

Caritas Germany





Strengthening Local Humanitarian Response Capacity in North-east Nigeria AN IMPLEMENTATION CASE STUDY OF CRS CAPACITY STRENGTHENING APPROACH



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FORWARD

am pleased and proud to present this case study on the systems strengthening approach developed collaboratively with CRS Nigeria, Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri. CRS believes that unjust systems and structures are transformed by committed communities and their institutions. Grounded in Catholic Social Teaching, CRS's guiding and partnership principles reinforce the notion that real, sustainable change comes about when people, working together, use their skills and resources to take action on the issues they feel most important. Helping partner organizations respond to poverty and injustice is a grace (Benedict XVI, 2005).

These principles are also reflected in the commitment by Caritas Internationalis to the Grand Bargain Commitment to Localization. More support and tools to national and local actors is an affirmation and acceptance of the principle of fraternal cooperation and partnership, at the heart of Caritas. The localization agenda is an opportunity for the confederation to renew and improve already existing collective commitments to partnership.

By partnering with and strengthening the capacity of local organizations, CRS has demonstrated that strong institutions with capable staff can design, implement, evaluate, and sustain effective development interventions. This values-based capacity strengthening approach sets CRS apart in its commitment to making people and organizations active participants in their progress rather than passive beneficiaries. These values include solidarity, subsidiarity and mutuality and instill a culture of equity and respect, in which CRS and its partners have a shared vision and work together on program design, implementation, evaluation, and reporting, ensuring that successes are owned by the community or organization.

I would like to finish by thanking Caritas Germany for the generous support of these activities and the close and continue collaboration with our sister Caritas agencies: Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri. Special thanks as well to Anselm Nwoke, the CRS Nigeria Partnership/Capacity Strengthening Coordinator for his tireless efforts and leadership in this effort.

Dane Fredenburg, Deputy Country Representative – Programs, CRS Nigeria

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The case study retrospectively examined the recently concluded systems strengthening efforts undertaken by CRS to support Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri, with funding from Caritas Germany. The initiative was implemented over a three-year period between 2018-2020. The main objective to produce substantial gains for both organizations supported in terms of improvements in the organizational capabilities to effectively engage and deliver humanitarian response programming appear to have been largely accomplished riding on the evidence of outcomes and immediate impacts provided in the case study documentation

Modelling the Replicating Effective Programs (REP) framework, although with some adjustments, the study describes three stages and several phases through which CRS implemented the systems strengthening effort, highlighting on the most important drivers of the implementation process and other success factors of relevance for learning. Importantly, the study notes that the most important tailwinds of success for the CRS systems strengthening initiative have included strong elements of organizational leadership buy-in and broad-based engagement from the outset, inclusive and collaborative planning, strong relationships and open communication with Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri, prioritization of needs-tailored interventions, incremental and reflective learning, use of multi-pronged and multi-dimensional capability development approaches and participatory process monitoring and evaluation.

The study presents several dimensions of successful outcomes including progressive improvement in organizational capacity across the three technical dimensions of MOCA as determined by baseline and midline results, enhancement of the adaptive programming capacities and functional effectiveness in program planning and delivery of both supported organizations, as well as increased employee functional efficacy.

In terms of learning, the study proposes a broad outline of important considerations for future similar initiatives of CRS and other critical actors. It would appear that the following propositions standout as the most indicative lessons; (i) the centrality of strong relationships with senior leadership and broad organizational engagement to the receptiveness and commitment to a change process in organizations being supported, (ii) the imperative of comprehensive organizational needs assessment using an integration of systematic and opportunistic approaches such as in-process participatory reflections to the responsiveness and effectiveness of change interventions, (iii) the need for phased and incremental implementation over a long-term horizon to allow for adequate change maturation and realization of transformative impacts and (iv) the cruciality of continuous participatory monitoring and evaluation of changing organizational capabilities as a means of learning and effort accountability.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A	Accompaniment			
СВ	Capacity Building			
CCFN	Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria			
CDC	Centre for Disease Control			
CHF	Catholic Health Foundation			
CRM	Complaint Response Mechanism			
CRS	Catholic Relief Services			
CWG	Cash Working Group			
FGD	Focus Group Discussion	•		
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Syndrome	•		
HOCAI	Holistic Organizational Capacity Assessment Instrument			
IPTT	Indicator Performance Tracking Tool			
IS	Institutional Strengthening	•		
JDPC	Justice Development and Peace Commission	•		
KII	Key Informant Interview	•		
KSA	Knowledge kills and Attitudes			
MEAL	Mentoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning			
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs			
MOCA	Modified Organizational Capacity Assessment			
PSEA	Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse			
REP	Replicating Effective Programmes			
SMILER	Simple Measurement of Indicators for Learning and Evidence based Reporting			
SOP	Standard of Practice			
UCT	Unconditional Cash Transfer	•		

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In part, to lend learning to the trending discussions and advances in the emerging area of "Localisation" but also to respond to dire humanitarian needs in northeast Nigeria, Caritas Germany, in 2018, secured funding from German MFA, to support two local humanitarian organizations—Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri (a national and local humanitarian respectively), to implement a 3-year (2018-2020), humanitarian Unconditional Cash Transfer intervention (UCT). The project primarily aimed to improve the quality of life of conflict affected populations in Adamawa and Borno states, two conflict affected states in north-east Nigeria. As part of the project implementation arrangements, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), was engaged as an organizational change intermediary by Caritas Germany, to offer tailored institutional strengthening support to both local organizations to enhance the implementation effectiveness and responsiveness of UCT interventions.

This case study explores the systems strengthening implementation experiences of CRS, to highlight the demonstrably effective approaches adopted by CRS towards strengthening the organizational capabilities of Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri to effectively deliver humanitarian (UCT) responses. It presents insights into the factors that best lend themselves to CRS' most significant successes as well as the attendant challenges important to consider in the process.

The case study is presented in seven sections. This section (Section 1) introduces the overarching rationale and contextual underpinnings of the CRS systems strengthening initiative. It progresses to describe the study methodology in Section 2. In Section 3, the report delves into a synopsis of the specifics of the CRS systems strengthening approach (including the intervention types and tactics adopted). In Section 4, the case study of the implementation process is presented. Whilst Section 5 presents the achievement, Section 6 provides a conclusion to the case study report, and the report ends in Section 7 with a summary of the main lessons.

1.2 Methodology

A retrospective qualitative research lens was applied to assess the trajectory of the CRS system strengthening effort to identify the factors that drove its course including the probable underlying favorable and limiting conditions, all with the aim to learn about what worked well and less well. However, to frame the information collection and analysis around this objective, the study adopted and adapted the Replicating Effective Programs Framework (REP). This framework was adopted for two main reasons—firstly for its rather unique similarity to, and in a few areas, significant overlap with the CRS capacity strengthening implementation framework and secondly, for its widely recognized ability to aid systematic analysis of organizational strengthening pathways. There was also the added consideration of its amenability to adaptations, as it allowed adjustments to maximize fit with the peculiar situations of different organizational strengthening efforts including CDC initiatives to enhance the effectiveness of health systems to successfully delivery HIV interventions in community-based settings.

REP organizes the system strengthening pathway along four key phases: (i) pre-condition, (ii) preimplementation, (iii) implementation, and (iv) maintenance and evolution (Figure 1). In adapting REP, slight adjustments were made to make it more responsive to the focus of the case study. For example, as the core activities under the CRS systems strengthening process aligned only with three of the four phases of REP—the "pre-condition" phase of REP which covers the "justification for and identification of a fit and effective capacity strengthening intervention for the target organization, was excluded as it clearly was not applicable to the CRS implementation approach. The pre-condition processes occurred at project proposal development stage, which was outside the remit of the study's mandate. In a similar way, some of the thematic categories and sublevels under REP were considered too granular to explore within the CRS systems strengthening implementation framework—apparently for the latter's less-complexities, and so, these were also either excluded or revised and adjusted to fit. The final version of the adapted REP framework thus recreated comprised three phases (i) Preimplementation, (ii) Implementation and (iii) Maintenance and Evolution.



Figure 1: Replicating Effective Programs (REP) as logicized by Amy M Kilbourne et al. 2007

1.2.1 Data Collection

Information from two main sources informed the case study—document review of relevant capacity strengthening intervention reports provided by CRS as well as in-depth interviews conducted with purposively selected informants who were either actively involved, or deemed knowledgeable in the history and workings of the systems strengthening implementation process. Respondents were drawn from Adamawa and Borno States, respectively.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with gender disaggregated groups of UCT project beneficiaries and Project Community Mobilisers, mainly to frame the impact of the systems strengthening effort on the effectiveness of the UCT interventions implemented by Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri. Six in-depth interviews and seven FGDs were conducted involving a total of 37 persons, including the consultations with the intervention coordinator and manager respectively at CRS as well as the relevant project focal points in CCFN and JDPC Maiduguri. Interviews were conducted in English or Hausa/Kanuri as applicable and documented verbatim, using a common semi-structured interview guide albeit, with some modifications to suit the respective respondent category or according to the level, or scope of involvement in the CRS capacity strengthening implementation process.

1.2.2 Data Analysis

The data collected through document review and in-depth interviews were subjected to an inductive thematic analysis, to ensure that the interpretations and perspectives of the study are firmly grounded on the content of text data gathered. The process mainly involved painstaking examination of interview scripts to get a familiar overview of the general evidence trends, followed by isolation and thematic classification of evidence related to the factors and conditions that may be associated with, or deemed to be potentially influential to, the success of the CRS capacity strengthening interventions. The identified themes and subthemes were further examined for common patterns, regularity, and congruency and then triangulated to build-up the perspectives of the report.

REP is a conceptual framework developed by the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to guide effective health systems strengthening interventions in community-based settings. (Kilbourne et al. 2007).
Ramsay JE, Janevic MR, Hogan CK, Edwards DL, Connell CM. Using the Replicating Effective Programs Framework to Adapt a Heart Health Intervention. Health Promotion Practice. 2019.

CHAPTER 2: THE SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING FRAMEWORK

The CRS approach emphasized a multidimensional process that required strengthening institutional capabilities across multiple levels— this draws from CRS' understanding that humanitarian organizations involve a dynamic intermingle of several systems and subsystems, all responding interdependently to accomplish a common goal of program effectiveness. Focus was on supporting both people and systems and to a variable extent, the enabling environment, which is a key determinant of organizational effectiveness. CRS started by reflecting on institutional entry points for strategic engagement with leaders, given their position as change sponsors, who are needed to legitimize and authorize the process. The modalities for engagement varied, aggregating on the imperative to pursue three inter-related systems strengthening workstreams namely Institutional Strengthening (IS), Evidence-tailored and structured capacity building interventions (CB) and Accompaniment (A). The latter involved a range of ancillary interventions to coach and mentor soft skill areas (Figure 2). Institutional Strengthening assistance focused on the specific systems and units particularly relevant to the effective delivery of UCT programming including UCT planning and delivery, financial operations, management and controls as well as monitoring, evaluation and learning processes to enhance evidence-driven programming. Through capacity building interventions (CB), a bespoke bundle of need—tailored support was provided to Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri to develop existing or new Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSAs). The objectives of CB interventions were mainly to positively influence the expertise and working practices of employees. Accompaniment (A) which aimed at nurturing knowledge and skills retention as well as the internalization of acquired institutional capabilities subsumed several modalities including periodic on-the-job training, coaching and mentoring as well as joint activity monitoring.



Figure 2: CRS Systems Strengthening Framework

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CHAPTER 3: THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

As already mentioned, three major phases characterized the CRS systems strengthening process (Pre-implementation, Implementation and Maintenance/Evolution). These are detailed in the following according to the main factors that positively influenced implementation success at each phase.

3.1 Pre-implementation Phase

Three main themes standout in interviews as the evidence of what worked well to set a solid groundwork for the successful rollout and implementation of the CRS systems strengthening process These include (i) influence of early senior leadership involvement, (ii) an inclusive and broadly engaging planning process and (iii) influence of context on intervention uptake.

3.1.1 Focus on Executive and Senior Management Involvement

From the outset, a major consideration for CRS was on how to ensure wide acceptance and sustained commitment in both supported organizations for the systems strengthening process being proposed. Recognizing that the outcome of the proposed support, would likely necessitate significant changes in the way things stand, with respect to the prevailing organizational culture, functional and even structural roles and processes, there was a potential risk that employees with vested interests could view change in status quo as jeopardizing important interests, which can naturally spark ambivalence and resistance to the process. CRS reflected on gaining insight into the internal politics of organizational reform mainly to understand the structural and function dynamics (interests, influences and positions) in both organizations that could act for, react to or even counteract the success of the systems strengthening intervention. To get off to a good start, CRS first explored the right levers and incentives to motivate influential leadership figures in both organizations, to whom, an enhanced organizational effectiveness will firstly be most incentivizing, and secondly, from whom buy-in and commitment will be critical for legitimizing the systems strengthening effort, motivating organization-wide uptake and fidelity.

Initial efforts concentrated on finding the opportunities for optimizing executive and senior leadership involvement in the process implementation planning. As interviews reveal, buy-in of high-ranking representatives in both organizations, particularly influential leaders at the highest echelons of management was assured by both the inception meeting convened early in the preimplementation phase and subsequently sustained by the annual reflection and planning sessions instituted by CRS as part of the process management arrangement. Through the former, CRS harnessed important leadership input that proved indispensable in many respects especially for defining the systems strengthening trajectory, promoting a shared understanding about the implementation process, clarifying leadership expectations misconceptions and tensions about the implications of the process, and ultimately building consensus around organizational roles, responsibilities and future commitments.

The latter—the annual reflection and planning sessions, ensured sustained engagement with the senior leadership of both organizations, through which CRS ensured that regular leadership inputs continuously shaped the co-evolution of the intervention and implementation design. Spinoffs from this strategy emerged overtime. For example, due to strong senior leadership interest, input and support for the process, a broadly receptive environment for the CRS systems strengthening process emerged in both organizations. Middle-level managers perhaps under administrative pressure from senior leadership, developed fervor for the process, which in turn served as a powerful incentive for their downlines (heads of departments and units) to also engage the process devotedly.

3.1.2 Inclusive, and Engaging Planning Process

Aware that strong commitment and support from senior leadership alone is insufficient to sustain the organizational vigor needed to drive the systems strengthening implementation, CRS considered additional levers for promoting wider inclusivity and engagement in the process, particularly the inclusion of middle level managers and frontline employees —that is, both those whose primary mandate it is to ensure the adoption of improved processes and systems and those whose skills needed to be enhanced to drive the overall organizational effectiveness of Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri. CRS instituted a quarterly reflection and planning meeting to which middle and frontline employees periodically converged to brainstorm on the best approaches for optimizing the systems strengthening intervention design and delivery to maximize organization-wide impact.

The forum presented the opportunity for CRS to consider the priority needs and consider several choices on how to effectively design systems strengthening interventions to meet practical needs on the ground. The quarterly reflection meetings were additionally indispensable for managing

staff concerns about the process, which had a positive impact in that it engendered a spirit of cooperativeness between both supported organizations. For example, obscurities around institutional roles and implementation overlaps, which seemingly created some competitive tensions initially between CRS and both organizations on one hand and on the other, between both, were promptly clarified and mutually resolved which enhanced constructive interorganizational engagement throughout the course of the systems strengthening implementation.

Interviews suggest that this expansion in the scope of engagement with management and employees of both organizations, represented an important groundwork that gave significant lift to the CRS systems strengthening implementation. Perhaps the greatest impact of the quarterly reflection forums, can be described in terms of the way it facilitated an environment noticeably conducive to productive interaction between all parties. A feat which could not have been accomplished easily if not for the supportive disposition of CRS throughout the process, frequently described at interviews as "facilitatory and not overbearingly or undesirably noticeable".

3.1.3. Contextual Incentives

Throughout the course of the CRS systems strengthening implementation, and especially thanks to the persistent global influence of a number of international agreements including "the Grand Bargain", activism toward the realization of increased partnerships that promote more locally-led humanitarian responses—so called "Localisation" remained a subject of immediate relevance locally. Within the humanitarian community in Nigeria for example, growing interest for new initiatives that contribute learning about demonstrably effective models to adopt towards localisation, correspondingly heightened local interest.

The latter is reported to be a significant incentive for Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri to sustain fervor and commitment towards the systems strengthening process. Important to note, that it was also, the aspiration to contribute demonstrable learning to the existing discuss on localisation in Nigeria, that provided the initial stimulus for the engagement of CRS by Caritas Germany as an external change intermediary— in the first place.

3.2. Implementation Phase

Throughout the systems strengthening implementation phase, CRS' efforts centered on the continuous course of design, re-design (as applicable) and delivery of tailored interventions to address the identified organizational capability needs of Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri. Overall, three main factors towered amongst the most significant success boosters of the CRS systems strengthening intervention and include— (i) the adoption of an evidence-driven and problem-solving approach, (ii) A focus on developing organizational adaptive capacities and (iii) Use of a multipronged and collective learning approach, These are discussed in the following subsections.

3.2.1. Evidence-Driven, Problem-Solving Approach

A critical focus at the implementation phase, was to assist both supported organizations to understand and assign a clear value to the proposed systems strengthening initiatives. For CRS, this was about finding a pragmatic way to make the true and honest picture as well as implications of the organizational capacity situation prior to intervention, self-evident to both organizations. Drawing on past experiences implementing similar endeavours, CRS opted for the Modified Organizational Capacity Assessment (MOCA) model—a variation of CRS comprehensive organizational capacity assessment model (HOCAI), specifically attuned to the organizational capability areas relevant to the context of emergency response and recovery. The choice of MOCA premised considerably on its historical effectiveness as a rapid evidence-based decision support tool—primarily, that provides a systematic approach for realistic collaborative and self-reflective organizational capability needs assessment, as well as its help in characterizing effective and responsive gap closing solutions. Four main domains characterize MOCA including three directly focused on key organizational capability themes— (i) Finance and Operations systems, (ii) Human Resources and (iii) Program Quality. Each of the three technical domains also have subdomains. The fourth domain concerns the use of the assessment—efforts geared at interpreting needs assessment results and action planning (collaboratively prioritized needs along with proposed solutions and indicative delivery timelines).

The deployment of MOCA involved a two-step process—initially, CRS facilitated Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri to independently self-appraise their organizational capacities along the three capacity domains and dimensions. Following this first step, CRS convened a broader

discussion between its technical support team and the representatives of both organizations to discuss their ratings, collaboratively build consensus on a final rating on each of the capacity dimensions which best represents the organization and then agree on priority needs to address. The entire process runs on the front end of a collaborative and consensually developed work plan—detailing what interventional responses best fit identified needs.

Over the course of the systems strengthening implementation, CRS facilitated three MOCA assessments for Caritas Nigeria and supported the latter, to in turn, facilitate three MOCA assessments for JDPC Maiduguri—at Baseline, Mid-Term and Endline. Through these processes, CRS also indirectly measured the outcome of its systems strengthening interventions for both organizations. The two-step process and collaborative MOCA approach was frequently mentioned as a crucial factor that, albeit over time, spurred not only generous discussions and honest dialogue about the true picture of the organizational situation in both organizations, but also helped both organizations to be more receptive, assign value to, and modify expectations from the systems strengthening process.

However, the attitude to MOCA was not always as receptive as CRS expected, at least not initially. Caritas Nigeria and JDPC were initially edgy and quite reluctant to accept the initial low results as a true reflection of their institutional capability situation. This challenge was one of the main reasons for the institution of a quarterly participatory reflection and learning forum, through which CRS facilitated expanded discussions about practical implementation constraints and capacity gaps, which became an additional basis for deriving specific organizational needs to target interventions. Interviews suggest that the introduction of a forum for ongoing experiential exchange was an important process innovation which helped to douse the initial tensions around MOCA and allowed greater wholeheartedness about organizational capacity gaps, objectives and intervention design.

Aside being a conduit for harvesting and analysing important emerging organizational capacity needs, the quarterly reflection platform also generated issues which required internal actions within the benefitting organizations that was beyond the remit of CRS to resolve. The absence initially of representatives of senior management from Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri in the quarterly reflection meetings meant that critical decisions about internal organizational responsibilities required to facilitate a smooth adoption of new skills and capabilities, did not

always cascade up to the level where actions were required quickly enough, because of hierarchical institutional bureaucracy; and this created a feeling of process fatigue. However, this wore out overtime, at least considerably, when CRS became proactive with ensuring senior management participation in the quarterly reflection process.

Furthermore, sustaining a flexible intervention and implementation design that is responsive to the often-tidal pace and complexities of the continuously emerging capacity priorities of both supported organizations, was not initially without some challenges. However, an important factor which proved indispensable to surmounting this, was reportedly the latitude on the part of the donor, allowing CRS to design and flexibly apply dynamic but appropriate solutions to emerging needs. The understanding and expediency of donor approvals for budget reclassification of intervention components that were designed based on initial assumptions at the design phase but not implemented, was particularly highlighted by CRS as a critical game changer.

3.2.2. Incremental Experiential Process

To effectively support the acquisition of the right functional capabilities required by Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri to be able to achieve deeper transformational change and optimize program impact on the ground, CRS adopted an applied learning approach. This approach emphasized, a systematic delivery of tailored interventions to the organizational needs identified through MOCA as well as an opportunistic approach to addressing emerging needs identified during the quarterly reflection meetings. Regardless of the approach, CRS implemented a wide range of systems strengthening activities to accomplish the systems strengthening objectives which can generally be described along four loosely defined stages—(i) Capability Assessment (ii) Capacity Building, (iii) Learning Application and (iv) Participatory Reflection and action planning (Figure 3).



Figure 3:CRS Systems Strengthening Implementation Cycle

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The sum of CRS' systems strengthening efforts centred on fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability to changing circumstances and uncertain complexities in the humanitarian programming context. For example, whilst, the results from MOCA, helped CRS design and implement appropriate interventions to close identified gaps, periodically after a short implementation period, CRS also convened a participatory reflection and learning meeting to generate additional insights on new or emerging capacity needs, to target supplementary capacity support. This approach helped to ensure that Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri were immersed into a process of "learning through reflection on doing" where they learn how to respond to dynamic contextual realities through continuous reflection and strategy improvement

3.2.3. Multi- dimensional Entry Points

Given the diversity of organizational capability needs frequently generated through MOCA and the quarterly reflection meetings, the efforts of CRS were also considerably focused on putting together the right mix of customized interventions to best align with the specific organizational needs and circumstances of both supported organizations. This was an important feature of the implementation phase, given that both organizations being supported were at different stages of organizational development and functional specialization, not unexpectedly, they often required different types and levels of capabilities. Joint action planning, through which CRS facilitated collective prioritization of capability needs and the scheduling of interventions, was an important strategy for coping in this situation. Often however, CRS facilitated and relied on Caritas Nigeria to respond to the capacity requirements of JDPC Maiduguri— leveraging on either the former's existing resources and capacities or its newly strengthened capabilities.

The capacity-building modalities frequently adopted by CRS to support Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri, can be loosely defined in three categories: (i) institutional strengthening (focused on improving the enabling environment and processes to support enhanced organizational effectiveness), (ii) capacity building (structured trainings and refreshers as well as provision of resource materials), and (iii) Accompaniment (mainly an assortment of soft skill strengthening activities embodied by on-the-job coaching, mentoring and facilitated networking). Within these categories are typically a range of many different types of specific change targeted capability building interventions.

The three modalities referenced above, were deployed often as a combination of approaches using a multidimensional strategy, in which capacity strengthening interventions were targeted across different institutional entry points in both organizations—mainly people and institutional systems, but also to the extent possible, supporting networking and effort integration with the broader sectoral constituency of partners that shape decisions and practices around humanitarian responses in the northeast—especially the Cash-Working Group.

CRS consummated the institutional strengthening support towards the development and institutionalisation of important strategic organizational instruments, albeit more the former than the latter. Amongst the critical capability areas where CRS Efforts were focused, is the operational capability for maintaining access to sustainable institutional resourcing, to effectively retain, nurture and sustain programming effectiveness. In this regard, CRS designed and provided training on resource mobilization and documentation touching on crucial themes like proposal development and quality donor reporting. On other fronts, focus was towards key gaps in the enabling environment for effective programming, for which technical support was provided for the development of critical Standards of Practice (SOPs) documents for Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), UCT programming, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEAL) as well as Safety and Security.

Capacity building interventions mainly in the form of structured and on-the-job training and refreshers, were commonly directed at improving specifically identified capability needs in key themes such as program quality and execution, human resources, finance and data management respectively, all of which are imperative to effective functionality in humanitarian response programming and for achieving progress toward transformative organizational change and impact on the ground. Knowledge and skills in the Kobo data collection application as well as Coping Strategy Index tool improved the timeliness and efficiency of data collection and analysis on the field, which has helped increase the effectiveness of beneficiary vulnerability analysis, objective targeting and responsive rollout of UCT programming to more promptly meet the needs of beneficiaries KII/Respondent.

An example of such endeavours is the training on Simple Measurement of Indicators for Learning and Evidence-based Reporting approach (SMILER) organized for the monitoring and evaluation teams in both Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri, to gain skills on contemporary data management and quality improvement processes, including direct mentoring and coaching to improve data quality and utilization, all of which helped to upgrade the existing outmoded monitoring systems in JDPC and enabled more effective and efficient use of data for learning, improved decision-making, accountability to stakeholders, as well as effective reporting and strategic communication. Trainings such as the use of Indicator Performance Tracking Tool (IPTT), mobile data collection using Kobo Collect Software as well as Coping Strategy Index Tool were especially mentioned in interviews as critically valued skills which have rapidly translated to demonstrable impact on the ground. Along the same lines, yet other frequently mentioned beneficial capacity building interventions included trainings, coaching and mentoring in market price monitoring, safeguarding and disaster risk reduction, which altogether have enabled Caritas Nigeria and JDPC, to better implement responsive UCT programming.

In the case of finance management system, CRS leveraged its internal finance system resources to build capacity in Quick books, which resulted in institutional budget and expense tracking improvement including cash flow monitoring as well as payroll and compliance management. The trio of Kobo Collect, Quick book and IPTT have now been adopted and internalized as institutional working tools by Caritas Nigeria and JDPC respectively. Trainings were also designed and delivered to address specialty capacity need areas. For example, early in the implementation phase, Caritas Nigeria and JDPC recognized the need to engage beneficiary communities more directly to effectively deliver on its UCT programming objectives. Accordingly, a cadre of community volunteers who provided direct UCT extension support services to beneficiaries was introduced. In addition to training Caritas Nigeria and JDPC on UCT related specialty areas such as "Best Agronomic Practices, Psychosocial and Trauma Healing, and Complaint Response Mechanisms (CRM), CRS also supported the step down trainings for community mobilisers, to maximize the success of the UCT community programming..

Lastly, in some interviews, respondents stressed the importance of CRS efforts to facilitate the involvement of Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri in the network of stakeholders who are focused on the coordination of all key actors and responders to achieve enhanced sectoral programming effectiveness on the ground and broader systemic change in the humanitarian field. By facilitating the active participation and greater engagement of both organizations with other humanitarian partners, especially the Cash Working Group (CWG), to build collective efforts to impact tangibly on the often complex and rapidly evolving humanitarian needs

contexts, both organizations heightened their visibility and recognition in the humanitarian response system as creditable and viable partners for future strategic collaborations. These results seemingly demonstrate the pragmatism and effectiveness of CRS' multi-dimensional approach.

3.3. Maintenance and Evolution

This third phase (Maintenance and Evolution) involves a range of activities which can be described as "institutional nourishment" and include soft skills training and coaching to nurture knowledge and skills retention, through mentored application of acquired capabilities and facilitated reflection. Through ongoing support, the intention to build an adaptive organizational process and capacity, which allows Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri to capably respond to complex and rapidly evolving humanitarian contexts, seemed to have taken-off as CRS envisaged. In interviews, both Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri attested to having instituted or at the least initiated, internal processes for establishing or updating standard operating procedures notably PSEA, UCT, Security and MEAL to enable more responsive and effective programming.

For similar reasons, HR processes are in various stages of improvement in both organizations. In the case of the latter, JDPC respondents mentioned the establishment of a new HR system with accompanying draft guidelines for improving recruitment and engagement of new personnel, as well as for grading of employee benefits and payroll based on qualification and established job descriptions. All of these changes emerged because of a new fervor to improve standard operational processes which has produced recognizable effectiveness in the way HR functions are executed. For example, prior to the CRS systems strengthening intervention in the HR management domain, personnel tasks were saddled on the JDPC Maiduguri Coordinator, which was very cumbersome and slow because of competition from other higher order tasks. However, the establishment of a dedicated HR unit has task shifted HR responsibilities from the JDPC Coordinator allowing better personnel hire and processing efficiency.

These are ostensibly proof of the potential readiness, to maintain acquired gains from CRS systems strengthening intervention on the progressive pathway to wider organizational change and effectiveness. Remarkably, both organizations have already initiated activities to disseminate acquired capabilities to other peer-organizations. The reported step down training on PSEA organized by Caritas Nigeria, which has already benefitted about 600 persons including JDPC staff in Calabar and Kano and staff of Catholic Health Foundation (CHF) in Osun, Lagos and Abuja is an

example of capacity for transferability in point. Similar endeavors have also been undertaken by JDPC Maiduguri including capacity building support to a sister organization JDPC Potiskum.

In terms of the organizational capability to sustainably nurture interventions and other support far beyond the immediate post intervention phase, there was a sense of quiet uncertainty both on the part of CRS on one hand and Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri on the other. Although, CRS indicated a strong commitment to leveraging ongoing and emerging other areas of collaborations with both organizations to provide sustained access to required resources and technical support, the fact that the CRS intervention was delivered as a grant funded timesensitive performance initiative, implies that the realization of the full scale of interventions, in the intensity and fervency required to sustain current gains is seemingly imperative on continued access to funding. The scale of the seeming uncertainty around sustainability, widens towards Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri and appears to draw on a wide range of relevant concerns, the most obdurate being a subsisting weakness in organizational resource sufficiency to sustain the intensity and scale of interventions and innovation required to propel deeper transformative organizational change. This finding perhaps makes a solid case for future similar efforts to consider longer-term and more flexible implementation horizons.

3.3.1. Implementing under COVID

The COVID-19 global pandemic was a time of unprecedented uncertainty which impacted significantly on the systems strengthening implementation process. As the pandemic rapidly evolved, CRS, like numerous other organizations encountered challenges continuing the implementation of activities. Although core programming was discontinued, CRS found alternatives to maintain certain critical programme elements in order to minimize the impact of COVID disruptions to the delivery of support activities for Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri. Despite the challenges of managing online engagement, including issues such as unfamiliarity with virtual learning, poor internet network connectivity, unstable power and family interference (on the part of participants), CRS leveraged on the "Microsoft Teams" virtual platform, to host several training sessions. Some of the online trainings convened include Cash Transfer Programming, COVID-19 pathway for humanitarian workers, remote working capacity, as well as wellness and resilience for frontline workers and managers. Notwithstanding the obvious limitations with this new form of engagement, respondents were generally of the view that the adoption of virtual training was an important innovation which helped to ensure skill retention and sustained access to vital technical support.

CHAPTER 4: THE ACHIEVEMENTS

In terms of tangible achievements on the ground, there is a wide range of related, relevant areas to consider. As most have been mentioned at some point in the foregoing sections, a synopsis of four of the most frequently mentioned are presented here.

4.1 Change In Practice: Improvement in Evidence-driven Decision-Support.

At organizational levels, a notable achievement reported was in the improved allocative and utilization of organizational resources because of strengthened organizational capabilities to rapidly generate and use evidence for program planning and management, as well as budgeting for humanitarian programs. Feedback about changes at the field level as provided by community mobilizers, indicate improved timeliness of critical workstreams such as beneficiary identification, vulnerability analysis and cash disbursement on the ground— a finding fervently attested to in consultations with UCT beneficiaries.

When I was told that JDPC was carrying out assessment of people in need for an upcoming cash support, I was not so interested at first because so many organizations have come before to do assessment and my home has been visited so many times I cannot even remember. But I was very surprised when after registration, my name came out on the list, which has never happened before, and within weeks I got my first financial support. **FGD/UCT Beneficiary/IDP Camp Maiduguri**

4.2 Improvement In Staff Confidence/Self-efficacy

Before now we had M&E staff but now, we have a MEAL team which has made our functions so much faster, less cumbersome, and more organized. KII/Respondent Maiduguri The strongest indications of outcomes in this area, highlighted in interviews was mostly in terms of individual competency gains in MEAL and financial management. Staff of both Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri, reported increased confidence and comfort performing routine MEAL and finance management related workstreams, which previously perceived to be cumbersome and effort intensive. Enhanced confidence to utilize gained skills and feelings of empowerment and motivation, in turn have not only increased functional dexterity but also heightened feelings of

relevance amongst staff. For example, during consultations with JDPC, key informants attested to

a better appreciation of the usefulness of data in UCT programming, and perceived that they are more competent to undertake data analysis and better able to use analysis to improve beneficiary targeting. These self-reported outcomes of how well staff of both organizations, are better than previously able to execute required tasks because of enhanced capabilities are ostensibly good pointers, that CRS systems strengthening efforts have had recognizable influence on self-efficacy and task performance.

4.3. Progressive Improvement in Key Organizational Capabilities

In terms of a more tangible assessment of capacity improvements, across the three technical domains of Finance and Operations systems, Human Resources and Program Quality, interviews indicate good progress. For example, MOCA assessment results conducted for JDPC Maiduguri, show an overall of 14-percentage point improvement between baseline and midterm, The most significant leap in systems capability was recorded in procurement management capabilities (63 percent at baseline to 86 percent at midterm), followed by HR management capabilities which increased to 88 percent from 67 percent at baseline. Similarly, for finance management there was a rise from 64 percent to 83 percent at baseline and midterm respectively. Other notable achievements recorded were in the compliance management theme which improved from 55 percent at baseline to 70 percent at midterm, just in the same way as the administration and logistics functional capability increased from 58 percent to 72 percent correspondingly. Performance management increased from 36 percent at baseline to 48 percent at midline. MEAL and resource mobilization represented the least areas of improvement—the former increasing only by a marginal 5 percentage points (from 59 percent at baseline to 64 percent at midterm) compared to Resource mobilization which increased by 7 percentage point from 48 percent at baseline to 55 percent at midterm.

The most significant leap in capability being in the domains of procurement, HR management and finance management systems respectively (Figure 3).





Other notable achievements recorded were in, compliance, administration and logistics functional capability, and performance management. However, MEAL and resource mobilization represented the least areas of improvement.

4.4. Enhanced System Readiness

Interviews identified examples of how Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri have adopted a more pointed stance towards systems change. As mentioned earlier, organizational readiness and capacity were demonstrated in a variety of ways as seen in the finding that both organizations have development SOPs that will set a new culture tempo and the tone of the desired environment under which both organization desire to take forward their respective organizational core workstreams. SOPs on MEAL for example are important instruments which emphasize the culture of evidence and learning-driven decision-making, and how both organizations desire to collect, store, protect and use implementation information to improve programming. On the part of PSEA, the availability of customized SOPs not only signifies a strong organizational commitment to zero-tolerance culture to all forms of harassment and abuse, but also sends a strong signal that human dignity is central to their humanitarian response work. By taking these important steps, both organizations demonstrate a commitment to greater accountability and a demonstration of organizational readiness to engage with the wider humanitarian community and operate as part of the broader International humanitarian accountability framework.

CHAPTER 5: LESSONS LEARNT/CONCLUSION

5.1. The Lessons

Finally, we discuss the lessons from the CRS systems strengthening approach and implementation process. Given that much of this is already addressed implicitly or explicitly in the body of the report, the most important is summarized in the following.

 Prioritizing organization-wide engagement (top to bottom and bottom to top) is a more sustainable route to effective and responsive organizational reform.
Whilst it is a fact that senior management bears the final responsibility for the success of organizational systems strengthening efforts, there is a high likelihood that these efforts will fail to achieve deep transformation if a decision-space is not secured respectively for middle managers

Key Lessons

- 1. Prioritizing organization-wide engagement (top to bottom and bottom to top) is a more sustainable route to effective and responsive organizational reform.
- 2. If deep transformative change is desired, best to adopt a multi-level, multi-prong, and mixed modality approach.
- 3. The impact of a systems strengthening effort is as good as its grounding on, and the rigor of the preceding capacity needs assessment
- 4. Focus on flexible, iterative learning and adaptive organizational development strategies.
- 5. Organizational resource mobilization capability is crucial to the sustenance of systems strengthening gains.
- 6. Plan a system strengthening process on the medium to long-term horizon
- 7. Systems strengthening efforts need to be grounded in an organization's performance framework to enable impact framing and demonstrability.
- 8. Fostering strong relationship and open communication is critical.

whose mandates it is to ensure that systems reform is implemented and internalized and nonmanagerial employees who play very crucial roles executing and advancing frontline organizational functions. Efforts to support organizations to reform internal systems must focus the lens on organization-wide involvement.

Leadership involvement requires careful and thoughtful alignment between systems strengthening goals and leadership vision as well as proactive and sustained engagement every step of the way, to incentivize involvement. On the other hand, building fervor and commitment amongst both the middle management and employees at the frontlines, may work best if aligned to achieving self-efficacy goals. This organization-wide and inclusive development strategy not only provided CRS a deeper insight into the core needs of CCFN and JDPC-M, but also generated a sense of urgency around change solutions, which allowed both managers and employees to dedicate substantial time and commitment to the process. Ultimately, it is the energy and direction of strong change leadership working in collusion with motivated and committed employees that generates the tidal force that propels to sustainable and deep transformative organizational change.

2. If deep transformative change is desired, best to adopt a multi-level, multi-prong, and mixed modality approach.

Organizations have multifaceted functions that contribute to their core mission and goals. The accomplishment of core organizational mission and goals, however, are reliant on an efficient concertedly working composite of dynamic systems, subsystems, and structures. Learning based on sound logic and CRS experiences, indicate the critical imperative of a holistic approach to organizational capability strengthening, that grounds firmly on a multi-dimensional focus, multi-pronged response, and multi-level goals and one in which pragmatism matters over ideals.

3. The impact of a systems strengthening effort is as good as its grounding on, and the rigor of the preceding capacity needs assessment.

Any systems strengthening effort is as good as the preceding needs assessment. Assessing needs especially when done as a collaborative and participatory process, helps highlight important organizational capacity gaps, some, even inapparent, to which change interventions can be targeted. However, an abridged but holistic approach, that is rather systematically objective, than one based on conjectures presents better opportunities for gaining a comprehensive understanding of institutional needs at design phase. Building on the already established understanding that institutions are a composite of several different dynamic but concertedly working systems which should be considered together, it is crucial, even imperative to ensure that capacity needs assessment frameworks, in addition to highlighting functional capability shortcomings, also focus on the more fundamental or enabling change arenas of organizational culture and leadership capacities including governance, gender, policy and strategic foresight, as these are indispensable to the long-term sustainability and durable impact of organizational reform. Culture is everything—systems strengthening, or reform professes that is oblivious of the import of corresponding organizational cultural transformation is a recipe for failure.

4. Focus on flexible, iterative learning and adaptive organizational development strategies. In humanitarian settings, context along with its attendant challenges and complexities are ever rapidly evolving. As local challenges shift, and complexities evolve, local organizations need to co-evolve, as well as flexibly and deliberately learn accordingly. This requires the imperative to develop adaptive capabilities or the learning from reflection on doing paradigm as in the case of CRS, where organizational learning from implementation or experimentation helped to inculcate and nurture the realization of adaptiveness. However, to effectively ground systems strengthening, on intervention experimentation and experiential learning, the learning from CRS's experience highlight the value of not over-designing formats from the outset, but rather a adopting flexible, incremental process that optimizes add-ons based on contextual needs and their evolutionary trends. In this regard, chunking the systems strengthening into multiphaseiterative processes, is a crucial imperative.

5. Organizational resource mobilization capability is crucial to the sustenance of systems strengthening gains.

Another component to organizational effectiveness—made particularly imperative, especially when the goal is deep and sustainably transformative change—is an organization's resource mobilization capability to over time, advance the frontiers of internal reform continuously, incrementally, and sustainably. Systems strengthening is both time and resource intensive—a critical consideration and careful planning with this in mind, is a vital impact shaping factor. To this end, building the capability of beneficiary organizations to continuously mobilize resources to sustain traction in the systems strengthening pathways is a critical imperative.

6. Plan a system strengthening process on the medium to long-term horizon. The main goal of any systems strengthening effort is not only to build an organization's capability to bring about better program results but also to empower the maintenance and continuous improvement of program quality and results, whilst adapting to changing environments and needs. Building this kind of organizational capability is process and time intensive, requiring regular and long-term supervision and support, especially if transformative change is the end goal and this makes it quite unrealistic to fit within the usual traditional fixed and often shortterm project funding cycle.

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For the process to work effectively and achieve desired transformative change, long erm investments are a critical necessity to ensure full maturation of the transformative change pathway, as well as to prevent systems collapse after an intervention phase down and where it is unable to extend. Accordingly, donors and their implementing intermediaries may want to consider prioritizing resources for a longer term, to support multi-year efforts that sustainably strengthen systems and emphasize incremental impact over time.

7. Systems strengthening efforts need to be grounded in an organization's performance framework to enable impact framing and demonstrability.

In view of the cruciality of learning from reflection on doing, there is better promise if systems strengthening efforts are designed not just to facilitate the accomplishment of project objectives but as an integral component of the project itself. This way the effort itself becomes an activity with a process and clear objectives as well as outcomes which is included in the project's evaluation and learning framework. The systems strengthening effort should also frame into the outcomes logic framework of the project or organizational programming, clearly delineating how it will contribute to desired outcomes, and some clarity on how these will be measured.

8. Fostering strong relationship and open communication is critical.

When systems strengthening efforts are designed to support effective project implementation, without necessarily being an integral part of the project itself, as was the case with the CRS systems strengthening initiative, there are numerous challenges that can present as important impediments. Importantly, the systems strengthening process may sometimes, if not frequently run asynchronous to the project implementation timelines and this may be quite disruptive as getting project managers to alter intervention schedules to meet strengthening support timelines may often become contentious. In a background that is already politically challenging because of vested interests who feel that their decision-spaces are being jeopardized by proposed changes, it can only be further compounding.

Learning from CRS experiences show the cruciality of strong and mutual relationships building to the maintenance of harmonic and mutually empowering implementation management. Change intermediaries must invest generous efforts on constantly building and rebuilding the relationships with the change sponsors or leaders and create opportunities to periodically come together to discuss their interests and concerns and an effective strategy for taking mutually agreed plans forward. This is key for bridging differences and finding common ground, shared perspectives on the implementation strategy. For CRS, perhaps the most significant tailwind to its relationship building experience was in the adoption of open and transparent communication with the leadership and middle managers in CCFN and JDPC. Clear and timely formal communication and frequent use of the more informal interpersonal interactions help to initially build and subsequently sustain mutual trust and cooperativeness. Lessons additionally show that by ensuring clear and open communication about roles, commitments and responsibilities, collaborative development of periodically renewable implementation plans, and a liberal application of pragmatism, understanding and flexibility, it is easier to engage progressively and work productively towards achieving common systems strengthening objectives.

5.1.Conclusion

This case study examined the framework, strategies and processes involved in an intervention undertaken by CRS to both improve the organizational proficiencies of two local humanitarian responders namely Caritas Nigeria and JDPC Maiduguri to deliver UCT interventions responsively and effectively in Adamawa and Borno State Nigeria, and as a lever for enhancing their overall humanitarian response capabilities. The case study highlights important features of the CRS systems strengthening approach, the organizational change dimensions that characterize these efforts for local respondents as well as useful lessons for other actors seeking to engage similar work to follow in several different ways.

The study confirms that systems change is an intentional process that requires strong leadership involvement and commitment to drive through to success and whilst this is not always sufficient, through deliberate efforts to ensure strong employee inputs, draw considerably on participatory needs assessment and expand opportunities for opportunistically harnessing thrust from ongoing experiential feedback, and adopting a flexible intervention design framework, that is alert to emerging needs and responsively agile, the full potential of systems strengthening can become better recognized, understood and adaptable. Interventional approaches can move beyond formal trainings to embrace more informal and reactive strategies including mentoring and coaching to provide valuable capabilities that resonate more firmly on day-to-day task execution which have windfall effects on increasing employee and organizational efficacies. With sufficient focus and commitment to monitoring impact as well as learning and reflection on doing, organization can assign value to systems strengthening efforts, self-determine its course, target and control the pace of learning, which in the end is critical for ownership, leadership and sustainability.

Challenges emerging from the implementation of CRS systems strengthening efforts, are presented as lessons and should be viewed as opportunities rather than obstacles to the process. Whilst, the Covid pandemic was ostensibly disruptive to the implementation process, the innovations mainly in the use of virtual processes and social networking and telephone assisted follow-up, helped to stabilize implementation and guaranteed sustained access to gap closing support throughout the Covid-19 lockdown phase. A further consideration appear to have been the cruciality of open and transparent communication and proactive collaborative coordination to building strong and trusted relationships between CRS and both CCFN and JDPC-M, a shortage of which, was only initially a recognizable rate limiting factor to smooth implementation.

Annexures

LIST OF STUDY CONTRIBUTORS

S/n 1. 2	Names Hassan Bassi Yusuf Dawa	Sex Male	Category Beneficiary	Location
		iviale		المبسا
2	YUSUFDawa	Mala		Hawul
2		Male	Beneficiary	Uba Askira
3	Edward Usman	Male	Beneficiary	Madagali
4	Gabriel Zirra	Male	Beneficiary	Michika
5	Nsakai- sai Dana	Male	Beneficiary	Mubi South
6	Thomas Patrick	Male	Agric specialist	Hong
7	Dija Stephen	Female	Beneficiary	Madagali
8	Doris Yusuf	Female	Beneficiary	Mubi north
9	Hauwa Paul	Female	Beneficiary	Hawul
10	Doris Yusuf	Female	Beneficiary	Askira
11	Jummai Bulus	Female	Beneficiary	Michika
12	Monica Cosmas	Female	Beneficiary	Madagali
13	Philomena Philips	Female	Community mobilizer	Michika
14	Chinda Bello	Male	Community mobilizer	Madagali
15	Solomon Dauda Kwajafa	Male	Community mobilizer	Hawul
16	Dorcas Lawrence	Female	Community mobilizer	Mubi
17	Grace Aliyu	Female	Beneficiary	Gwoza
18	Jummai Yusuf	Female	Beneficiary	Gwoza
19	Asaim Ladai	Female	Beneficiary	Konduga
20	Zara Idris	Female	Beneficiary	Konduga
21	Yagana Bukar	Female	Beneficiary	Kukawa
22	Mai Ali Bulama	Male	Beneficiary	MMC
23	Muhammad Kolo	Male	Beneficiary	MMC
24	Eprahim N. Kaye	Male	Beneficiary	MMC
25	Hamaza Maazu	Male	Beneficiary	MMC
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27	Mary Patrick	Female	Program officer	MMC
28	Nubwa J. Madugu	Female	Program officer	MMC
29	Abukau M Augustine	Male	Community mobilizer	MMC
30	Peace K Gideon	Female	Community mobilizer	MMC
31	Modli Fantami	Male	Community mobilizer	MMC

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2	Phil-George Didigwu	Carittas Nigeria
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6	Ann Ogboji	Carittas Nigeria
7	Michael Ibe	Carittas Nigeria
8	Gregory Atogbon	Carittas Nigeria
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