



Venezuelan refugees stand on line at Casa de Paso, a church charity offering people free meals and basic medical aid in Cucuta, Colombia in June 2018. Photo by Nicolò Filippo Rosso for CRS



EMPOWER PROJECT

Empowering Partner Organizations Working on Emergency Responses: Caribbean and South America's Zones 2018-2020 Achievements Year One

OVERVIEW

Given the increasing frequency of emergencies in the Caribbean and South America, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is expanding its support and work in solidarity with local partners across the region. In the aftermath of disasters, families and communities often first turn to faith-based and local nongovernmental organizations for help. However, organizations in areas hit by disasters are not always equipped to respond to the immediate, life-saving needs.

CRS' EMPOWER project aims to strengthen the capacity of local first responders to both meet the acute needs of the most vulnerable, as well as lead comprehensive emergency efforts that support people's dignified recovery. The EMPOWER project builds off lessons learned and demonstrated successes from approaches and modules that have taken place in similar emergency contexts of India, Indonesia, Philippines and Jordan.

In 2018, CRS invited the national Caritas and other local NGOs from Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Antilles, Jamaica, Grenada, Venezuela, Peru, and Trinidad & Tobago, to participate in EMPOWER.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The overarching goal of EMPOWER is that local partners effectively prepare for and respond to disasters in the Caribbean and South America. This is taking place through the following objectives:

1. Partners respond to emergencies through organized and strengthened national and zonal networks.
2. Partner staff have strengthened their organizational structures and capacities.
3. Partners seek and garner resources to respond to emergencies.



Architect Rosalba Puertas works with the CRS team to assemble a shelter. Photo by Eduardo Naranjo for CRS

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

1. Organization and strengthening of national and zonal networks

In the first year of EMPOWER, CRS worked with partners to strengthen platforms for networking with stakeholders to create joint, coordinated efforts in emergency response. This includes co-facilitating the Caritas Internationalis Venezuela Working Group, which brings together five national Caritas leaders working on the Venezuelan response across the region, as shown in Table 1.

Through EMPOWER, partners across the region have developed cross-partner exchanges and collaborations that have led to meaningful progress and impact. Notable highlights include:

- Caritas Colombiana supported Caritas Brazil with OFDA pre-award survey materials and procedures
- Caritas Brazil supported Caritas Antilles with registration in the U.S. government System for Award Management (SAM)
- Caritas Peru supported la Mision Scalabriniana with SAM registration and Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration proposal submission
- Caritas Brazil seconded an Emergency Coordinator to CRS Mozambique/Caritas Beira
- Living Water Community Trinidad co-facilitated Cash training for 15 Caritas Peru diocesan teams
- Caritas Colombiana is co-facilitating Protection Mainstreaming/Psychological First Aid training
- Living Water Community Trinidad is building capacity and access to funding for the newly formed Caritas Willemstad in Curacao

Partnerships

EMPOWER staff coordinate with Caritas Antilles, British Red Cross, ADRA, and the Red Cross in Jamaica, St. Lucia, and Grenada, on cash collaboration via the British Virgin Islands Joint Cash Platform. It also supports partner engagement in the Collaborative Cash Delivery platform in Ecuador and Colombia.

Table 1



2. Strengthening organizational structures & capacities

Where possible, EMPOWER brings together partners for trainings on common topics. CRS also holds simulations of emergency situations near the end of the project to test partners' learnings and preparedness measures.

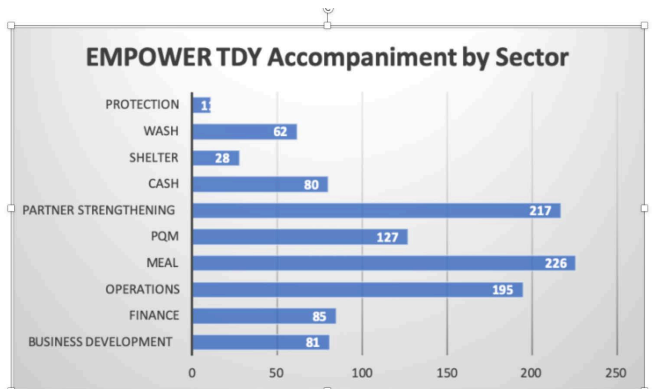
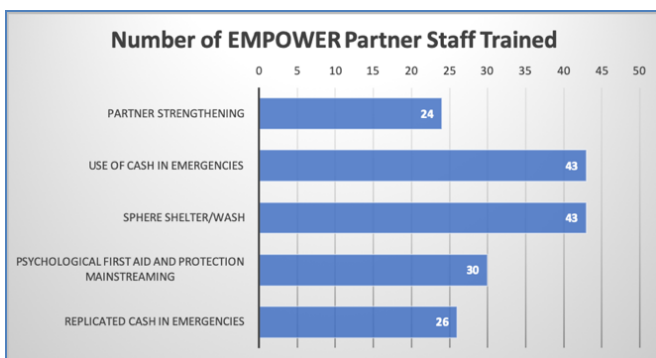
Trainings

EMPOWER capacity self-assessments are the foundation of program activities, and help to examine institutional policies and procedures that influence efficiency and effectiveness during emergencies. In the first year of EMPOWER, CRS has trained 166 partner staff in the following topics:

- EMPOWER Partner Strengthening
- Cash in emergencies
- SPHERE Shelter/WASH
- Psychological First Aid & Protection Mainstreaming (FY20)
- Hurricane Tabletop Simulation in the Caribbean (FY20)

Accompaniment

The EMPOWER team accompanied partners with 103 TDYs, during which staff members provided 1,112 days of support. Accompaniment focused on institutional strengthening through capacity self-assessments; Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning; Operations; and Program Quality and Management. CRS also provided surge capacity to fill position within partner organizations. According to 25 feedback surveys from 12 partners, CRS support met expectations 100% of the time, and was reported as having gone "above expectations" 68% of the time.

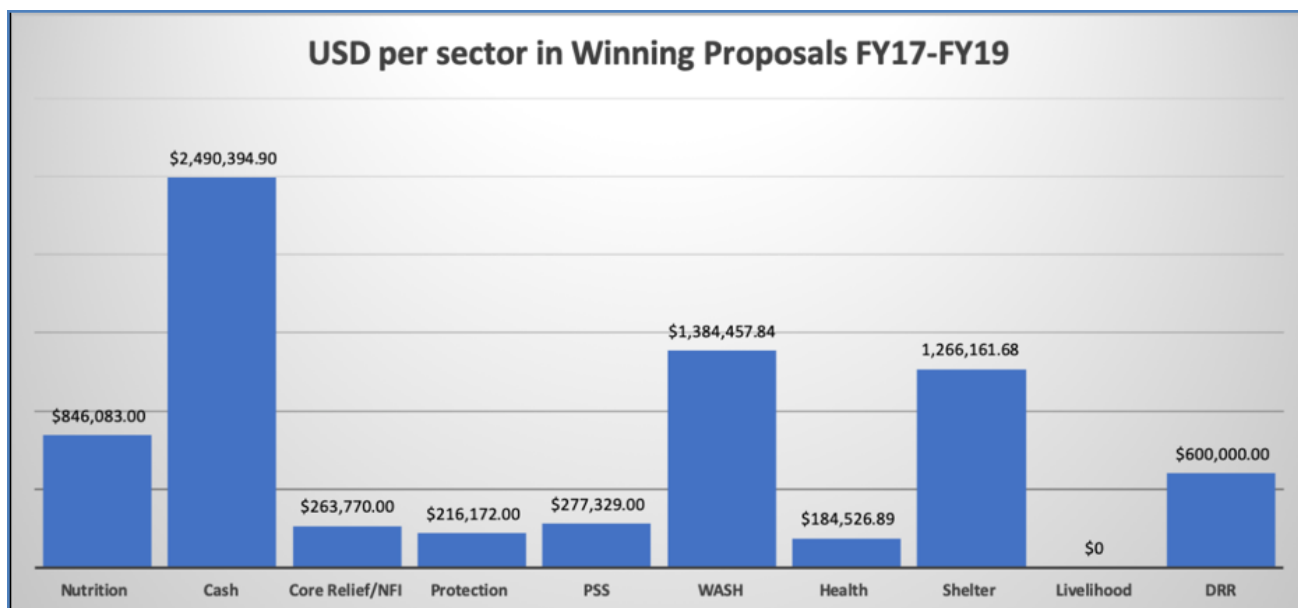
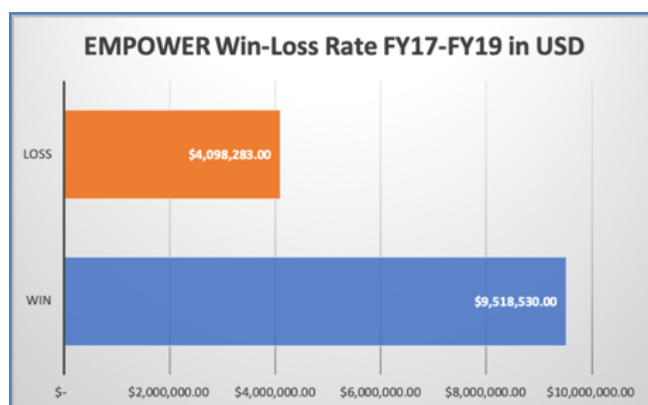
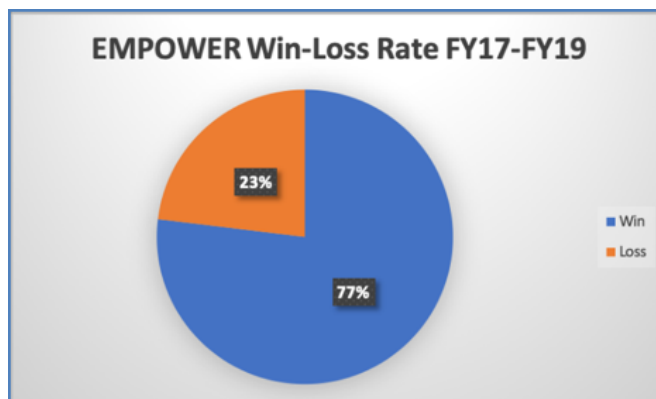


3. Seeking and garnering resources to respond to emergencies

CRS has supported partners in external donor positioning, proposal writing and the improvement of internal controls to bolster their eligibility for funding. This has included helping partners register with the US government grants systems and improve internal controls documentation to pass eligibility requirements of USAID, OFDA, PRM awards.

Currently, three EMPOWER partners have successfully passed the OFDA Pre-Award Survey, and 10 have been registered in the grants.gov system.

In the first year of the EMPOWER program, CRS supported partners to win \$9.8 million in funding for their active emergency responses. This includes more than \$5 million in direct USG awards to EMPOWER partners. Cash based interventions received the highest investment by donors, followed by WASH and Shelter.



Criteria for Partner Participation in EMPOWER

- Responding to emergencies is part of the organizational mission and demonstrated experience
- Is a registered entity in its country, and able to respond to emergencies and participate in coordination forums
- Able to commit to two-year capacity strengthening program, with monthly activities
- Can nominate at least 2 staff to participate in the program and transfer learnings to their organization.
- Willing to participate in an organizational capacity assessment, and undertake organizational development
- Open to accepting the secondment of CRS staff to support response implementation
- Has submitted an Expression of Interest committing to the above criteria

Contact

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