

Internal capacity strengthening project improved CRS staff skills and attitudes, yet increase could be higher with leadership commitment

SiS Final Evaluation Findings - January 2022



Participants and organizers of 2018 Perfecting Partnerships workshop held at Villanova University in Villanova, Pennsylvania, where representatives from 30 different countries shared their stories and expertise in their fields.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) started an eight-year project in 2012 to boost the ability of its staff to strengthen the capacity of its implementing partners. With funding from the GHR foundation, the Strength in Solidarity (SiS) project was designed to transform the systems, processes and skills used by CRS to help its implementing partners become more effective, stronger and more sustainable. The final evaluation of the project was carried out through a survey and led by two external consultants. This brief summarizes the statistical analysis carried out by the evaluators in relation to the changes in Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSAs) of the staff who participated in the project, as well as their use of the tools and resources created by the project.

The methodology used in the final evaluation included a literature review of project-related documents (proposal, baseline, midterm review, and progress reports), and an online survey targeting three specific groups: CRS staff, Perfecting Partnership alumni and local partners.

The first survey targeted all CRS employees as they were the population of interest for the project. The second survey focused on a small group of CRS employees, about seventy people, who took part in a specific initiative of the SiS Project,

the Perfecting Partnership workshop. The third survey was for local partners and local organizations that worked with CRS in the past few years. Surveys were available in English, French and Spanish, and were accessed through a link that connected to Qualtrics, the software used for this evaluation.

A total of 419 valid surveys were collected from the CRS staff survey, 29 from Perfecting Partnership alumni, and 26 from local partners. This puts the response rate of CRS staff at 5.95% (from 7,070 staff), Perfecting Partnership alumni at 39.73% (out of 73 people), and local partners at 6.22% (from 418 organizations). As a reference, the standard rate of response for online surveys is around 20-30%. Thus, the Perfecting Partnership alumni response rate is very good, but the response rates for CRS staff and local partner surveys are low. In the case of CRS staff, a point must be made in that considering the number, of the 1,788, of staff who opened the invitation email, the response rate was 23.43%.

Response rates affect the accuracy of any conclusions that are made about the data. The good response rate for the Perfecting Partnership Alumni survey, and the fact that participants shared a selection criterion make the data more useful. Conversely, the low rate of response from local partners makes it difficult to make reliable insights. Even

still, this information is still useful to understand some effects of the SiS project among local partners.

The demographics of CRS staff who responded to the survey are consistent with the overall demographics of the agency. When the demographics line up this way, survey respondents are considered a random sample and unbiased. This makes it possible to use the results of the CRS staff survey to generalize conclusions about the CRS employee population.

Changes in KSAs

KNOWLEDGE

To assess changes in knowledge over time, a direct comparison of respondents from baseline and midterm evaluations was not possible given that information was collected without identifiers. So for the final evaluation, recollection was present in KSAs questions in order to recreate a baseline and then compare progress. This was achieved by asking the respondents to rank a particular topic in KSAs twice, in 2016 and at the end of December 2019. The choice of 2016 was because the midterm evaluation was done that year, so it is possible to assess changes that took place after the midterm review.

The information created a neat statistical comparison of the 'before and after' observations on the same subject by estimating paired t-tests.

Figure 7 presents the results for Knowledge on PCS. For all topics, t-tests indicate that knowledge has statistically significantly increased between 2016 and 2019. In all aspects, the mean levels of knowledge went from values around 3s (in a scale of 5, with five being the highest level of knowledge) in 2016 to values around 4s in 2019.

SKILLS

Figure 8 displays the results for changes in skills. The t-tests indicate that, on average, all skills significantly increased between 2016 and 2019. The mean levels of skills were mostly 3s (on a scale of 5) in 2016, and with the exception of one. The mean levels in 2019 were mostly 4s.

ATTITUDES

The "right" attitudes are essential. Figure 9 shows the changes in attitudes explored in this evaluation. Parallel to what has been observed for knowledge and skills, t-tests reveal that on average, attitudes conducive to PCS have increased between 2016 and 2009. They also moved from 3s to 4s levels.

The results of this section reveal that substantial progress was achieved since the MTR. Furthermore, when contrasting the evolution of KSAs during the life of the

Figure 7: Increase in staff knowledge about PCS

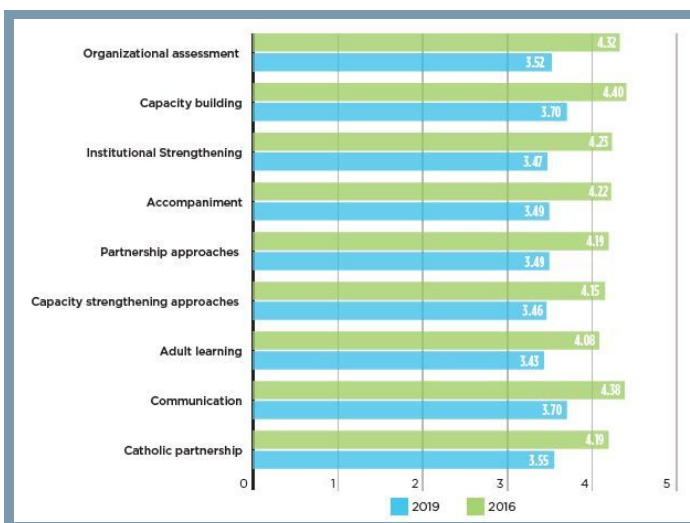


Figure 8: Improvement in staff skills

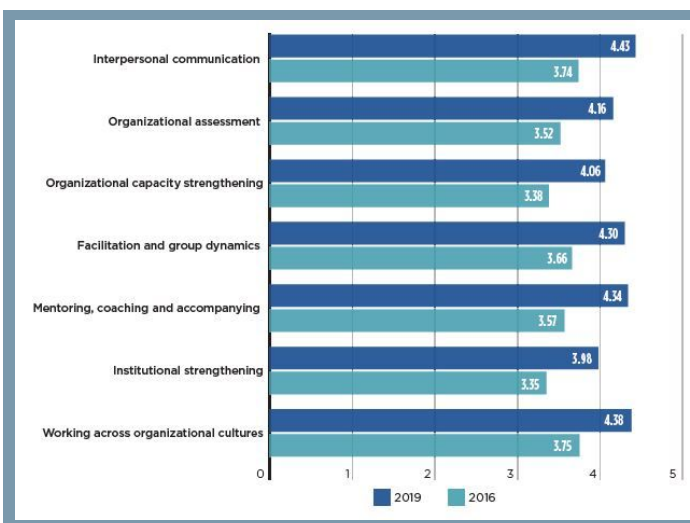
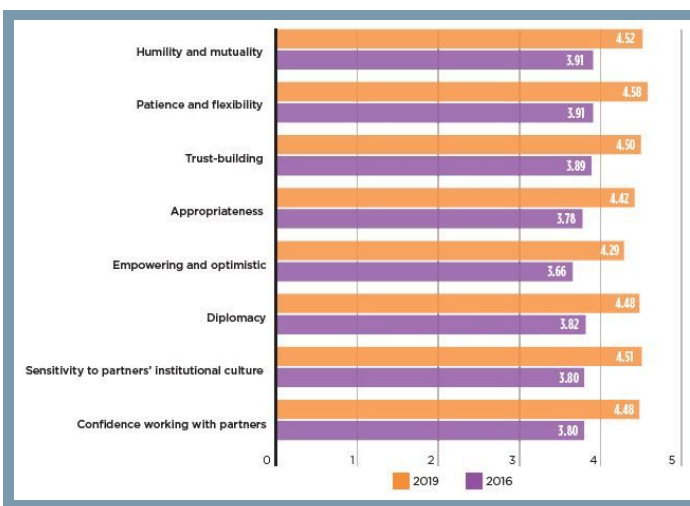


Figure 9: Changes in staff attitudes



SiS project (Table 2) two trends become apparent: 1) most areas that were robust at the onset of the project had gained strength throughout its duration, and 2) other “newer” areas, very relevant to PCS work, have also become robust.

Use of Tools and Resources.

CRS created many PCS tools and guides for CRS teams and outside partners. Some of these tools were developed prior to the launch of the SiS project, and others were designed during the project.

To evaluate tools, it is important to distinguish between ‘knowledge’ and ‘use’. At the start of the project, there were eight major tools available. During the life of the project, seven other major tools were added. That represents an increase of 87.5%.

“During the life of the project, many more staff became familiar with these tools. In 2012, there was a low level of knowledge about these tools. By the end of the project, recognition to 60% or higher.

Recommendations

- **Continue to include PCS in job descriptions.** To improve and maintain competencies among staff PCS needs to appear in job descriptions and performance management plans. Staff appear supportive of the idea. Continued participation of the Partnership and Capacity Strengthening unit is needed to ensure the continued rollout and full institutionalization of PCS crosscutting competency modules.
- **Provide more learning credentials.** Make PCS education a professional development opportunity that results in certificates, diplomas of completion or other mechanisms of recognition among staff.

Table 2:

KSAS	STRONG AT BEGINNING AND END OF PROJECT	EMERGING AS STRONG BY THE END OF PROJECT
Knowledge	Communications	Organizational assessment
		Institutional strengthening and accompaniment
Skills	Communications	Working across organizational cultures
		Mentoring, coaching and accompanying
Attitudes	Humility and patience	Sensitivity to partners’ institutional culture
		Confidence in working with partners

- **Leadership commitment.** Make leaders accountable for the promotion and planning of learning opportunities for their teams. This can result in practical and important changes in KSAs among staff.
- **Intentional promote and disseminate PCS tools and resources** at all levels of the agency (HQ, regions and CPs). With country offices in particular, the communication strategy should be aimed at presenting the resources and tools that meet practical needs.
- **Research the use of PCS tools and resources.** For current tools and resources, investigate using to assess how tools are being used. This will identify gaps in how needs are being met.
- **Test new tools.** For potential tools and resources, preliminary research is helpful. Also, a smaller rollout may deliver better results than a larger one.

