CAFOD Ukraine Response

EVALUATION REPORT

October 2024

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ACRONYMS

CAFOD – Catholic Agency for Overseas Development

CHS – Core Humanitarian Standard

CIMO – Caritas Internationalis Management Organisation

CUA – Caritas Ukraine

DEC – Disasters Emergency Committee

FCDO – Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

HR – Human Resources

INGO – International Non-Governmental Organisation

JRS – Jesuit Refugee Service

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

RTR – Real-Time Review

SADI – Safe, Accessible, Dignified, and Inclusive programming

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report has been prepared by Catherine Green and Rachel Skeates-Millar

Catherine Green is a humanitarian leader with over 20 years of experience managing accountability systems and humanitarian response programmes services in a range of crisis settings, including several years based in Ukraine. Rachel Skeates-Millar has over 15 years of experience in programme design, qualitative research and evaluation for humanitarian and development programmes.

We would like to thank those who participated in the evaluation process

This report has been shaped by the generous sharing of experiences, reflections, and insights from the participants. It was a privilege to have the opportunity to speak with so many of you and hear about the incredible work that has been undertaken and continues to be undertaken as part of CAFOD's Ukraine Response Programme. We would like to especially thank the CAFOD evaluation steering group who made themselves repeatedly available and provided valuable input along the way which helped to enhance the accuracy and relevance of the findings and recommendations.

Views in the report reflect the evaluators assessments based on what we heard

We have worked to capture the diversity of perspectives and voices heard through our interviews and discussions, and address feedback received on the report. The conclusions and recommendations set out in the evaluation report are our professional assessments as independent evaluators.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, CAFOD launched its new strategic framework, *Our Common Home*, which laid out a compelling vision as a self-reflective organisation working to transform its own worldview while supporting local leadership and advocating for those who are excluded. Central to this framework is CAFOD's commitment to being a learning organisation that holds itself accountable and builds upon its experiences. The independent evaluation of CAFOD's Ukraine response, covered in this report, was commissioned as part of that commitment to self-reflection. The evaluation highlights areas for improvement as well as many successes upon which the organisation can build. It was conducted through a review of existing evidence and in-depth interviews with partner organisations, staff, and external stakeholders.

When the war in Ukraine escalated with the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022, the UK public responded with unprecedented generosity. While Ukraine was outside CAFOD's priority countries and areas of operation, CAFOD set out to deliver a Ukraine response that would not only embody the humanitarian imperative to save lives and meet needs of the most vulnerable but would also be an example to the international sector of living out Grand Bargain and Charter for Change Commitments and demonstrating meaningful support for local leadership, agency and voice through equitable and value-adding partnerships with local organisations. The goal of CAFOD's Ukraine response was formalised into a strategy shared with partners in October 2023 highlighting CAFOD's ambition to ensure that those in greatest need would be supported with timely, appropriate, inclusive, and ecologically sustainable humanitarian response and recovery. The strategy outlines two core pillars through which the goal is being achieved – capacity strengthening for local partners to implement safe and dignified programming, and advocacy with and for partners for a more locally-led response in Ukraine.

The evaluation found that CAFOD has overall succeeded in carving out a unique value proposition in Ukraine, significantly adding value to partners' implementation efforts through a distinctly equitable partnership approach, aligned with the Grand Bargain commitments. We found specific areas where we recommend further consideration be given by CAFOD going forward to help better align with the organisations vision, such as the choice to channel DEC funds through international NGOs, and where improvements are needed regarding the rigour and transparency of partner selection and the management of conflicts of interest. However overall, we found CAFOD's approach has contributed overwhelmingly positively to fostering local leadership, voices and agency in Ukraine. CAFOD's distinct value lies in its combination of flexible, adaptive, and respectful programming arrangements, with comprehensive capacity strengthening offered across a broad range of areas. These elements have helped position CAFOD as a valuable partner in the Ukraine response, offering much more than the traditional development models.

CAFOD brought an equitable partnering approach to its engagements which enabled local organisations to more adaptively manage for results

CAFOD has largely lived up to its commitment to relinquish control by offering genuine flexibility and establishing two-way partnerships through its Ukraine response. Implementing partners reflected that CAFOD's relationship felt like one of equals—built on trust and respect for each others expertise. They found CAFOD engaged with them through genuine, equitable exchanges, fostering shared value. CAFOD staff were approachable, critical friends, willing to help and open to feedback, which encouraged partners to be more open to reflecting on and improving their programmes. As a result, partners managing risks more effectively and were able to be more responsive to community needs. CAFOD's

programme management and technical staff—its greatest asset—brought an interpersonal approach steeped in safe, accessible, dignified, and inclusive (SADI) expertise. This made partners feel heard, empowered, and supported.

The impact of this partnership model is that it has allowed partners the flexibility to adapt and pivot in response to the evolving humanitarian landscape. Beyond fostering a positive working relationship, this flexibility also opened the door for deeper capacity strengthening. Partners absorbed and institutionalised new skills in areas such as monitoring, human resources, humanitarian distribution, data quality, SADI programming, and supply chain management. CAFOD's high level of trust and flexibility empowered partners to innovate, adapt faster, and ultimately, be more effective in meeting community needs.

CAFOD added real value through capacity strengthening

CAFOD's support has strengthened partner capability. Two years into the Ukraine response, partners report being institutionally stronger than before, an impressive achievement considering the influx of funding into Ukraine, which could have otherwise caused partners to grow too quickly and become overstretched. Partners noted that CAFOD's expertise and approach brought significant value to these relationships.

What set CAFOD's capacity and organisational strengthening apart, according to partners, was the depth and breadth of technical support provided. In addition to the usual safeguarding, data quality, and monitoring support, partners emphasised the strategic support for organisational capabilities, such as human resources, security and supply chain management, as particularly impactful. The delivery of this technical support was another differentiating factor, to the extent that it was highly tailored to partners' needs, negotiated based on their priorities, and delivered through coaching by experienced experts. This ongoing, hands-on approach allowed for troubleshooting and gradual uptake, as partners were able to absorb and apply new practices at their own pace over a sustained period.

CAFOD brought a best practice approach to its advocacy that helped propel local leadership, voices and agency

CAFOD's advocacy work on local leadership has been another distinctive feature of its work among many INGOs and among the Caritas network. What worked well is that CAFOD has been a catalyst for action both vertically and horizontally, by enabling grassroots organisations to connect with global actors, and by facilitating linkages between local NGOs. CAFOD often chose not to put its own brand in the spotlight but to focus on coaching and supporting local organisations to take centre stage in national, regional, and global forums.

CAFOD played a pivotal role in bringing local NGOs together through conferences where they could debate and formulate a coordinated position on locally led response. CAFOD then supported these organisations in accessing global dialogues, where they voiced their positions to international donors and the UN system. Although change is slow, these efforts produced hard-won advancements, with some evidence of shifting mindsets among institutional funding mechanisms like DEC. On request from local civil society in Ukraine, there is growing openness to piloting new types of direct funding arrangements for local NGOs, such as "no-regrets" funding models, which are currently being scoped out. However, achieving these gains required significant investment of effort of highly skilled and experienced staff. Limited advocacy technical resourcing and staffing in general put strain on staff and is a risk to the sustainability of these efforts.

Areas detracting from CAFOD's partnering approach, and opportunities to further enhance alignment, transparency, and trust

While CAFOD made significant strides in fostering local leadership, the evaluation also found gaps regarding partner selection rigour and transparency, especially during the initial response phase. These practices highlight weak spots within CAFOD's humanitarian response governance practices that are worth addressing, particularly to align with its positioning as a leader in locally led response. In the early weeks of the crisis, CAFOD leadership drew on personal and institutional connections to quickly identify partners outside the Caritas network. This approach is common among INGOs, but the selection decision process was not well documented or transparently communicated, including how potential conflicts of interest had been managed in the process. Caritas partners in Ukraine, as well as broader civil society, were not formally notified they were being assessed or excluded from DEC funding, nor were they given the opportunity to express interest or challenge the decisions. We found this lack of clear communication did not fully align with the values set out in CAFOD's *Our Common Home and the Core Humanitarian Standards*, which emphasise transparency, equity and accountability.

The evaluation found that the poor documentation and lack of timely communication of these decisions exposed CAFOD to reputational risks and impacted its relationships with some stakeholders. Staff were left in difficult positions, having to manage and repair relationships without the necessary documentation to justify the initial selection decisions.

As the response transitioned from emergency relief to recovery, we expected to see more transparent and open processes followed for subsequent funding allocations as new resources emerged. CAFOD did indeed put in place greater transparency during the second year of implementation with the dissemination of its Ukraine strategy in October 2023 which meaningfully enhanced the quality of funding,[1] and we identify several best practices established along the way in Ukraine that could be built upon for future responses. CAFOD continued to allocate new funds throughout the response to existing partners without an open opt-in process for new partnerships. CAFOD felt that its values around long-term stable partnering meant it should prioritise its resources around extending existing partnerships rather than revisit the selection process with added transparency. Practical considerations also played a role; CAFOD was operating with a slim structure and had not assigned sufficient staffing resources to be able to take on any additional partnerships mid-response, especially with smaller, less developed local NGOs. This approach is not uncommon among INGOs, but the unintentional impact is that it reinforces the exclusion of local civil society groups that lack international connections at the outset of the response.

When partner selection is based on international relationships, without providing other local organisations the opportunity to opt in or register interest, it can perpetuate the dominance of internationally backed local organisations and the exclusion of local civil society groups that lack the privilege of international relationships and networks. We encourage CAFOD and its peer INGOs to reflect on this for future responses and to plan for setting aside resources to explore opportunities to partner with a broader range of grassroots local organisations. Continuing to advance locally-led response, we think it is important for leading INGOs like CAFOD to recognise international relationships as a form of power that can be inequitably distributed when it comes to accessing international humanitarian resources. We encourage CAFOD to reflect on this practice as a leader in this space and in line with CAFOD's integral ecology: "we will go beyond our traditional partnerships and alliances… We will identify

[1] Quality of funding as defined by CAFOD's Ukraine programme partnership principles includes where possible provision of multi-year, predictable and flexible funding, including fair overhead and cost recovery.

and dismantle any discrimination that perpetuates inequalities in our operating models, ways of working, funding models, and communications."

For similar reasons, we also question the choice to channel GBP17.4million of DEC funds through international organisations rather than direct to local organisations. Again, this was done for practical reasons because CAFOD assigned itself a slim supporting function for the Ukraine response, by building alliances with other INGOs, CAFOD could outsource an aspect of the supporting role to other international groups. There are certain circumstances where it makes sense to partner across INGOs, particularly when each partner brings a distinct skillset to add-value to the arrangement. However, we encourage reflection on whether this should be the standard preferred setting for DEC funds because these arrangements add administrative costs/complexity and increase the distance between supporter and the local organisation and the ultimate beneficiaries.

The decision to broaden CAFOD's partnerships beyond Caritas in-country is a positive and courageous move in Ukraine that allowed CAFOD to diversify and expand the impact of the Caritas network in Ukraine. It is something CAFOD should continue to explore and build on for future responses, particularly the larger ones where Caritas partners may be saturated with funding. Going forward, staying at the forefront of locally led response, we encourage CAFOD to explore potential alternative mechanisms for funding partnerships with a wider variety of local civil society organisations rather than only those where CAFOD has international relationships, even if it is with just a small, ring-fenced portion of the funds to begin with. To support that, CAFOD could consider ways to preposition agreements or develop rapid assessment and due diligence processes to be able to directly fund local NGOs across a wider range of organisations during emergencies. This may require thoughtfully choosing to take on more risk with a portion of the portfolio, and perhaps building tailored financial risk management processes for that portion of funds, for example seconding financial advisors out to local partners, rather than using a one-size-fits-all financial controls that set the bar out of reach for less experienced local organisations.

To replicate and build on CAFOD's exceptional value-add as a genuine partner of local leadership, the evaluation findings demonstrate how important it is to continue to resource programmes, advocacy and technical support functions adequately. This will only become more challenging amidst shirking global humanitarian funding but is essential to CAFOD's effectiveness and distinctiveness in supporting locally led responses. There is need for advocacy to DEC and institutional partners to shift away from arbitrary funding restrictions towards assessing the quality of partnering to better understand the return on investment from internationally based expenditure that enables more locally led response.

The way forward

CAFOD's work in Ukraine has demonstrated many best practices, setting it apart from traditional top-down humanitarian response actors. Some successes stem from the organisation's strategic decisions aligned with *Our Common Home*, while others resulted from the specific contributions of individuals. To ensure these successes are replicated in future responses, CAFOD should look to expand and share these best practices within the organisation where they have not already. This includes taking a strategic approach to supporting partner capacity strengthening which went well beyond traditional programme areas. With the Ukraine response CAFOD piloted offering partners a broader range of capacity strengthening supports which significantly increased the overall effectiveness and impact of the response.

To help manage partnership and reputational risks effectively, CAFOD can look to enhance its policies and processes by adopting the partnering principles piloted in Ukraine, establishing and disseminating its response strategy to partners at each major phase and transition of the response, setting clear

standards for partner selection. Looking for opportunities to partner with other grassroots organisations will help CAFOD multiply its impact on local leadership, voices and agency.

As CAFOD approaches the next phase of its Ukraine response strategy, the real test will be whether the gains made in partner capacity and capability can be sustained for the long term. Partners in Ukraine are facing the difficult challenges of shrinking funding while needs among communities remain high. CAFOD has already begun working with partners transparently on exit strategies. CAFOD should work to help partners stabilise their revenue streams and retain skilled staff, ensuring that the hard-won progress achieved so far is not lost. CAFOD could also consider continuing to provide value to its partners by maintaining coaching and mentoring relationships, facilitating their access to international forums, and helping them advocate for local needs, even after funding has ended.

OVERVIEW OF CAFOD'S UKRAINE RESPONSE

Setting the scene – the road to here

When the war in Ukraine escalated with the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022, the UK public responded with unprecedented generosity and have donated a record £438million to the Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) alone to date. While Ukraine was outside CAFOD's priority countries and areas of operation, the organisation chose to respond and to work differently in line with its 2020 vision, *Our Common Home*. CAFOD set out to deliver a response in Ukraine that would not only embody the humanitarian imperative to save lives and meet needs of the most vulnerable but would also be an example to other INGOs and the international sector, by living out its Grand Bargain and Charter for Change commitments and demonstrate meaningful support for local leadership, agency and voice through equitable and value-add partnerships with local organisations.

CAFOD made a series of decisions to do things differently from other INGOs in Ukraine, and even from CAFOD's previous responses – some made initially by the leadership, and many made through the initiative and extra ordinary efforts of the specific programme staff overseeing the Ukraine work. CAFOD chose not to establish an office or staffing in Ukraine, but to support local implementing partners remotely, and to assign only two UK-based programme staff; significantly less than CAFOD's other responses or other organisations that took a similar approach. CAFOD had provided remote support to partners several times before and chose this approach to align with its values and to reduce overhead expenditure amidst shrinking income, even though the move disadvantaged CAFOD in acquiring additional funding according to donor rules, including to cover its own costs.

CAFOD delivered its Ukraine response through three main mechanisms, each with different characteristics and impacts. It channelled £1.3million from its own Ukraine Humanitarian Fundraising Appeal through contributions to five different national Caritas Emergency Appeals across multiple countries from 2022 through to 2024. The appeal mechanisms are administratively light and allow resources to move quickly into the hands of national Caritas organisations to rapidly scale and meet needs. However, the size of the Caritas funding response meant Emergency Appeals were quickly over-subscribed and, in several cases, CAFOD made appeal commitments during 2022 that were not able to be absorbed by the Caritas partner until a year or two later.

The second mechanism, through which CAFOD allocated a total of around £1million from its own Ukraine Humanitarian Fundraising Appeal and other donors is direct bilateral grant projects with

partners. CAFOD has used this mechanism to directly support seven or eight targeted projects, many of which were focused on specific programme areas such as anti-trafficking, and to add significant value through co-designing the projects, including investing in capacity strengthening and coaching implementing partners along the way. The third mechanism is with DEC funds where CAFOD delivered £17.9million and added significant value to its implementing partnerships technically as well as sharing the administrative burden to meet DEC's stringent documentation requirements.

When it came to choosing implementing partners for its DEC funds, CAFOD made the bold move at the outset of the response to depart from its standard practices and guidelines (as set out in its Programming Manual) to work primarily with values-aligned partners outside of the Caritas network. The decision reflected a strategic judgment by CAFOD leadership at the time, who, recognizing the substantial influx of funding into the Caritas network, observed that in-country Caritas offices were becoming quickly saturated. They determined there would be limited opportunities for the type of partnership where CAFOD could add significant value beyond just a funding arrangement. They drew on interpersonal relationships within their networks and humanitarian sector experience to identify alternative partners, holding exploration meetings with a number of potential partners before forming funding partnerships with two experienced social work organisations focused on homelessness and displacement: Depaul International, JRS Europe and their in-country Ukraine and Romania registered counterparts. CAFOD leadership felt these partnerships might allow CAFOD to differentiate and diversify its impact from others in the Caritas network and reach a different set of needs in Ukraine among those most often excluded. CAFOD leadership chose Depaul as its primary implementing partner for £14.6m of the GBP18m received from DEC because of their confidence that Depaul aligned with CAFOD ways of working and understood DEC requirements well and the partnership would work effectively to quickly scale programming reach and meet needs. Refer to Appendix A for a summary of CAFOD's partners, financial allocations and funding mechanisms in Ukraine.

In October 2023, 20 months after the launch and focus on rapidly scaling to reach immediate needs, CAFOD approved it's Ukraine Response Strategy covering an anticipated 5-year period of engagement in Ukraine from 2022 to 2027, accompanied by tailored partnership principles, and a set of advocacy priorities and action plan for Ukraine. These documents outline priorities and funding allocations across partners, including CAFOD's commitment to equitable partnership, defined as collaborative relationships marked by fairness, balance, transparency and just distribution of responsibilities, benefits and resources based on each partner's roles and efforts. These strategies and plans were transparently shared with current implementing partners for feedback, and a mechanism put in place for both anonymous feedback and regular joint-reflection on how things are going.

At the strategic mid-point in the response, CAFOD has commissioned an independent evaluation, set out in this report, to identify lessons and understand what if anything has made CAFOD's approach unique, the difference it has made, and how could that inform the way forward.

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND APPROACH

An evaluation of the CAFOD Ukraine response was commissioned in mid-2024, coordinated by a steering group of CAFOD International Programmes staff. The evaluation purpose is to understand the key learnings for CAFOD from the Ukraine response and how could this inform future work. It aims to synthesise and build on the organisational learning emerging from CAFOD's Ukraine response, to inform future programming and organisational strategy in both Ukraine and beyond, with a particular focus on partnerships, capacity strengthening, localisation, and resource management. Refer to Appendix B for further information on the key evaluation questions.

The evaluation has limited scope - it focused on CAFOD's role and behaviours as a partner and a funder of the Ukraine response and how effective this was in achieving its Ukraine strategy outcomes. It did not involve assessing the outcomes or impacts of the investment at the community level and did not engage community participants for their perspectives on CAFOD's Ukraine response. The evaluation relies on drawing on the findings of two external field evaluations already conducted of CAFOD's partners' implementation during 2023-24. This is an important limitation.

The evaluation has limitations - it was retrospective, relying on individuals' memories from an intense, high-pressure period more than two years ago, which can affect the accuracy of the data. While this review sought to explore and understand the pathways towards achieving change and impact, the methods used in this review do not allow for causal attribution to be assessed. The evaluation was conducted remotely, it relied on drawing on insights from existing documents with regards to community level results, we did not visit or speak with members of the community.

We used a multi-methods design - drawing together insights from a review of internal and external documents, including available evaluation reports from implementing partners and an internal review of CAFOD's Ukraine partnerships conducted concurrently alongside the evaluation, which captured the perspective of partners on how they felt the partnership with CAFOD was working and areas for strengthening. The evaluation collected additional information to address knowledge gaps through in depth interviews and small group discussions with over 25 individuals with close experiences and perspectives of CAFOD's Ukraine response, including representatives of partner organisations in Ukraine, funders, as well as current/previous CAFOD staff.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

1. Partnering approach and effectiveness

The key learning questions explored included, what approach to partnering did CAFOD take in Ukraine, to what extent did this reflect and deliver CAFOD's response strategy, organisational values, and goals; how effectively has CAFOD supported partners' capacity to deliver effective, safe, and dignified programming; how did this differ from other international NGOs supporting the same partners; has CAFOD's partnering approaches added value and supported partners to achieve better outcomes at the community level?

What we looked for	Our assessment of partnering approach and effectiveness	
Engagements with partners reflect CAFOD's values, guidelines, and partnership principles Partnering contributed to better delivery and humanitarian outcomes for affected communities CAFOD clearly adds value to partnerships, enhancing effective, safe, and dignified delivery Partners are operationally stronger due to CAFOD's support Technical support was timely and impactful on partner implementation	**Key strengths** Partners had flexibility to adapt, leading to more effective responses as things changed Funded programme priorities were partner-led, reflecting their strengths and organisational needs Partners' capability grew due to expert coaching and comprehensive support Equitable partnership principles were lived out in day-to-day behaviour, with CAFOD staff working alongside partners, sharing administrative burdens, and making partners feel respected, which made them more receptive to guidance CAFOD Ukraine programme staff were exceptionally open and collaborative, inviting and leveraging expertise from across CAFOD Collaborative two-way partnership practices strengthened as the response progressed through piloting new best practices such as tailored partnership principles and reviews CAFOD's consistent engagement across multiple phases enhanced the quality of funding, giving partners stability and time to build trust and bed-in SADI practices Staff were well-versed in SADI, they worked as critical friends with partners to continuously improve results CAFOD supported partners in identifying, positioning for, and seeking funding external to the CAFOD/DEC mechanism	**Opportunities for improvement** Given size of the response, missed chances to expand partnerships and engage more local partners (as noted in Real-Time Review)[2] Slim programme team resourcing meant CAFOD couldn't revisit or diversify partner engagement across all phases The quality of funding improved in year two but was initially hampered by the lack of multiyear funding and limited forward visibility of potential funding cliffs and opportunities Transparency in partner selection and the opportunities to provide feedback was limited in year one but improved as the response progressed Formalising capacity strengthening through multiyear plans would enhance accountability Some found SADI documents complex; simplifying technical language and adding contextualised examples could improve adoption Partners are ready for support in developing long-term organisational plans (aligned to multi-year funding) Opportunities to make it easier for wider technical experts across CAFOD to be assigned to coach implementing partners

[2] The Real Time Reflection (RTR) was conducted by CAFOD in August 2022 as part of its learning and reflection process in order to explore and understand the successes and challenges of CAFOD's Ukraine crisis response between February 24 - July 2022.

CAFOD's partners overwhelmingly described CAFOD as adopting a 'best practice' approach to partnering when compared with peer organisations

Partners found their experience with CAFOD to be respectful, trusting, and empowering. Beyond positive relationships, they provided compelling qualitative data showing how CAFOD's partnering approach had improved humanitarian outcomes.

Localisation in practice - letting go of control

CAFOD's high-trust approach granted partners greater flexibility to make adaptive decisions based on changing contexts and humanitarian needs. As a result, partners felt faster, more adaptive, efficient, and responsive. They could swiftly adjust target locations, project participants, budget allocations, and intervention types to better meet community needs as the war progressed, thanks to CAFOD's built-in flexibility. One partner shared:

> ***"We're not bound to Excel sheets carved in stone.... If we explain the context and the aim of the changes, CAFOD says, 'yeah, that makes sense to us, go for it.' That makes the programme much more easily implemented."***

This contrasted with experiences with other INGOs. Flexibility also meant partners felt trusted and respected by CAFOD and were more amenable to being challenged to think about different priorities or receive feedback on their humanitarian response. This foundation of trust made for closer collaboration, faster more efficient decision-making, and greater uptake of technical support.

One partner explained that CAFODD's flexibility allowed them to reach more vulnerable populations that may be overlooked by larger organisations with more rigid programme templates. CAFOD's flexible contracts enabled them to respond quickly to emerging needs, such as providing new non-food items after the Russian incursion into Kharkiv oblast in May 2024, without a large administrative burden or lengthy approval processes.

CAFOD's approach of letting go of control and embracing partners' unique approaches and expertise has meant that different partners are meeting needs in quite different ways – overall it's a good balance. For instance, CAFOD's approach allowed Depaul Ukraine to employ their casework method, rooted in social work, providing a tailored response suitable for the complex, protracted situation. This enabled them to reach more vulnerable populations that larger organisations with rigid templates might overlook.

> ***"CAFOD was a very important partner for us. We saw that flexibility, that openness, that CAFOD listens to our needs. They are flexible and open in situations when we need to change or approach or in situations where we needed to act swiftly, so for us we are extremely grateful to CAFOD for this fruitful experience. There is still some space to explore, there is still some space to learn."***
>
> ***Local implementing partner***

Equitable partnership – balancing power with two-way accountability

Accountability and risks were shared by CAFOD and implementing partners

Contrary to concerns that a high-trust model might reduce accountability, CAFOD appropriately shared risk with its implementing partners. They upheld high expectations on accountability, working alongside

partners to ensure understanding of essential components like SADI, financial protocols, safeguarding, community feedback mechanisms, and data quality.

Capacity strengthening priorities were negotiated between CAFOD and partners. While some non-negotiables like safeguarding were initially seen as donor-driven and slowing progress, CAFOD's coaching led to cultural changes, with leaders appreciating their importance.

Some partners also initially found the SADI framework overwhelming, overly-technical and wanted more contextualised examples. However, CAFOD's hands-on support helped to make the content more relatable and focusing on key components. This approach led partners to embrace SADI and programme quality principles, though continued work is needed to embed practices beyond key individuals.

Helping partners tailor tools to their context and develop their own locally owned tools

JRS Romania vulnerability assessment tool - CAFOD worked alongside JRS Romania to develop a contextualised vulnerability assessment tools coupled with relevant training based on JRS Romania's needs. This process gave JRS more of a sense of ownership and deeper understanding of the tool, and as a result is more likely to use it and maintain it as part of its standard operating procedures. JRS staff shared:

"CAFOD wanted to adapt what they knew to the local context and to the realities of this crisis. And they did that together with our colleagues, with the team implementing. So, we were involved in this process of learning but also developing a new tool like the vulnerability tool... when you had to use the tool, it was yours, the tool wasn't given by somebody, it was your tool which we have developed together"

Sharing the administration burden

Partners highly valued how CAFOD shared the administrative burden, such as grant management and reporting, allowing them to focus on delivering aid. CAFOD helped simplify technical documents and tools, enhancing partners' ability to meet donor requirements efficiently. Additionally, CAFOD staff helped partners understand, simplify, and contextualise technical documentation and tools.

Tailored partnership principles and periodic reviews

Eighteen months into the response, CAFOD piloted tailored partnership principles developed with partner input and shared its Ukraine Response Strategy. They introduced periodic partnership reviews, including anonymous surveys and meetings for joint reflection.

Partners expressed appreciation and surprise at CAFOD's transparency, contrasting it with more directive relationships from other funders. This openness fostered greater trust and cooperation. Sharing CAFOD's strategy and funding plans gave partners visibility of the broader programme and resource limitations, allowing for better planning. One partner said:

> ***"It's unique that CAFOD revealed their strategy and resources to us... I found this to be a very open approach, sympathetic to views and needs of the partners.... It changed the results, it meant that we had more discussion about strategy and based on this, we could also have discussions about the future.... These discussions help me as a local partner, to understand better the overall context of where CAFOD comes from and the limits of what they can do. The level of precision they put into sharing the strategy is really helpful for us to realise there's a***

real limit to the funding CAFOD has…. We can have more precise discussions on sustainability of our programme."

Having a response strategy and funding transparency earlier would have helped

Implementing the programme strategy and partnership principles earlier could have mitigated tensions during funding transitions. Some partners felt blindsided by funding changes they hadn't anticipated. Clearer, proactive communication about funding plans earlier on in the response could have alleviated these issues. Partners reported increased visibility and satisfaction in the second year.

CAFOD could further cultivate co-ownership by involving partners in co-designing the strategy at each response stage, possibly as an opt-in process, especially appropriate in recovery phases.

This equitable, two-way accountability model is a key lesson from the Ukraine response, distinguishing CAFOD from other actors and worthy of institutionalisation in future responses.

Beyond just funding - adding genuine value to the partnership

Investment into capacity strengthened succeeded in enhancing results and local leadership

We saw evidence that CAFOD's technical support led to an uplift in partner capabilities across a wide range of areas, including humanitarian approaches, safe and dignified programming, monitoring, data quality, human resources, security, financial management, logistics, and supply chain management.

The key to CAFOD's success was its partner-driven and highly tailored approach to capacity strengthening. Deep expertise was offered, and formal training was accompanied by extended coaching and mentoring from CAFOD staff. This combination resulted in what partners perceived as a substantial shift in their organisational capacity and capability. Sustaining these gains long-term will require a thoughtful phased exit plan and continued engagement from CAFOD, especially to help partners navigate funding reductions and retain talent and key skill sets.

Partners described CAFOD staff as down-to-earth and relatable, delivering informal coaching that built trust and created effective working relationships. They demonstrated a genuine commitment to partners' capacity and capability needs. One partner leader remarked:

"I must say I'm very happy with CAFOD and having CAFOD as a partner. It's also been a learning experience, a true partnership experience. The way they communicate, they are sensitive to localisation. It's very good. They are never imposing their own ideas from their desk. Always trying to see the real needs on the ground. So, I'm learning a lot as well for my relationships with our implementing partners, seeing how sensitive you can be in listening. So that for me is a very positive experience."

The personality and philosophy of individual staff was a key to success

Numerous participants noted that specific individuals in the CAFOD Ukraine Response programme were particularly supportive, standout, and able to foster genuine, transparent, and honest relationships.

This development of trust and ongoing coaching meant partners were open to being challenged and to consider different approaches to programming, ultimately contributing to organisational growth in effective humanitarian programming.

Being equitable partners meant CAFOD programme staff could have honest conversations and help partners improve programme quality over time

Partners appreciated CAFOD staff acting as 'critical friends', using the SADI framework to ask probing questions that helped them draw insights from data and feedback, leading to improvements. Consequently, programme quality and client satisfaction improved over time. For example, CAFOD staff challenged partners on targeting and locations, encouraged assistance in underserved areas, promoted the use of needs assessments, and advocated for a shift towards adopting cash-based programming—all of which led to improved programme quality.

Implementing partners felt CAFOD's capacity strengthening efforts had enhanced their organisational autonomy and independence

CAFOD's intensive technical support increased partners' confidence and capability, standing apart from pre-defined, often redundant capacity building by other INGOs. Partners valued the tailored approach, having a say in prioritising their capacity needs, leading to sustainable organisational practices.

Those receiving CAFOD-facilitated technical support identified significant impacts on their operations and ability to accelerate aid delivery. They especially valued support in areas beyond traditional programming, like HR, security, and supply chain management.

Delivering technical support across a wider range of areas differentiated CAFOD from other INGOs and added to its impact

Partners highly valued the wide range of supports they received from CAFOD, especially in areas beyond the typically INGOs supports for safeguarding and reporting, such as around organisational leadership, human resources, financials, security and technology and supply chain management.

Given the valuable impacts these technical investments had for partner organisations, and what role they played in CAFOD's value proposition as viewed by partners, there would be value in sharing learning from this approach within CAFOD and piloting it across other responses.

Technical support beyond traditional areas

The technical support provided to one partner by an experienced Procurement and Supply Chain consultant over an extended period was described by the partner as "utterly vital" and "the single most important investment during the entire programme by any party involved" in enabling the partner to massively scale up their response in the early days. In the beginning, the organisation was "delivering items by doing ad-hoc procurement without any procedures… deciding by itself what items to deliver and no paperwork was done – just phone order and payment against invoice before the order was processed by the suppliers." By the end of this period of technical support "the team adopted … procedures saw how it improved the operation and then began to even insist on more procedures to improve professionalism further." This investment in a key technical area that was critical to meeting humanitarian response needs resulted in the partner's creation of a Supply Chain manual and accompanying templates together with national and international tender procedures that relevant staff were trained on and was embedded in the ongoing operations of the organisation. "CAFOD prioritised getting the right support at the right time to the partner, even at a cost, and this should be applauded. Sustained support, deep specialist expertise, and an accompaniment style were critical to the most successful piece of capacity strengthening of the entire programme."

Looking ahead: helping partners become self-sustaining

As the response enters its next phase, there's an opportunity to shift capacity strengthening efforts to support partners in becoming self-sustaining. It's crucial for CAFOD to provide technical assistance in financial resource acquisition, management, and human resources to help partners navigate budget declines and retain key capabilities.

Partners are increasingly focused on revisiting their long-term strategies and plans. Facing upcoming funding reductions and capacity gaps, they seek support to manage these challenges. Organisations that expanded rapidly now need strategic leadership support to handle shrinking budgets and enhance resource generation. Several partners have expressed a need for CAFOD's guidance on securing stable funding and managing organisational contraction without losing essential talent and capabilities.

Supporting partners in strategic organisational leadership during budget contractions is a vital role for CAFOD to sustain the gains in local capacity and capability. This may require increased engagement from senior-level CAFOD leadership to help partners strategically navigate these changes.

Looking ahead, partners shared that there is also a real need for continued support for staff care. Support for staff care is something that has set CAFOD's approach apart from other donors. The protracted crisis has reached a point where many staff are fatigued, and continued staff care is critical for sustainability of capacity and capability.

Flexible programme funding let partners innovate and leverage strengths

JRS Romania Cash for Rent scheme empowered clients by giving them control over their housing arrangements and fostering trust with landlords, while maintaining necessary checks and balances. This model became best practice, adopted by other NGOs, and led authorities to change policies to provide money directly to refugees with rental contracts. The success hinged on CAFOD's trust and support in refining the model and building accountability mechanisms.

Depaul Ukraine (DPU) tailored casework approach CAFOD together with Depaul International supported DPU to develop and adopt a hybrid social-work-humanitarian programming approach that leveraged their strengths and experiences as a homelessness focused organisation. That meant, DPU used a tailored and holistic wrap-around caseworker approach to meet the complex needs of individuals affected by the conflict. This approach was particularly appropriate and well suited to meeting long-term needs of those structurally displaced in a protracted crises like Ukraine, and therefore was well suited to meet needs as the response transitioned out of the immediate relief phase.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON PARTNERING AND EFFECTIVENESS

1.1 Advocate with DEC for practical changes that help members better support local leadership
Partner with other like-minded DEC members to advocate to DEC and other funders to make practical changes that encourage and enable partnership-based programming that better aligns with Grand Bargain and Charter for Change commitments, including:

- leveraging DEC's expertise to project likely appeal income to provide reassurance for members to test and trial in-principle multi-year funding commitments with partners
- shifting away from prescriptive funding restrictions on money spent in UK and move towards measuring the quality of partnering or return on investment from UK-spend with regards to better enabling locally led response
- advocating to DEC to revert to leaner reporting templates, originally based on the harmonised reporting templates (8+3) and now containing significantly more questions and components than that. Providing more time for partnership-based members to prepare reports, recognising the more time-consuming nature of reviewing, providing feedback and collating multiple reports from various partners.

1.2 Adopt a broader organisational development support processes into CAFOD's offerings for partners, including jointly developing organisational development plans that highlight support areas.

1.3 Share learning, scale up and pilot the partnership principles and two-way partnership reviews in other responses

Learn from Ukraine and pilot adopting similar tailored programme partnership principles and partnership review process given its succeess in building partner trust, transparency, two-way accountability and improving the quality of funding.

1.4 Share learning on Ukraine capacity strengthening approach

Develop case studies and share learnings with other CAFOD response on what worked well in Ukraine for strengthening partner capacity. For example, consider documenting best-practice approach to partnership coaching and roll out across responses; ensure that staff identified as being able to deploy in a response are trained in this approach as part of preparedness. Consider pre-positioning 'Humanitarian Accompanier' profiles and example TORs for external consultants based on the type of technical input typically requested by partners. Continue to ensure that CAFOD staff that take on direct partner support roles undertake training on SADI and coaching as well as other capacity development opportunities for themselves such as local language learning which added to their credibility with partners. Matched with peer supports from within CAFOD who have worked this role previously.

1.5 Prioritise support for partners to be self-sustaining in next phase of Ukraine capacity strengthening

For the next phase of support in Ukraine, provide strategic partner-led support for sustaining capacity gains and becoming self-sustaining as organisations. For example supporting the development of a fundraising strategy for partners to support financial sustainability beyond the life of CAFOD funding. Continue to invest in partner staff care to help partners manage staff fatigue and burnout in the protracted crisis. Extend the technical coaching support to partners, especially on resource mobilisation, beyond the end of the funding period to increase sustainability of the gains achieved; as has been the case with JRS Romania.

2. Leadership and process

The key learning questions explored included: how and to what extent did CAFOD's leadership and processes during the response support effective and equitable partnerships and align with its organisational values set out in Our Common Home (hope, dignity, compassion and solidarity) commitments and goals[3]; where, if any, may there be opportunities to strengthen this further?

What we looked for	Our assessment of leadership and process	
Leadership, decision-making, and processes reflect best practices, including CHS and DEC accountability frameworks The response strategy addresses the humanitarian imperative and adapts to changing contexts Partnership decisions are made in a timely, transparent manner, based on available information, and aligned with organisational values and goals Leadership revisits decisions strategically as contexts evolve Key stakeholders are consulted and involved appropriately	**Key strengths** Decision-making was timely and based on CAFOD's deep humanitarian experience Leadership adopted a response methodology that prioritised partner impact, aligning with localisation values over CAFOD's budget growth The strategy modelled a localisation-led approach, providing an example for the wider humanitarian sector in Ukraine There was strong support for partner-led adaptive management at the operational level	**Opportunities for strengthening** Developing and sharing a brief (2-3 page) response strategy earlier could have added transparency and eased relationship challenges in year one Partnering outside Caritas with DEC funds was bold and helped to diversify impact, but needed to be better documented and communicated to Caritas partners Lack of formal and documented partner selection processes meant we could not assess whether a fair, rigorous and impartial selection process had been run, exposing CAFOD to reputational risks. Partner selection processes were not well documented and communicated, which impacted on perceptions of transparency and trust. This did not change as the response progressed through phases Partners needed more transparency on funding opportunities in year one, which improved in year two with sharing of the response strategy and partnership principles Strategic decisions (e.g., partner selection, sector priorities) would benefit from regular data reviews and integration into periodic strategy updates.

A note on the principles we applied

In assessing CAFOD's leadership and processes for the Ukraine response, we looked for alignment with CAFOD's *Our Common Home* values, the humanitarian imperative, the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), and the DEC accountability framework. These frameworks emphasise transparency, impartiality, accountability, documentation, clear communication, consultation, and timeliness. The CHS and DEC frameworks stress transparency with communities and stakeholders, ensuring they are informed about selection processes and criteria, with clear documentation and communication of decisions. They also highlight mechanisms for beneficiaries to raise concerns or seek redress regarding decisions. While the

[3] Key assessed components from Our Common Home included: Commitments: Putting the most vulnerable and excluded first; Prioritising local leadership, agency and voices; Promoting a culture of encounter for transformative change; Transforming ourselves through our own ecological conversion; and Goal 6 Our organisation: Our operating models and ways of working are optimised, flexible and responsive to best reflect our goals and values, secure sustainable income, achieve our intended outcomes, and ensure accountability to those we serve, those who support and funds us, and other stakeholders.

standards don't explicitly require partner selection processes, the same principles apply to NGO partners as recipients of funding and support.

Effective leadership and management for transparency, impartiality, and accountability requires appropriate management of potential conflicts of interest, as they can impact decision-making impartiality. In the humanitarian sector, close relationships among organisations are common and can enhance partnering effectiveness. However, they also present potential conflicts of interest that must be thoughtfully managed. Many donors now include expectations around managing these situations in funding agreements; for example, FCDO's supplier code of conduct notes that personal interests can create conflicts, and perceived bias can damage the credibility of selection processes. Many international organisations have responded by developing dedicated policies and practices to manage these risks, such as conflict of interest declarations, documented partner selection criteria, and clear decision-making processes. These measures provide a transparent record to justify decisions, ensure continuity despite staff turnover, and uphold the credibility of the selection process.

Findings on leadership and process

CAFODs response in Ukraine was timely and swift, decision-making relied on deep humanitarian experience of individuals

In launching the Ukraine response, CAFOD faced a unique challenge. Despite public expectation for a significant response, Ukraine, a middle-income country, was not a Core Programme country for CAFOD, and they lacked existing partnerships or a country strategy, aside from an entry point via the Caritas network. CAFOD leadership initially debated the appropriateness of responding to the Ukraine crisis, given it was outside their existing programmes and priority areas, and considering the political context. However, they resolved this debate promptly, deciding to respond. Leadership worked quickly in the weeks and months prior to the 2022 full-scale invasion to establish connections with Caritas partners in Ukraine.

CAFOD was able to mobilise resource, form partnerships, respond and successfully deliver aid to beneficiaries very quickly, well ahead of most other DEC members.

CAFOD made a values-aligned choice not to establish a presence in-country at the expense of growing CAFOD's own budget

We commend CAFOD's leadership for making bold, assertive decisions early on, differentiating their response in a crowded and chaotic space and carving out a niche in Ukraine.

Due to the scale of humanitarian needs and influx of funding, there was strong competition among INGOs seeking local partners, leading many to set up in-country offices. CAFOD chose to work differently. Instead of establishing an in-country office, they made a principled decision not to deploy or recruit national programme management staff but to partner with local organisations to implement and represent CAFOD's response. They sought partnerships where they could add value.

CAFOD's Ukraine response strategy modelled a different way of working compared to most other INGOs, providing an example to the wider humanitarian sector in Ukraine. Their approach balanced acting on the humanitarian imperative with aligning to best practice principles and commitments around localisation, such as the Grand Bargain and Charter for Change, and CAFOD's own goals to promote and support local leadership, agency, and voice. This decisive approach showed evidence of influencing other INGOs and institutional funders. However, it also came with unintended consequences.

Choosing not to have an in-country presence was a brave move that came at the expense of CAFOD's organisational growth. It meant CAFOD was not well-positioned to access additional funding from donors requiring INGOs to have a local presence, highlighting larger failings in the humanitarian financing system that perpetuate an INGO-driven model. Consequently, without CAFOD and its relationships with these donors, partners were also disadvantaged in accessing additional and diversified funding sources. The CAFOD Ukraine Programme Strategy indicated that CAFOD allocated itself just 12.9% of the overall £24 million budget, a smaller percentage than typically taken by an INGO in a humanitarian response. This illustrates the tension INGOs face as they move towards more locally led responses while also feeling pressure to grow or maintain their own budgets. This issue may require collective advocacy among INGOs with institutional donors and organisational reflection on what a 'fit for purpose' structure looks like.

Not having an in-country presence also meant CAFOD programme staff had to work harder and travel more frequently to build close working relationships and add value with partners, and at times, partners wished CAFOD was more locally available. The limited programme support resources meant staff worked additional hours to deliver the supportive partnering outlined in CAFOD's *Our Common Home*.

Partner selection decisions

When CAFOD saw the volume of funding available for the Caritas partners in Ukraine and neighbouring refugee-host countries, it wanted to differentiate its impact and take an alternative path by exploring partners outside of the Caritas network. This was a decisive departure from the priority outlined in CAFOD's programming manual, reflecting the unique circumstances and size of the Ukraine response, which sets out:

> ***"Firstly, priority is given to supporting, funding and working alongside, and in partnership with, the national Caritas where one exists. This may require us to place staff with the national Caritas to support capacity and coordination. Within this approach, we are often asked to take a lead and work directly with a diocesan Caritas or local partner to help deliver a response. Where there is no national Caritas, CAFOD will work with other existing national partners who have access, capacity and a desire to engage in the crisis response."***

CAFOD assessed that Caritas partners were over-saturated and might not meaningfully absorb additional significant funds. This was based on observations of the total funds Caritas partners were receiving, the rapid oversubscription of Caritas Emergency Appeals, and interactions with Caritas Ukraine (CUA), which suggested CUA lacked the capacity, need, or interest to work with partners like CAFOD who would expect close involvement in programme design and monitoring. CAFOD aimed to partner with local organisations in Ukraine and neighbouring countries who had the time, space, and desire to engage in genuine partnerships, allowing CAFOD to add value by sharing technical skills and strengthening the NGOs.

When it came to DEC funding, CAFOD felt pressure to identify partners and distribute the bulk of resources quickly during the first 6 months as per DEC requirements. This reflected DEC policy, and an assumption held across the broader international community that the intense period of conflict would not be drawn out. For practical reasons, getting resources to beneficiaries quickly meant working through INGOs with existing capacity and experience delivering against DEC-like requirements, or the ability to quickly come up to speed with those.

CAFOD identified potential partners beyond Caritas by reaching out through personal and organisational networks, holding quick conference calls to assess possibilities. Within a week of the full-scale invasion, CAFOD had decided on Depaul and JRS as its primary partners for the DEC-funded response.

The rationale for selecting Depaul was strategic and practical. As a homelessness-focused organisation with a local subsidiary in Ukraine, Depaul International allowed CAFOD to share administrative burden while partnering with Depaul Ukraine, reaching a different cohort and diversifying the impact beyond the Caritas network. Additionally, the close relationship with the Chief Executive, who was CAFOD's programmes director months before and had a deep understanding of CAFOD and DEC processes, gave CAFOD leadership confidence that Depaul could easily navigate DEC funding and reporting requirements.

Our interviews revealed reasonable levels of consistency held among staff on the rationale for partner selection and the criteria applied—partner capacity, presence, access, expertise, and alignment with humanitarian goals. The criteria were sound but not formalised, written, or documented. Caritas partners were not informed of these criteria, nor that they were being informally assessed, and did not have timely opportunity to challenge or seek verification of the decisions.

Due to lack of documentation, key information about decisions was lost as leadership staff turned over. Staff were unclear on who the actual decision makers were in the selection process. Meeting minutes were difficult to locate and did not clearly state what decisions were made, by whom, or on what information. Some staff present at the decision meeting reported they were not the decision makers. The minutes suggested decisions may have been made by CAFOD's International Emergency Committee, likely because an Emergency Management Team had not yet been established, although this would have been outside their terms of reference as described in CAFOD's programming manual.[4]

A potential conflict of interest existed that was not explicitly declared or managed in a documented way, nor communicated to staff. [5] Senior leaders may have assumed that completing financial due diligence for new partners before funds disbursement was sufficient to justify selections.

Selection decisions were not communicated timely to Caritas implementing partners in the region and the Caritas Internationalis network, impacting those relationships. Staff were left in difficult positions, having to manage and repair relationships without documentation to justify the initial decisions.

Our assessments and recommendations on partnership selection processes

The decision to work with different partners like Depaul helped CAFOD to reach a different demographic of highly vulnerable persons in the Ukraine response

Selecting Depaul and JRS Romania as primary implementing partners was effective. It differentiated CAFOD's impact, reached people with different needs with unique interventions, met DEC requirements, and was managed with limited programme support by sharing administrative burden. This allowed CAFOD to support partners innovating at the intersection of humanitarian and social work, bringing a unique approach. Depaul, with CAFOD's support, successfully pivoted to deliver humanitarian

[4] Chapter 7 of the PMM states "Should the Deputy International Programmes Director (DIPD) assess that an emergency meets the criteria for Level 2 or 3, they will convene an IEC to make strategic response decisions including the establishment of an Emergency Management Team (EMT) and Emergency Communications (E-comms). The IEC will validate the level of emergency and, if deemed to be a level 3, call a Corporate Emergency Committee (CEC). The CEC would only agree top-level corporate engagement and response (not programme delivery). Chapter 7 of the PMM defines the role of the EMT as leading on "identifying areas of operation, type of response and partner selection and appraisal (MANGO Health Check, status of safeguarding profile, counter terrorism country status. and Partner Organisational Profile)."

[5] The former Humanitarian Director of CAFOD joined DePaul International as the Group Chief Executive five months prior the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. CAFOD's International Programme Director (at the time of initial partnering and funding decisions in favor of DePaul International) joined the DPI board in June 2022.

programming and met the needs of highly vulnerable beneficiaries with a tailored approach. Many interviewees identified Depaul's work as excellent and the partnership with CAFOD as effective.

Lack of documentation around partnership selection processes meant we could not assess whether a fair, rigorous and impartial selection process had been run

The partner selection process did not meet the standards we expected in alignment with CHS and DEC accountability principles regarding transparency, impartiality, and communication. This exposed CAFOD to reputational risks, some of which have materialised. CAFOD has a strong reputation and is trusted among its partners and peers. The communication of the implementing partner selection decision process and lack of transparent information about managing perceived conflicts have impacted trust among some stakeholders, as evidenced by individuals who raised it during interviews. This lack of documentation departs from standard organisational governance procedures and highlights a gap in CAFOD's governance practices that should be addressed.

A transparent and equitable approach to partnering requires balancing the use of personal and institutional relationships, having a defined partner selection process (even in an emergency), documenting rationale if agreed selection processes is not followed, and being accountable to these agreed processes. Early in a response, urgency may necessitate waivers to normal processes that fast-track partner selection, but these decisions should also be documented. As a response progresses, the standard of evidence and process rigour for decision making should increase to ensure effectiveness. We do not agree that commitments to being a good partner preclude an organisation from reevaluating its decisions, including its partners, at least after the initial relief period when response prioritise are adapted as the context and needs of the community change.

We did not see evidence that an open and accountable partner selection process was revisited during the response and in subsequent funding allocations

For subsequent funding allocations and phases of the response, it was expected that adaptive management processes would have been demonstrated as the context and needs of the community changed. This includes revisiting partner selection decisions to ensure that resource allocation was still in line with humanitarian imperative and that transparent processes were in place to ensure partners had the opportunity to register interest, receive information and had the right to give feedback on the outcome of CAFOD's selection process for partners. This does not mean that CAFOD would need to abandon its initial partners or its commitment to multi-year and flexible funding, but rather it commits to adaptive learning within a response where there is an intentional process to reassess whether initial partners, selected rapidly during the relief phase, are still the best fit for meeting strategic goals as the response shifts into new phases. This also allows for the opportunity to take on additional, more grass-roots partners, providing resources are quarantined for this and some of the recommendations related to CAFOD human resourcing were also actioned. The selection criteria would recognise and take account of the added value that existing partners offer. The benefit of this approach is that it is aligned with best practice of peer agencies, builds trust with civil society through a transparent partnership opportunity, allows a broader network of local NGOs to potentially benefit from partnering with CAFOD, and positions CAFOD to be able to partner with the optimal suite of partners to meet the humanitarian imperative and its response strategy.

For example, at the start of the response, if CAFOD chose to directly source partners through its networks for the relief phase period, at the transition point from the relief to the recovery phase, as CAFOD is revising its strategy, there could be a partnership review and selection process that allowed a broader range of local organisations to register interest in working with CAFOD the recovery and subsequent phases of the response. This would give CAFOD more visibility of what organisations were operating and interested to work with CAFOD. It could choose to take on one or two additional partners as well as maintain current partners, if the current partnerships were assessed to be effective and still fit

for the context. The selection criteria could recognise the value of existing partnerships by transparently and openly weighting the assessment towards organisations currently active on the ground and capable of reaching CAFOD's priority target groups.

We understand that CAFOD's current organisational preference is to maintain partnerships and commit to multi-year funding, and that in the Ukraine response, the slim resourcing of the programmes team made it very difficult to take on any additional partnerships without compromising on the quality of support CAFOD offered them. We encourage CAFOD to reflect on the limitations of working only through Caritas partners and INGOs when it comes to transforming the capacity of local civil society and reaching those most in need, and for large responses like Ukraine, to explore ways to broaden its impact through finding opportunities to partner with a wider variety of local organisations and resourcing its team to do this. This will require setting aside enough staffing resources to support those additional partnerships.

When partner selection is based on international relationships, without also providing local organisations the opportunity to be considered, it unintentionally perpetuates the dominance of internationally backed local organisations and the exclusion of local civil society groups that lack the privilege of international relationships and networks. We encourage CAFOD to reflect on this for future responses. While leveraging its position as part of the Caritas network, there is an opportunity to also plan for resourcing its team and setting aside resources to explore opportunities to partner with a broader range of grassroots local organisations. Continuing to advocate and be a leader in locally-led responses, it is important for a leading INGOs like CAFOD to recognise international relationships as another source of power that can be inequitably distributed when it comes to accessing international humanitarian resources.

Some practical steps can be taken to strengthening selection processes going forward

When choosing to depart from CAFOD's guidelines to prioritise partnering with a Caritas Internationalis member in-country, a clearer process and criteria is needed together with supporting evidence and opportunities for Caritas Internationalis partners to give feedback.

We recommend CAFOD mitigate these risks in future responses by amending its programme guidelines and financial procedures to clarify expectations on managing partnership selection decisions, supporting documentation and communication with partners. For example, developing a clear partner selection criteria template, completed and signed off by senior leaders, and accessible to relevant staff.

CAFOD's engagement in the broader Caritas Internationalis network increased in the second year and was highly valued. CAFOD's decision to partner outside the Caritas network, was questioned within the CIMO network and prompted discussions on revising the Caritas Internationalis partnering principles to make them more binding.

Overall, despite some of the limitations around process, we see the decision to broaden CAFOD's partnerships beyond Caritas members in-country as a positive and courageous move that diversified and expanded the impact of the response in Ukraine. CAFOD should continue to explore and build on this for future responses. Going forward, and as referenced above, to stay at the forefront of locally led response, we encourage CAFOD to explore mechanisms for partnering with a wider variety of local civil society organisations, not only those with existing international relationships.

To support this, CAFOD could consider ways to create sliding scales of partnering for different types of organisations, develop rapid assessment and due diligence processes to directly fund local NGOs, or explore mechanisms for peer support between its Caritas Internationalis partners in country and local NGOs. This may require thoughtfully taking on more risk with a portion of the portfolio, and building tailored financial risk management processes, such as seconding financial advisors to local partners,

rather than using one-size-fits-all financial controls that set the bar too high for less experienced organisations.

To replicate and build on CAFOD's value-add as a genuine partner of local leadership, the evaluation findings demonstrate the importance of adequately resourcing programmes, advocacy, and technical support functions. This will become more challenging amid shrinking global humanitarian funding but is essential to CAFOD's distinctiveness in supporting locally led responses in transformative and sustainable way. There is a need for advocacy to DEC and institutional partners to shift away from arbitrary funding restrictions towards assessing the quality of partnering, to better understand the return on investment from internationally based expenditure that enables more locally led response.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON LEADERSHIP AND PROCESS

2.1 Strengthen governance committee practices

2.1.1 Update CAFOD's templates and procedures for decision-making committees to ensure that meeting minutes clearly delineate and document:

1. **Decisions approved**: Specify the exact decisions being signed off or approved by the committee and the rationale.
2. **Delegations and role of attendees**: Clearly distinguish between decision-makers and observers present at the meeting, including noting when decisions or roles have been delegated to others and rationale for delegation.
3. **Conflict of interest declarations**: Include any declarations of conflicts of interest and document how they were managed.
4. **Formal sign-off and accessibility**: Ensure that minutes are signed off by the Chair, formally filed in a standard location, and made accessible to all relevant staff.

2.1.2 Appoint an administrative role to support decision-making emergency committees (CEC, IEC, and EMT), especially during the early stages of large-scale responses. This secretary would be responsible for:

- Ensuring best practices are followed during governance meetings.
- Accurately recording minutes as outlined above.
- Managing the sign-off process of minutes by the Chair.

2.2 Establish standard practices for managing Conflicts of Interest

2.2.1 Develop and implement a standard policy to guide staff and governance committees on managing potential conflicts of interest within decision-making processes. This should include:

- **Clear guidelines**: Define what constitutes a conflict of interest in the context of governance committee decisions and financial due diligence for new funding commitments.
- **Declaration procedures**: Outline when and how conflicts of interest should be declared during meetings and decision-making processes.
- **Management and mitigation**: Provide steps on how declared conflicts should be managed and mitigated to maintain impartiality and integrity.
- **Orientation and training**: Ensure all staff and committee members receive appropriate training on the new policy to understand their responsibilities and the importance of transparency.

2.2.2 Integrate these practices into existing governance frameworks to promote consistency and uphold high standards of accountability across all levels of the organisation.[6]

2.3 Amend the Programme Management Manual to strengthen strategic processes including transparency of partner selection practices

Update partner identification section (7.4) to guide operationalising CAFOD's partnership principles:

- **Flexibility in partner selection**: Acknowledge that CAFOD may partner with organisations outside the Caritas network, especially when Caritas partners are not best positioned to meet specific humanitarian needs or are approaching funding saturation.
- **Clarify IEC Terms of Reference**: Specify that before the Emergency Management Team (EMT) is established, the International Emergency Committee (IEC) assumes the EMT's responsibilities, including partner selection decisions.
- **Define partner selection criteria**: Clearly outline factors for selection decisions, such as capacity to manage funding, CAFOD's added value, ability to reach marginalised groups, geographic alignment with areas of highest need, relevant experience, and robust risk management practices.
- **Manage Conflicts of Interest**: Include section defining conflicts of interest in partnership selection, procedures for declaring them, and methods for management and mitigation
- **Establish a minimum evidence base**: Specify the minimum process required for partner selection decisions, like initial partner capacity assessments. If comprehensive assessments occur later, state the essential information needed in the relief phase. Establish open transparent rapid assessments of shortlisted partners, allowing them to provide input or dispute findings.
- **Document selection decisions**: Detail how decisions should be documented and communicated to partners, referencing selection criteria, governance levels, required documentation, and procedures for seeking waivers to the standard process.
- **Make partner selections transparent:** Set transparency and communication standards for selection process. Consider openly advertising or at minimum formally informing all Caritas partners about opportunities to express interest in CAFOD funding, especially for bilateral and institutional funds.
- **Outline review processes and communication plans**: Specify when and how partnership and financial allocation decisions will be reviewed during the humanitarian cycle, assign roles and responsibilities, and develop a communication plan for Caritas Internationalis Member Organisations (CIMOs) and other stakeholders to ensure transparency.
- **Establish, share and revisit response strategy process at each response phase -** set a guideline regarding at what point in the response a Response Strategy should be established and shared with partners including funding targets. Update the strategy for each phase of the response. Include a simple response strategy template (2-3 pages) in the manual to assist staff, especially in the early stages of a response, making collaboration easier.

[6] Common practices for managing potential conflict of interest include: recusal: decision-makers who declare a potential conflict of interest may need to recuse themselves from any part of the decision-making process related to partner selection; independent review: a neutral party might be asked to oversee the final partner selection decision; documenting the disclosure; it is essential to document the relationship and the steps taken to manage the potential conflict, ensuring that the process remains transparent and can be audited if needed.

3. Advocacy and local leadership

The key learning questions assessed included: to what extent is CAFOD effectively using the available platforms with donors, Caritas International Member Organisations (CIMOs), and other agencies to advocate for localisation; are CAFOD financial and technical supports delivered at the right levels to support partners to meaningfully deliver and engage in advocacy initiatives?

What we looked for	Our assessment of advocacy and local leadership	
Local NGOs had opportunities to voice issues important to them Various platforms were used to effectively advocate for systemic change, local leadership, and agency CAFOD's advocacy contributed to meaningful action, positively impacting local NGOs	**Key strengths** CAFOD was a key driver behind the scenes in advancing the local leadership advocacy agenda for Ukraine CAFOD leveraged networks to amplify local voices on global platforms, influencing donors and peers to prioritise key issues for local civil society CAFOD played a key role in advocating that DEC and members prioritise a locally led response CAFOD supported forums, research, and initiatives that enabled local organisations to lead and have influence within Ukraine and global humanitarian ecosystem CAFOD empowered partners to take leadership roles in key humanitarian forums and external engagements CAFOD also facilitated broader advocacy and organising among local partners and non-partners, supporting a locally led response	**Opportunities for improvement** CAFOD could strengthen support for partners to pursue their own advocacy agendas including on local barriers and operational challenges within Ukraine Global-level advocacy efforts were more challenging in year two due declines in advocacy staff technical resourcing and reliance on the programme team to absorb the work of the Advocacy Advisor CAFOD could review its risk appetite and financial protocols for partnering with more grassroots organisations, identifying ways to manage calculated risks through clear processes balancing finance and programme needs, with strong audit systems

Local leadership, agency and voices

A commitment to supporting local leadership, agency and voice is one of the core goals of CAFOD's organisational strategy *Our Common Home*, and identity as an organisation, and a key driver of how it wants to work as well as what it aims to achieve. CAFOD's organisational vision is articulated in the Integral Ecology approach outlined in Our Common Home (established in 2020, updated in 2022 and April 2024) which includes the following goals:

2. Local Leadership: our partners have the sustainable funding, organisation and programme capacities, and operational space to lead initiatives that meet needs of their communities.

4. Influencing change: together with our partners, the communities that we serve, our supporters, and wider civil society, we participate in and influence political and economic power to drive systemic and structural change at local, national and global levels.

CAFOD viewed the Ukraine response as a critical moment for the international humanitarian community to walk the talk of the Charter for Change and the Grand Bargain commitments to make humanitarian aid delivery more flexible, transparent, and localised, ensuring that assistance reaches those who need them more quickly and efficiently. Given Ukraine's well-established civil society, there were few excuses not to enhance local leadership, agency, and voices.

Our evaluation found that CAFOD made significant efforts to influence and contribute to localisation through both its advocacy work and programming approach.

1. Advocacy to influence systemic changes in the humanitarian system

CAFOD has been consistent in championing localisation – local leadership, agency and voice - from the outset of the Ukraine response. Recognised by international peers and funders, CAFOD utilised every available channel—including its privileged access to global platforms—to amplify Ukrainian voices and advocate for systemic change.

CAFOD was a catalyst for horizontal and vertical linkages to help propel the collective voices of Ukraine NGOs into the Global stage

Early in the response, CAFOD formed a strategic alliance with Caritas Ukraine, one of the largest national NGOs in Ukraine. Together, they collaborated to promote local voices on the global stage. CAFOD supported the first and second Ukrainian Aid Leadership Conferences in Kyiv and championed the establishment of the Alliance of Ukrainian CSOs. This alliance activated local civil society to collaborate and articulate shared messages about locally led responses. This work culminated in the creation of a Ukraine strategy on locally led response in Ukraine, formulated collectively across Ukraine CSOs and NGOs, which was spearheaded by the Ukraine Alliance and outlines expected roles from each stakeholder group as well as one-year and five-year targets. These kinds of documents and approaches are key for transformation of the international humanitarian system.

CAFOD's advocacy significantly enhanced its credibility among Ukrainian civil society. Intentionally, CAFOD often refrained from spotlighting its own brand, even while providing pivotal advice, coaching, recommendations, and financial support behind the scenes. We commend this approach and encourage CAFOD to share more about its advocacy achievements and lessons learned. Recognising and resourcing this work long-term is essential, and sharing experiences can benefit others in the sector.

Leveraging its reputation in coordination platforms with peers and the DEC, as well as in formal and informal working groups, CAFOD helped propel messages from local NGOs onto the global stage and influenced donor behaviour. CAFOD partnered in the FCDO Donor Dialogue on Locally Led Humanitarian Action and advocated to the DEC to enhance its support for localisation. They actively supported Ukrainian organisations in calling for donors, the UN, and INGOs to include specific objectives, time-bound milestones, and metrics in their strategic frameworks to promote accountability for supporting local leadership. They also argued for the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund (UHF) to adopt clear and ambitious targets for direct funding to local actors, increasing over time.

While changes among international donors are often slow, there is evidence of shifting mindsets and practices, partly attributable to CAFOD's advocacy. For example, following multiple formal dialogues between Ukrainian civil society and international actors, there is growing openness to piloting new direct funding arrangements for local NGOs, such as the Ukraine local pooled fund seed-funded by the DEC and managed by the National Network of Local Philanthropy Development in Ukraine.

Challenges and sustainability

Achieving these gains required significant investment of effort from highly skilled, experienced and dedicated advocacy and programme staff, working overtime. These efforts were combined with CAFOD’s networks and access to global forums, coupled with their strategic alliance with Caritas Ukraine and later the Ukraine Alliance to engage in an active strategic alliance.

However, in the second year, advocacy resourcing declined, resulting in less global forum engagement, even though national efforts remained effective. Sustaining CAFOD's successful approach in Ukraine requires adequate staffing capacity and resourcing and technical support for future implementation.

Efforts to create change at the institutional level

At a donor level, CAFOD advocated to the UK Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) to commission a study to identify options to support a locally led response in late 2022 and, as a result, DEC committed funds to support the establishment of a new fund available only to local and national actors in Ukraine. The fund is co-hosted by an international and a Ukrainian entity – Start Network and National Network for Local Philanthropy Development – with aims to transition to full Ukrainian management and a pooled fund mechanism in the next phase. This fund aims to provide grant sizes below the UHF minimum grant amount and to use a simplified and tiered due diligence process. The simplified due diligence tool for the fund was intended to follow the verification process of the new online database platform being established by NGO Philanthropy in Ukraine with support from Christian Aid, CAFOD, CARE and Save the Children UK, which will support local and national actors to register and complete a verification process using the tool. This mechanism is yet to launch and has not been without its challenges, a good example of the shift underway and the barriers still to overcome.

At a humanitarian system level, CAFOD used its learning from Ukraine and other response settings to drive reflection and recommendations regarding quality and accountable partnerships, locally led coordination, quality funding and specific barriers that organisations representing marginalised groups face. The FCDO, together with the British Red Cross (BRC) and CAFOD hosted a dialogue to reflect on and inform the UK's evolving approach to locally led humanitarian action. CAFOD, leveraging its brand as a thought leader on locally led responses and supporting participation of its partners from Ukraine and other responses, was able to influence discussion and help inform the UK's future approach to locally led humanitarian action.

Supporting partners' advocacy beyond localisation was a gap

While CAFOD's advocacy focused primarily on promoting locally led responses, there was a potential gap in supporting partners' broader advocacy agendas. Some partners were aware of CAFOD's efforts in advocating for local leadership within the Ukraine response context, but did not perceive this as a significant value-add in their partnership. They identified their own advocacy priorities and capacity gaps, expressing a desire for CAFOD's support in developing their own strategies to address local operational challenges related to humanitarian programme implementation. Building their teams' capacity to execute these strategies would enhance their effectiveness on the ground. CAFOD noted efforts offered and now currently underway with partners on this.

2. Actioning commitments to local leadership through programming approaches

CAFOD responded to one of the largest humanitarian crises without an in-country footprint or launching a direct implementation response—a departure from the traditional INGO approach. This strategy, used by CAFOD in other contexts for both practical and principled reasons, allowed for reduced costs, more funding to program implementation, and enabled local organisations to lead the humanitarian agenda, acknowledging CAFOD's intent not to stay beyond a five-year period.

As discussed in the partnership section, CAFOD succeeded in creating a more equitable funder-intermediary-implementer relationship by supporting partner's priorities, flexible programming, and adaptive management —key elements of a locally led response. This approach was not only ethical but also effective. The equitable partnership model led to implementation that was more efficient, effective,

relevant, and sustainable. Partners integrated best practices into their organisational culture, used data to inform adaptations, improved programming quality over time, adjusted when needed, and employed innovations to meet evolving community needs.

Challenges and opportunities for further strengthening

Despite its leadership in localisation, CAFOD faced challenges common in the humanitarian sector:

- **Risk-Averse Financial Procedures**: Risk-averse financial policies made partnering with less experienced local organisations difficult to get approved and burdensome for CAFOD's programme staff managing due diligence. Partners found CAFOD's documentation requirements overwhelming. The CAFOD Financial Manual (version 1.8, December 2023) updated passporting procedures for the Partner Organisational Financial Profile (POFP), making it "not practically attainable for any of our national partners (excluding large, northern INGOs and CIMOs)." This prompted CAFOD Program staff to request a formal review and highlights the tension between localisation intentions and the low fiduciary risk appetite of large organisations and donors.
- **Initial Funding Channels**: Funding was initially channelled through international arms of local organisations without early reflection points to reassess. This led to delays in amending arrangements. Programme leadership lacked visibility over overhead allocations; overheads for the first 18 months of the DEC programme were retained by INGO intermediaries and not passed to national partners. Once identified, CAFOD included a 10% Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR) for local partners, revealing a blind spot in financial efficiencies and processes with international partners.
- **Exclusion of Grassroots Organisations**: CAFOD's requirements and processes, and limited staffing, may have inadvertently excluded grassroots organisations lacking international linkages, widening the gap between internationally affiliated NGOs and the broader Ukrainian civil society.
- **Communication of Partner Selection**: Decisions and rationale for partner selection clearly documented or communicated, leaving selected and unselected partners unaware of the reasons behind their selection (refer Findings Section 2).

Opportunities to strengthen the quality of funding from outset of response

CAFOD's commitments in Our Common Home and within the Ukraine Programme's Partnership Principles set out goals to provide multi-year, predictable, flexible, and fair funding. While funding quality improved over time, partners—especially in the first year—expressed a need for clearer communications about the funding landscape, available opportunities, decision timelines, and engagement processes. The two Caritas partners in Ukraine, with new directors at the onset of the full-scale invasion, required additional support to navigate funding processes. The establishment of the response strategy and partnership principles improved this, and by the two-year mark, partners reported high satisfaction levels. This desire from partners for clearer communication about future funding was impacted by CAFOD's own lack of clarity on the future funding landscape; DEC funds were accumulated as the response progressed and in total, to date, all DEC members have received 6 allocations from DEC.

Organically evolving priorities should be balanced with care around who might be being excluded

CAFOD's slim programme resourcing meant CAFOD realistically has to be very selective with the number of bilateral partners and projects it pursues. CAFOD's approach has been to let new projects and organisational development (OD) initiatives evolve naturally through partner meetings and existing programming, other than the DEC collective initiatives which CAFOD were proactive in developing and advocating for. In some cases, this has worked well (e.g. the direct programming with Caritas Ukraine anti-trafficking project emerging out of programme staff's attendance at a Caritas Partners

Meeting, and the OD work with JRS Romania similarly emerged out of the end of the DEC programming), but has the potential to leave other partners out by not providing a clear entry point for new initiatives even with partners. For example, for potential partners like Caritas Spes Ukraine, who CAFOD initially said they would prioritise for engagement, new initiatives have been slow to develop. It is important for these processes to be sensitive to which partners might be confident exercising a louder voice, and which voices might be more quiet or absent.

CAFOD fell short of offering multi-year funding, affecting partners' ability to plan ahead and provide job security. While CAFOD does itself face funding uncertainties—particularly with DEC funds where approvals are contingent on income from the Income Commitment Date (ICD) and drawdowns—it could have taken additional steps to provide multi-year commitments. For example, CAFOD could have offered multi-year funding through its appeal funds. Even with DEC funding constraints, CAFOD might have established a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or a commitment to fund partners for the duration of the appeal. By making these efforts, CAFOD could have provided partners with greater financial stability and assurance, enabling them to plan more effectively and retain essential staff. Advocacy to DEC and institutional donors remains important, but there was room for CAFOD to strengthen its funding commitments within existing structures.

Leaning further into CAFOD's strengths and value-add

CAFOD could enhance its localisation efforts by exploring partnerships with a broader range of less formal local organisations, acknowledging that this will require additional resources for support functions. While CAFOD's current partners in Ukraine are well-established, locally led organisations respected within Ukrainian civil society—they remained operational in areas of highest need even when security deteriorated—they represent only part of the civil society landscape.

During the crisis, numerous smaller or less formal, often non-registered organisations and groups emerged, rapidly mobilising to reach affected populations that might have been overlooked by INGOs or larger national NGOs. These groups effectively served a diverse range of people in need, including individuals of various genders and religions who may not feel comfortable seeking assistance from traditional faith-affiliated partners like CAFOD.

While CAFOD was instrumental in advocating for the DEC to fund a new fund for local actors, as a leader in localisation among INGOs, CAFOD has an opportunity to push the envelope by incorporating a more diverse array of local actors into its implementing partners. By reserving at least a portion of its funds to work with CSOs lacking international linkages, CAFOD could broaden its impact and reach, further strengthening local civil society.

Adopting this approach would necessitate increases in CAFOD's staff resourcing. Midway through the response, based on internal Real-Time Review (RTR) recommendations, CAFOD considered expanding its partnerships but ultimately chose not to, citing limitations due to its constrained programme management capacity. This decision highlights the tension in partnering with lower-capacity organisations and the human and financial resources required to achieve positive partnership results.

To successfully engage with these less formal organisations, CAFOD would need to allocate budget for additional staff, which could, in turn, reduce the funds directly available to local partners. These highly localised partnerships would also require CAFOD to invest more in coaching, financial accounting, system and governance strengthening, and safe and dignified programming as part of its support role.

While increasing investment in these areas may initially reduce the percentage of funds going directly to partners, neglecting such investments could be shortsighted. It may make CAFOD appear better aligned

with the Grand Bargain in terms of fund allocation percentages, but without the necessary capacity building, working with less experienced local organisations becomes a superficial metric of localisation. By providing the necessary support, CAFOD ensures that these organisations can implement programmes effectively and sustainably.

CAFOD should not hesitate to deploy staff in-country to work in coaching and supporting roles embedded alongside less experienced partners. In Ukraine, CAFOD has demonstrated its ability to support and empower local partners without supplanting or overpowering them. Extending this approach to a wider range of local actors could enhance CAFOD's localisation impact and further its mission to promote locally led humanitarian responses

Broadening CAFOD's implementing partnerships beyond Caritas and other International NGOs

CAFOD should reflect on its practice of selecting INGO partners—such as Depaul International and JRS Europe—to implement institutional funding like DEC funds. Decisions were influenced by partners' ability to meet reporting requirements. However, CAFOD excels at supporting partners to develop reporting and safeguarding practices. By planning and resourcing this support role appropriately, CAFOD can confidently partner with less formal or less experienced organisations, maximising its complementary skills and advancing its localisation aims more effectively over the long term.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON ADVOCACY AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP

3.1 Directly fund local organisations
Work towards the majority of funding, including DEC, going direct to local NGOs, particularly after the immediate relief phase of the response. Explore alternative options to directly fund local organisations in locations where CAFOD is not present before the response, such as establishing prepositioned agreements with INGOs to directly fund local implementing partners during emergencies across various contexts.

3.2 Expand partnerships to include diversity of local organisations beyond those with international affiliations
In large responses, reserve funds and staffing resources for piloting work with diverse local actors without international affiliations. This is key to long-term strengthening of local civil society and disrupting the power dynamics that exclude grassroots and volunteer networks from international funding. Research how other partnership-based NGOs, like Christian Aid, transparently conduct partner selection to reach local actors. Use these insights to inform updates to CAFOD's programme manual and partnering principles.

3.3 Resource programme and advocacy staffing sufficiently to deliver on strategy
Allocate sufficient programming and advocacy resources to sustain CAFOD's best-practice local to global advocacy efforts, and to enable partnering with less experienced organisation. Continue to invest in staff learning and development.

3.4 Amend financial procedures and pilot risk-tolerant mechanisms to align with Our Common Homes goals
Revise financial procedures, including passporting, to make partnering with less experienced organisations more realistic using tailored financial risk management approaches/supports reflecting the partner capacity. Enable CAFOD to take calculated risks in partnering with lower-capacity local organisations for a portion of funds. For example, following CAFOD's advocacy, some donors are

exploring 'no regrets' funding directly to local NGOs with a small percentage of their resources. CAFOD could adopt similar mechanisms or pilot innovative hybrid models to manage risk without excluding grassroots partners. This might include deploying financial and safeguarding advisors in future responses. Conduct a desk review of available options and consider publishing the findings to support advocacy efforts with donors and INGOs on locally led response solutions

3.5 Document and share advocacy lessons learned
Develop a dedicated report on the lessons learned from CAFOD's advocacy approach in Ukraine, highlighting how it catalysed change through vertical and horizontal linkages. Share this report publicly to contribute to international learning. Crucially, use the insights to inform CAFOD's future strategies regarding targeting and technical resourcing to ensure the sustainability of advocacy efforts.

3.6 Support local partners' advocacy priorities
Identify ways to assist partner NGOs with their local advocacy objectives to remove operational barriers. Offer technical advocacy support by leveraging CAFOD's wider development advocacy expertise to coach implementing partners on influencing government policies and effecting change on issues most important to them.

3.7 Pilot multiyear partnership commitments
For future responses, explore mechanisms for making multiyear partnership commitments, even if future years are 'indicative' and subject to progress appraisals and funding acquisition. Such arrangements could enhance the quality of funding by providing partners with written assurances of CAFOD's intentions, helping them plan ahead despite the inability to confirm funds for subsequent years.

THE WAY FORWARD

The findings and recommendations included in this evaluation should be seen as a step along the continuum toward realisation of the vision laid out in *Our Common Home* and the broader pursuit of the humanitarian sector toward the local leadership, voices and agency.

The CAFOD response to the humanitarian needs in Ukraine and surrounding countries succeeded in demonstrating a unique value proposition, adding value to partners' implementation efforts through an equitable partnership approach. CAFOD's distinct value in Ukraine lies in its flexible, adaptive, and respectful programming arrangements, coupled with comprehensive capacity-building, and deep technical expertise. These elements positioned CAFOD as a valuable partner, offering more than traditional development models. This approach, together with its focused advocacy and funding contributed to fostering a more locally led humanitarian response in Ukraine, demonstrating to other humanitarian INGOs what an alternative approach to launching a large-scale response could look like, and promoting debate within the broader humanitarian community about what best practice looks like.

The challenge for CAFOD now is to take learnings from this response and apply them in the coming years, against a backdrop of growing humanitarian need, competing demands on donor money and the knock-on effect to INGOs, and louder voices calling for decolonised and localised humanitarian responses.

CAFOD made bold decisions related to Ukraine response. This same boldness is needed to adopt recommendations related to internal partnership processes, identifying and managing when inequitable power dynamics or conflicts of interest may arise in the organisation. By moving toward increasingly bottom-up approaches, sharing its learning and continuing to find ways of working with a diversity of grassroots partners, CAFOD can continue to push the boundaries and challenge the international community on what it looks like propel local leadership for more effective humanitarian response.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Summary of CAFOD Ukraine response implementing partners and funding allocations

Implementing partners (in order of total allocation)	Programming areas	Funding allocation	Funding channels/mechanisms[7]	Funding sources
Depaul International (sub-grant to Depaul Ukraine)	Multi-sector response, MHPSS	GBP15.6m	5x grants (May 2022, Oct 2022, Aug 2023, Jan 2024, May 2024)	DEC, Caritas Australia, D&P, CAFOD Appeal
JRS Europe (sub-grant to JRS Romania)	Multi-sector response, Education	GBP1.6m	2x grants (May 2022, October 2022)	DEC UK Trust
Caritas Ukraine	Multi-sector response Strategic advocacy partnership on localisation Anti-trafficking	GBP1m	2x Emergency Appeals funded 2x Grants for anti-trafficking (March 2022, May 2023, July 2023, June 2024)	CAFOD Appeal Caritas Spain Caritas Korea
CRS International (sub-grant to Caritas Ukraine)	Cash programming	GBP1m	1x Grant June 2022	DEC
Caritas Poland	Multi-sector response, Health	GBP373k	1x Emergency Appeal funded 1x Grant for health (May 2022, October 2022)	CAFOD Appeal, JustGiving
Caritas Spiš Slovakia	MHPSS	GBP259k	2x Grants (April 2023, December 2023)	Jersey Overseas Aid CAFOD Appeal Caritas Belgium
Caritas Spes Ukraine	Multi-sector response	GBP100k	2x Emergency Appeal funded (February 2024, June 2024); note CAFOD also committed to 2022 appeal, but it could not be absorbed)	CAFOD Appeal
Caritas Romania	Multi-sector response	GBP88k	1x Emergency Appeal funded (April 2023; note CAFOD also committed to 2022 appeal, but it could not be absorbed)	CAFOD Appeal
Caritas Moldova	Multi-sector response	GBP201k	1x Emergency Appeal funded (March 2022)	CAFOD Appeal

[7] Timelines reflect date of contract approval for each discrete project grant. This does not reflect modifications or actual funding decision.

Appendix B: Methodology

The key critical learning questions of the evaluation were:

1. What has been different or unique about the CAFOD Ukraine response and how well has this worked or not worked, particularly regarding: 1) being an effective development partner; 2) supporting localisation and local leadership.
2. How effectively has CAFOD supported partners capacity to deliver effective, safe, and dignified programming? How did this differ from other international NGOs supporting the same partners?
3. How and to what extent did CAFOD's leadership and processes support effective and equitable partnerships and where, if any, may there be opportunities to strengthen this further?
4. Has CAFOD partnering approaches added value and supported partners to achieve better outcomes at the community level?
5. To what extent is CAFOD effectively using the available platforms with donors, Caritas International Member Organisations (CIMOs), and other agencies to advocate for localisation?
6. What examples of good practice has CAFOD demonstrated with regards to quality and equitable partnership and funding within their programme, and where might there be opportunities to further strengthen, if any?
7. Are CAFOD financial and technical supports delivered at the right levels to support partners to meaningfully deliver and engage in advocacy initiatives?
8. What were the unintended consequences of this approach that should be considered if CAFOD applied this approach in other contexts?

We used a multi-methods design – the evaluation draw insights from three core areas:

- **Document Review:** We examined over 30 policy and operational documents, including CAFOD's organisational strategies, programming manual, partnership principles, and other materials relevant to the Ukraine response and the localisation agenda.
- **Previous Assessments:** We reviewed internal and independent evaluations of CAFOD's Ukraine response, including more than 10 external reports. Notably, we considered CAFOD's internal partnership review conducted concurrently with our evaluation, which captured partners' perspectives on their collaboration with CAFOD and areas for improvement.
- **Interviews and Discussions:** We conducted in-depth interviews and small group discussions with over 25 individuals closely involved in CAFOD's Ukraine response, including representatives from partner organisations in Ukraine, funders, and current or former CAFOD staff.

Strengths and limitations of our approach

- **Retrospective Data:** Relying on individuals' memories from an intense period over two years ago may affect data accuracy. We have made efforts to triangulate findings to mitigate this limitation.
- **Attribution Challenges:** While we aimed to understand pathways to change and impact, our methods do not allow for causal attribution. Given CAFOD's strategic focus on partner capacity strengthening and local leadership in the Ukraine response, there is limited quantitative data to directly attribute the effectiveness of the humanitarian programmes undertaken by partner organisations. We addressed this gap through qualitative data collection with partners, assessing their perceptions of CAFOD's approach and its implications for programme effectiveness.
- **Limited Participation:** Our evaluation engaged with current and former CAFOD staff, partners, and other stakeholders. Community engagement was out of scope since communities had already been consulted in recent external evaluations, which we reviewed as part of our secondary data analysis. We sought to balance inclusivity with not overburdening partner organisations, who are still focused on urgent needs in Ukraine and neighbouring countries.
- **Revisiting Data Collection:** After sharing initial draft findings with the evaluation steering group and CAFOD leadership, we were asked to expand data collection to include additional perspectives that might have been missed initially. This step provided further context for several findings in the final report.