

## Local partners recognize CRS' unique approach to capacity strengthening but tools should be better adapted to organizational context

SiS Final Evaluation Findings - January 2022



CRS Disaster Risk Reduction team meeting with local government in Vietnam. CRS staff

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) launched an effort eight years ago to boost the ability of its staff to strengthen the capacity of the agency's 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 by two external consultants and released in July 2020, based on interviews with CRS staff, alumni from the "Perfecting Partnership" training workshops, and local partners. This brief summarizes the findings related to SiS' impact on local partners.

### Findings

Most surveyed local partners (Table 17) rank the work of CRS in helping to improve their organizational effectiveness at high levels. The highest recognition is for the support CRS provided in improving capacity, a key finding as it relates to the core of the CRS approach. Local partners highly recognize the unique approach of the agency to strengthening partnerships and organizational capacities. There is some room for improvement in adapting tools to the organizational context of local partners, as 16% of respondents ranked it at a low level.

**Table 17: Local partners assessment of CRS' work with them in organization effectiveness (%)**

ASPECT	MINIMAL	LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
CRS has adapted its tools to the organizational context and needs of my organization		16	47	37
CRS has supported or accompanied my organization to help us improve our organizational functions		5	30	65
CRS has helped us understand and articulate CRS' value-added and overall approach to strengthening partnership relations and organization capacities (HR, finance, programs, etc.)			42	58
Notes: Cells in color mark the highest percentage response for each aspect				

Local partners indicate that the use of CRS' PCS tools and resources translated into important gains in individual and organizational productivity, better working relationships (within the organization, with CRS, and with peer organizations) and an increase in job satisfaction (see Table 18). These are significant results. commitment to local leadership and localization" (90%), and "it ranks well compared with other international NGOs' (100%).

**Table 18: Local partners using CRS tools and resources has translated into (%)**

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 19 displays the views of local partners of CRS as a leading agency in PCS, collected from survey responses. There is a 60% of "higher agreement" (addition to the "somewhat agree" and "fully agree" categories) among local partners about the strong role of CRS in PCS.

**Table 19: Local partner views of CRS as a leader in PCS work (%):**

ASPECT	NOT SURE	FULLY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	FULLY AGREE
CRS has become a key source for knowledge about strengthening partnership relations and organization capacities (HR, finance, programs, etc.) by identifying knowledge needs				5	57	38
CRS is successful in translating knowledge needs into ready-made applications in platforms for active dissemination and discussion of knowledge	10			29	33	29
CRS has become an agency that lives an authentic commitment to local leadership and localization				10	57	33
CRS ranks well compared with other international NGOs in strengthening partnership relations and organization capacities (HR, finance, programs, etc.)					48	52

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

The highest levels are: "CRS has become a key source for knowledge about strengthening partnership relations and organization capacities by identifying knowledge needs" (95%); "it has become an agency that lives an authentic

commitment to local leadership and localization (90%), and that it ranks well compared with other international NGOs (100%). The aspect with lowest agreement is still at 62%: that CRS is successful in translating knowledge needs into ready-made applications.

CRS staff scored lower at about 70% but local partners were much more positive. Comments from local partners support this positive view of CRS as a leading organization in PCS. A local partner said, "CRS has always proven to be a strong cooperative partner in my area compared to other organizations." Partners commented on support from CRS' country offices and the welcoming environment working with CRS staff. Other local partners emphasize the help from CRS in improving their work: "Our agency has gradually been updated due to CRS's interventions with regards to organizational capacity strengthening." CRS will need to improve in two areas in order to take a leading role: funding and the availability of experts.

Another challenge rests with how well CRS can respond to partner needs when the agency is not the principal recipient of funding. This shift will change the dynamic with partners. "CRS must empower local partners to be able to mobilize international and national resources."

The survey revealed three areas where improvements are needed: access to PCS tools and resources, funding, and the dimension of partnership. Most local partners request access to PCS tools. One partner said, "We do not have access to online capacity building courses." Many partners are concerned about their ability to continue working with CRS because of limited financial resources. Many partners would prefer to partner with CRS rather than be solely a recipient of funding. "We want the form of partnership to evolve from a service provider to a true strategic partnership where our two structures can have a common vision with regard to specific questions concerning human development." As one respondent said, "As a partner, I feel that we want to work together as a family. We care for each other, we share our difficulties, we share our happiness, we share our successes."

## Recommendations

- **More access to PCS tools and resources** is necessary for local partners to strengthen their capacity. This entails creating more learning opportunities in the form of training and workshops where full practical explanation on the usage of PCS tools and resources is provided. Also, exploring possibilities for online versus in-person activities will help in better reaching and serving partners.
- **Funding for PCS with partners.** This requires careful analysis about how best to strengthen PCS. Some examples include

helping country programs mobilize resources for PCS, and embedding PCS in projects with the input of partners.

- **Track and increase the number of local partners.** Continue documenting progress, including how CRS is making local organizations better at attracting donor funding. CRS can also expand engagement with diverse actors, including local governments and the local private sector. Connecting with local private actors can help CRS foster a more agile and innovative environment and create resources that are more tailored to local needs.