

CRS supervisors are committed to strengthening staff skills in partnership and capacity strengthening, but staff say finding time is the real problem

SiS Final Evaluation Findings - January 2022



Efuelomon Esekhaide, 42, sells shoes in front of her house in Ihievbe, Edo, Nigeria. She is one of 150,000 people who benefitted from a CRS-led project through which civil society organizations receive sub-grants to support capacity strengthening and program implementation at the community level.

In 2012, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) launched an effort to boost the ability of its staff to strengthen the capacity of its implementing partners. Funded by the GHR foundation, the Strength in Solidarity (SiS) project was designed to transform the systems, processes and skills used at CRS to help partner organizations become more effective, stronger and more sustainable. The final evaluation of the eight-year project was carried out through a survey and led by two external consultants. This brief summarizes the findings related to the involvement of supervisors in fostering among staff different partnership and capacity strengthening (PCS) activities.

Findings

At CRS the work of staff is partially influenced by the actions of supervisors. Nearly half of respondents to the survey (48%) said they have some degree of supervision of other staff. Table 14 presents information on the work of supervisors in fostering PCS work with local partners.

Reassuringly, a large majority of supervisors have worked in fostering among staff different activities connected with PCS work. While supervisors indicated they actively encourage staff in PCS work, the extent of that activity is shown in Figure 18. The results denote that the actual effort from supervisors is mostly moderate, signaling plenty of room for improvement. Related to fostering further opportunities for

staff, in the survey comments staff ask for more opportunities for PCS learning. Without supervisors making a priority of this, as one staff member indicates, “there are too many important things arriving at the same time that makes [it] really difficult to spend time improving our own skills.”

Table 14: Supervisors work in fostering PCS activities with local partners (%)

ASPECT	IT DOES NOT APPLY	I HAVE NOT WORKED ON THIS	I HAVE WORKED ON THIS
I have encouraged staff on my team to take ICS online courses	9	27	64
I have encouraged staff on my team to use materials available on the ICS website (other than online courses)	8	26	66
I know the specific ICS courses staff on in my team have taken	10	27	63
I have supported staff to incorporate the information from courses and/or resources from the ICS website into their PCS work	10	25	64
With my support, staff from my team submitted applications to the Perfecting Partnership initiative	14	33	54
I have encouraged staff on my team to join regional or global PCS communities of practice	13	33	54
I have engaged Alumni from the Perfecting Partnership initiative in the PCS work of my team	14	38	49

Notes: Cells in color mark the highest percentage response for each aspect

Staff also underline the importance of improving communication of PCS related activities from management to teams with the goal of enhancing engagement and commitment among employees.

To assess the state of service delivery in the work with local partners from 2016 to 2019, Table 15 presents information collected from supervisors about PCS-related indicators. Forty percent of supervisors have worked in the past three years with more than ten active local partners, an encouraging sign of diversification. In fact, most supervisors have worked with at least three or more partners. While supervisors work with a relatively high number of partners, few of those partners are found to be at a high level of organizational development when assessed by CRS' HOCAI tool (Holistic Organizational Capacity Assessment Instrument). This tool helps organizations analyze their strengths and challenges, develop an action plan, and improve organizational functions through capacity strengthening.

A measure of practices that support impactful PCS work is the local partners' use of PCS tools. 36% of supervisors have had 3-5 local partners utilizing those tools. Considering the number of active partners, this puts the use of PCS tools at relatively low levels, which is consistent with what partners themselves have acknowledged. An indicator of organizational sustainability is the number of partners that pass a prime-readiness evaluation. 33% of supervisors have 3 to 5 local partners in that capacity, which is a relatively low number considering the number of active partners, but also an encouraging sign of having at least some partners who are becoming prepared for the transformational change taking place in funding and support at international level. Consistently, in another metric that captures the organizational sustainability of local partners the number of partners that receive direct donor funding is low: most supervisors, 41%, have 1 or 2 partners reaching this level. Though still a relatively low number, it is the beginning of helping local partners to transition to a more direct role in their own work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership commitment. Executive commitment to sustain PCS efforts at all levels at the agency is crucial. This includes support to funding, but also in championing and prioritizing PCS efforts. It is important for leadership to create ongoing dialogue with staff with respect to the value of PCS tools and resources required to sustain and expand the gains achieved within the agency and in the work with local partners.

- **PCS in job descriptions.** To improve competencies among staff and keep such level updated, PCS needs to appear in staff's job description and performance management plan.

Figure 18: Supervisors degree of work in fostering PCS work with local partners (%)

ASPECT	IT DOES NOT APPLY	I DO NOT KNOW	NO SUCCESS	SOME SUCCESS	MODERATE SUCCESS	HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL
Higher productivity in my work				9	41	50
Higher productivity in the work of my organization				18	32	50
Better working relations within my organization				14	52	33
Enhanced working relations of my organization with CRS				5	33	62
Enhanced working relations of my organization with peer organizations			5	33	38	24
Improvement on my own job satisfaction	5			19	33	43
Improved job satisfaction among colleagues in my organization		5		24	38	33

Notes: Cells in color mark the highest percentage response for each aspect

Table 15: Information from supervisors about PCS-related indicators

TOPIC	VALUE RANGE (%)				
	NONE	1-2	3-5	6-10	MORE THAN 10
# active local partners		6	33	21	40
# partners with a score greater than 75% in any of the HOCAI organizational capacity areas	3	38	24	24	11
# partners engaged in PCS tool use	10	10	36	23	21
# of MOUs reviewed	4	17	27	25	27
# of MOUs signed	15	13	22	22	28
# partners that pass a donor prime-readiness evaluation e.g. USAID Non-US Organization Pre-Award Survey (NUPAS)	19	30	33	11	7
# partners that receive direct donor funding through transition awards or new awards	14	41	22	16	8

Notes: Cells in color mark the highest percentage response for each aspect

Staff appear supportive of the idea. This process requires coordination at the agency.

- **Get supervisors more involved.** Supervisor support in promoting and disseminating PCS tools and resources within all levels of the agency (HQ, and with regions and country offices) is needed. With country offices in particular, the communication strategy should be aimed at presenting the resources and tools that meet practical needs internally in CRS.
- **Provide better support to Perfecting Partnership alumni.** Supervisors and managers need to provide more support to alumni in incorporating PCS knowledge into practice. This also requires additional resources to engage in PCS work. Resources include funding, time allocated to carry out PCS work, and support to engage with other units beyond those under purview of immediate supervisors and managers.