Strength in Solidarity (SiS) Project: Final Evaluation Report

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Contents

Figures

Tables

Abbreviations

BR	Baseline Report
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
FE	Final Evaluation
ICS	Institute for Capacity Strengthening
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
KSAs	Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes
MTR	Midterm Review
PCS	Partnership and Capacity Strengthening
PLG	Perpetual Legacy Grant
SiS	Strength in Solidarity

1. Executive Summary

The Strength in Solidarity (SiS) project started in 2012 to advance Catholic Relief Services' (CRS) ability to work with partners and to mutually share the expertise needed to operate optimally as organizations and sustainably deliver programmatically, even beyond individual projects. Project activities were designed to transform the systems, processes and skills used at CRS to help partner organizations become more effective, stronger and more sustainable. SiS was funded by a grant from GHR Foundation (GHR) from 2012 to 2019 supporting the agency's efforts to transform the way it works in aligning its operations with its guiding principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, and particularly in relation toward the agency's field partners. The final evaluation (FE) is an opportunity to assess the overall achievements of the project, reflect on lessons learned and consider what comes next.

Two consultants conducted this evaluation using mixed methods developed in collaboration with CRS staff. The methodology included the collection of primary data and a review of secondary data. The former consisted of three online surveys targeting staff, participants of a specific initiative of the SiS project, and local partners, and in-depth interviews with key staff, partners and external stakeholders.

Findings from the data are very positive. Results showed that important transformations took place both within CRS and in its relations with local partners. There were strong and statistically significant gains in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) of CRS staff about partnership and capacity strengthening (PCS). The SiS project substantially increased the expertise and knowledge base (e.g., tools, methods, knowledge resources) available for PCS work. A host of new courses and learning resources were developed, and many existing assets were updated and curated from sources both internal and external to CRS. Staff members increased their familiarity and, more importantly, their use of the resources as they worked with local partners. Among the many resources created by the SiS project, two had a particularly important impact: the Institute for Capacity Strengthening (ICS) and the Perfecting Partnership initiative. Both provided CRS with a growing library of novel learning resources and a novel ways to access them offering promising expectations that progress will be sustainable. SiS made it possible for CRS' partnership and capacity strengthening work to be more intentional, systematic and professional. CRS' "Vision 2030" strategy put partnership and capacity strengthening "at the heart of the CRS approach"—a recognition of the lasting impact of the project.

SiS also developed important new skills for CRS staff for activities beyond those strictly related to PCS, showcasing the spillovers originating in this project and its transformational capacity. Learning and using PCS tools and resources improved job satisfaction and often resulted in increased productivity, better working relations within the teams, enhanced working relations with other CRS units, and improved job satisfaction among colleagues on the same team.

This evaluation also highlights some areas in need of further improvement, especially those related to making learning opportunities more readily available to a wider

range of CRS staff: including PCS as a more consistent element in job descriptions, strengthening communication about PCS activities, and expanding more intentionally the network of engaged staff. Local partners would benefit from more consistent communication and sharing on the PCS tools and resources available to and co-created with them, and encouragement to use the resources in their work.

A major challenge for the future of PCS at CRS is its financial sustainability. In order for it to remain a core part of the agency's work, resources need to be generated and dedicated to this function. Two recent actions in this area offer encouraging news: the approval of PCS as an official CRS program area, and specific agency initiatives that categorize technical assistance in business development and other competency areas, including PCS, as profit generating areas as profit-generating, which is a new business model for the agency (CRS strategic initiatives 2.2 and 2.6, from Strategic Approach 2, March 2020).

The findings from this evaluation also indicate that staff are adapting PCS tools in their work with partner organizations. Recognition and appreciation for CRS' work in PCS is very strong among partners. This new level of appreciation and respect for CRS' commitment to local leadership and localization will continue to pre-position CRS and its partners for the future, which is already moving in this direction. Though not formally part of the SiS project, this evaluation will reflect on CRS' preparedness to embrace a renewed commitment to solidarity and subsidiarity to support the leadership and agency of CRS' partners, evolving the way we operate.

During Perfecting Partnership 2017 each day began with a participant-led interactive summary of the learning from the previous day. Shown left to right: Cassandra Bissainthe (Haiti); Mehret Zerihun (Ethiopia); Sr. Pauline Acayo (Kenya); Linda Gamova (Armenia).

2. Introduction

2.1 PURPOSE OF THE FINAL EVALUATION

The Strength in Solidarity (SiS) project started in 2012 with the goal of enabling CRS to better serve its partner organizations by intentionally improving the quality of the relationship and of the know-how generated and shared in form of capacity strengthening products and initiatives. Project activities were designed to transform the systems, processes and skills used within CRS to support partner organizations become more effective, stronger and more sustainable. SiS was funded by the GHR foundation (GHR) and ran from 2012 to 2019.

As the program has officially ended, the final evaluation (FE) is an opportunity to investigate the effort's overall achievements. This includes exploring the transformations within CRS in its capacity to relate to and support local partners, how those transformations manifest in practice, as well as the sustainability of the transformations achieved considering the lessons learned during the life of the project.

CRS' work with local partner organizations overseas started with the opening of the agency, and the SiS project intended to improve staff skills in partnership and capacity strengthening (PCS) and adapt organizational structures and processes. Under this framework, this FE looks for changes that have occurred as a result of the SiS interventions while keeping the overall context of CRS' work in consideration.

Transformations in organizational development require time, and some of the initiatives of the SiS project started in late 2015. This FE captures changes that have started to manifest in practice while also acknowledging that other changes may still be developing.

2.2 SCOPE OF THE FINAL EVALUATION

This FE explores changes within CRS that have taken place because of the SiS project. This includes changes in staff knowledge, skills, and attitudes around PCS and the use of PCS tools and resources provided by initiatives of the SiS project, as well as transformations in the way staff relate to local partners in practice. Additionally, the FE investigates potential transformations in organizational development in partner organizations from the perspective of local partners.

2.3 METHODOLOGY OF THE FINAL EVALUATION

CRS hired two external consultants to conduct the FE. The methodology utilized is a mixed-methods approach jointly developed by CRS and the consultants. The methodology included a literature review of documents related to the project (i.e., proposal, baseline, midterm review, and progress reports), the design of data collection tools to generate primary data, data collection and analysis, and report writing.

The tools for data collection included quantitative and qualitative instruments: surveys and key informant interviews (KIIs).

Three surveys were created for this evaluation, targeting:

- CRS staff
- Perfecting Partnership alumni
- local partners

The first survey targeted all CRS employees as they were the primary population of interest for the project. The second survey focused on a smaller group of CRS employees, about sixty people, who took part in the Perfecting Partnership initiative of the SiS Project. The third survey for local partners centered in local organizations who are working or have worked with CRS in the past few years. To facilitate responses, surveys were available in three languages: English, French, and Spanish.

Table 1 presents the sections contained in each survey. CRS Staff and Perfecting Partnership alumni surveys had the same sections, but Section C differed in the questions included. The questions for staff were about the general use of PCS knowledge and learning resources created by the SiS project. In addition to those questions, Perfecting Partnership respondents were also asked about their participation in the Perfecting Partnership initiative.

The sections in the local partners survey intended to mirror the questions asked to CRS employees but from the perspective of local organizations who engaged in PCS initiatives with CRS. Special attention was paid to word the questions in a more general manner to avoid misunderstanding with CRS' terminology that may be unfamiliar to local partners.

TABLE 1. SURVEYS SECTIONS

SECTION	STAFF	PERFECTING PARTNERSHIP	LOCAL PARTNERS
A	Profile Section	Profile Section	Profile Section
B	Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes	Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes	
C	Use of Tools and Resources for Partnership and Capacity Strengthening (PCS)	Use of Tools and Resources for Partnership and Capacity Strengthening (PCS)	Use of CRS Tools and Resources for strengthening partnership relations and organization capacities (HR, finance, programs, etc.)
D	Partnership and Capacity Strengthening (PCS) in Working with Local Partners	Partnership and Capacity Strengthening (PCS) in Working with Local Partners	Strengthening partnership relations and organization capacities (HR, finance, programs, etc.) in CRS Action
E	CRS as a leading institution in Partnership and Capacity Strengthening (PCS)	CRS as a leading institution in Partnership and Capacity Strengthening (PCS)	CRS as a leading institution in strengthening partnership relations and organization capacities (HR, finance, programs, etc.)

Surveys were taken online through a link provided by email to all CRS staff (7,070); the link directed respondents to Qualtrics, the online survey software used in this evaluation. All CRS staff and Perfecting Partnership members received an email requesting participation and one reminder. The link was also sent to 418 local partners, compiled through information from Gateway and a list of most relevant partners provided by country programs.

Data collection among CRS staff took place from mid-February to early March 2020. Meanwhile, data collection for local partners took place during the month of March 2020.

Next, in-depth interviews with key informants were conducted. The interviews took place from mid-April to early May 2020. More than 50 people were invited via email to the interviews. A total of 46 people were ultimately interviewed, 42 of them individually and 4 of them in pairs of two. Except for one interview occurring via Zoom, all others used Skype.

The interviewees were clustered into four main categories: 1) CRS Staff, 2) CRS staff who participated in a Perfecting Partnership workshop, 3) partners, 4) external stakeholders. A fixed template of questions was developed for each group of interviewees to guide the interview process. However, the individual conversations organically and naturally developed beyond the fixed framework, based on the participants' familiarity with the SiS project and the broader PCS work.

Most of the interviews were recorded via the built-in Skype function. Interviewees gave verbal consent to it with the agreement that the recordings would only be used by the evaluation team and would not be disseminated further.

Vietnam Disaster Risk Reduction team meeting with local government partners in 2015. Photo by CRS staff

3. Results

3.1 DATA COLLECTED

After closing data collection efforts, a total of 419 valid surveys were available from CRS staff, 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), that of Perfecting Partnership alumni at 39.73% (out of 73 people), and that of local partners at 6.22% (from 418 organizations). As a reference, the standard rate of response in online surveys is around 20-30%. Thus, while the response rate from Perfecting Partnership alumni was very good, the rates from CRS staff and local partners were quite low. However, in the case of CRS staff, a point must be made that, within the 1,788 staff who opened the invitation email, the response rate was 23.43%.

Response rates can affect the ability to generalize conclusions extracted from analysis of data collected. Response bias occurs when the distribution of survey respondents may not resemble that of the population. The good response rate for the Perfecting Partnership alumni survey and the fact that participants in this initiative shared a strict selection criterion make the data useful to obtain valid inference. For local partners, the low number of responses compromises the ability of data collected to provide insights that can be extended to all local partners. However, the information generated is still useful to understand some of the effects of the SiS project among local partners.

For the CRS staff collected data, a key aspect in this discussion is whether respondents resemble the population of CRS staff. If the survey response rate is low as in the current situation, but the distribution of respondents is similar to that of the population, then response bias is not a problem and conclusions from data analysis can be generalized. Figure 1 presents the distribution of the CRS staff population and that of survey respondents. As observable, they are similar, with program staff being the largest group present in both the CRS employee population and survey respondents. There is a
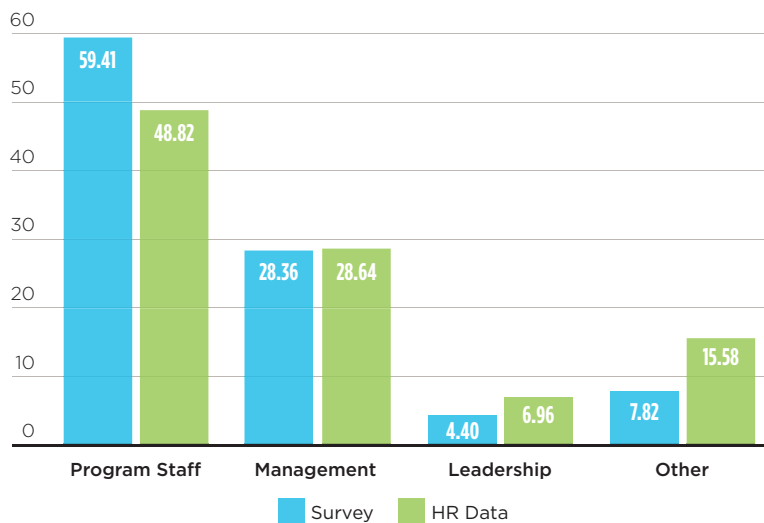
Figure 1. CRS population and survey responses, by job grade/level (%)

slightly higher survey representation of program staff and a smaller of "other"[1] but their participation is the same: program staff is the largest group while the other is the third group in both the CRS staff population and the survey respondents.

Given these considerations, when there is a similarity in distributions as in this case, the survey respondents can be considered as a simple random sample and thus the estimators generated with them to be unbiased (Guarnera, 2014)[2]. This means that it is possible to use the results of the staff survey to generalize its conclusions to the CRS employee population.

In consequence, both CRS staff and Perfecting Partnership alumni survey analysis provide information useful to understand the impact of the SiS project within CRS as an organization. Meanwhile, given the considerations explained about the responses from local partners, the information collected from surveys is used in this report to provide some insights about their relationship with CRS, though it cannot be generalized to all partners.

3.2 RESPONDENTS PROFILES

Among respondents to the CRS staff survey, Figure 2 indicates that most respondents, 45.28%, have worked at the organization for 1–5 years. A vast majority, 89%, work in country programs (Figure 3). The CRS regions with the largest presence (Figure 4) among respondents are EARO and WARO with 18.49% each, followed by Asia with 17.76%.
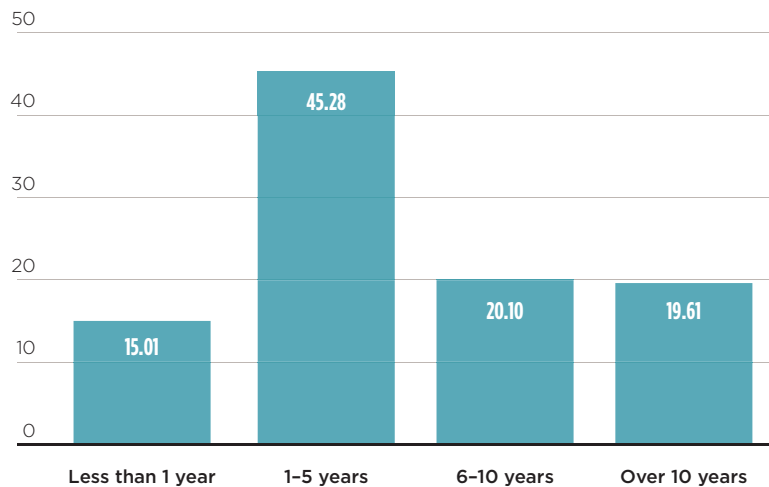
Figure 2. Staff, Time at CRS (%)

Among Perfecting Partnership alumni survey participants, the tenure at the job is longer than among staff: about 44% of people have been at the organization for more than ten years. In contrast, work location and region of work are very similar to staff. Over 79% of Perfecting Partnership alumni respondents work in a country program; the same three regions with a large presence in survey participants have the largest presence for Perfecting Partnership alumni respondents: ASIA, SARO and EARO in equal concentration, 17.24%.

For local partners, there is somewhat equal participation from different types of organizations (Figure 5), with Catholic Church-affiliated organizations and Others representing an equal 32% of respondents, followed by secular NGOs at 20%.
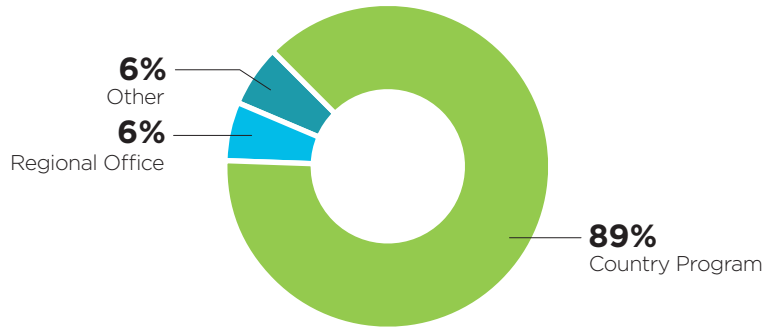
Figure 3. Staff, Current work location (%)

6% Other

6% Regional Office

89% Country Program
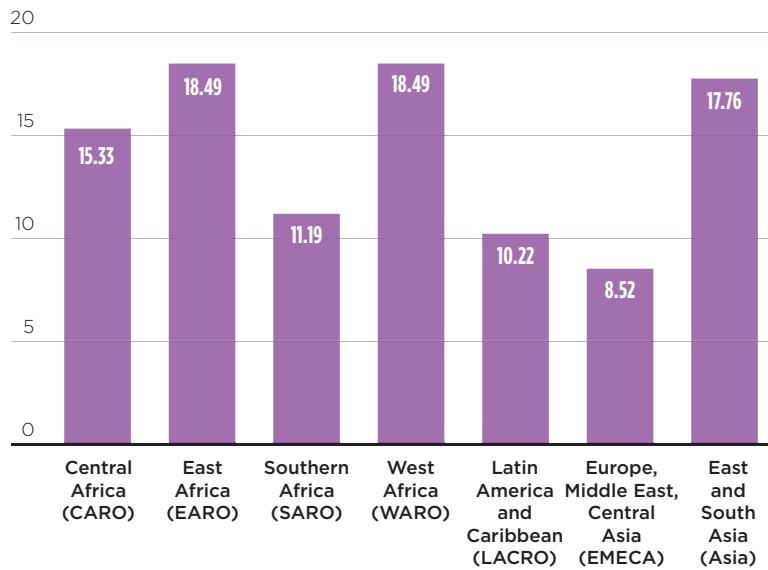
Figure 4. Staff, Region of work

20

15.33 — Central Africa (CARO)
18.49 — East Africa (EARO)
11.19 — Southern Africa (SARO)
18.49 — West Africa (WARO)
10.22 — Latin America and Caribbean (LACRO)
8.52 — Europe, Middle East, Central Asia (EMECA)
17.76 — East and South Asia (Asia)

44% of local partners respondents are in senior management level positions with more than ten years at their organization, which indicates their responses are knowledgeable with respect to the work of their organization in PCS and in connection to CRS. Notably different than the results from the CRS staff and Perfecting Partnership alumni surveys, there is a large presence of respondents from a single region with 40% of respondents from Asia.

In the last 24 months, 84% of local partners have collaborated with CRS to strengthen partnership relations and organization capacities. In 45% of cases, the connection to CRS is 1-5 years old and in 35% is 6-10 years (Figure 6).

16% Faith based NGO, excluding Catholic organizations

20% Secular NGO

32% Other

32% Catholic Church or Catholic Church-affiliated organization
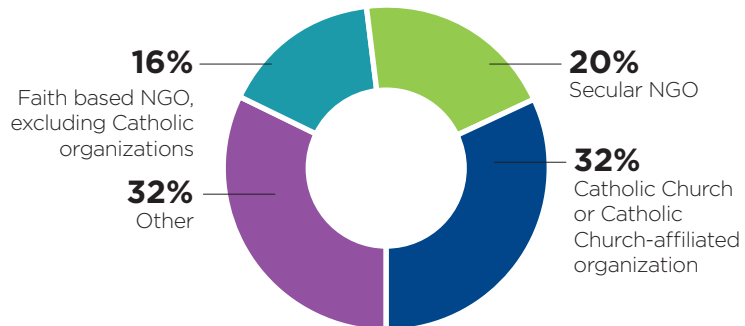
Figure 5. Local Partners, Type of organization (%)

For KIIs, out of the total 46 people interviewed, 35 of them are CRS staff, six of which are Perfecting Partnership alumni. Of the other 11 people interviewed, 7 are working with partner agencies, while the other 4 belong to the external stakeholder's category being affiliated with donors, service providers, and universities.
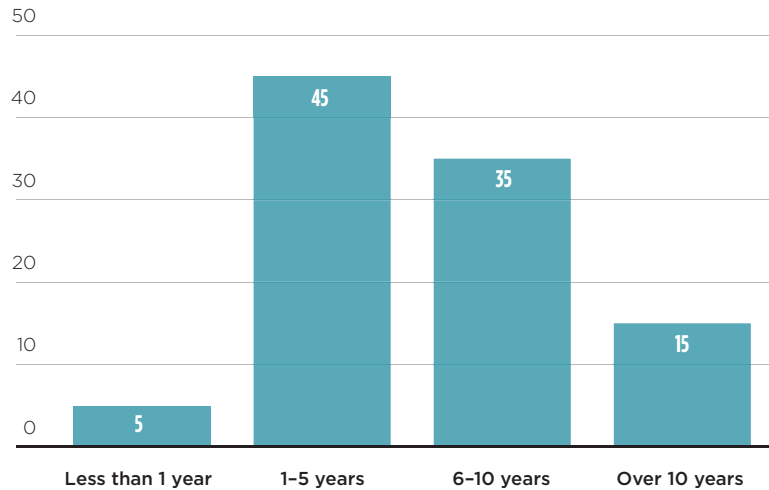
Figure 6. Local Partners, Length of collaboration with CRS (%)

3.3 CHANGES IN KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ATTITUDES (KSAS)

KNOWLEDGE

The baseline report (BR) (2013) found that, in technical areas, staff ranked their highest knowledge in communications while the lowest was in developing capacity strengthening action plans. Meanwhile, the midterm review (MTR) (2016) indicated that staff felt that their knowledge had improved in comparison to previous years with the highest changes in partnership approaches and capacity strengthening approaches, whereas the weakest knowledge was in Catholic partnership and adult learning.

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. Thus, for this final evaluation recollection was present in KSAs questions in order to recreate a baseline and then compare progress. This was achieved by asking the respondent to rank a particular topic in KSAs twice, in 2016 and at the end of December 2019. The choice of 2016 was due to the midterm evaluation being conducted in that year, so it would be possible to assess changes that took place after the midterm review.

The information gathered permitted 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 evaluated, 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.

Consistent with previous evaluations, the topics with the highest level of knowledge in 2016 were capacity building and communications. By the end of 2019, those were still the aspects with the highest levels, indicating sustained gains over time. It is
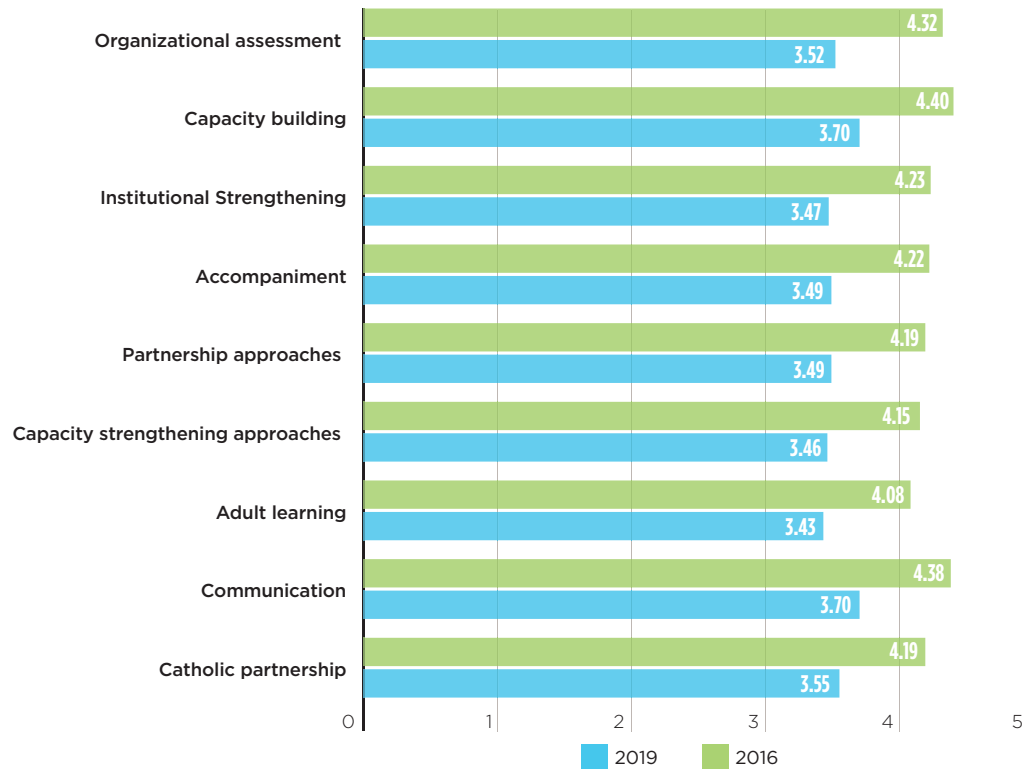
Figure 7. Staff Progress in knowledge about PCS

also important to investigate areas with the largest improvements. Between 2016 and 2019, the topic with most progress in knowledge was organizational assessment, followed by institutional strengthening and accompaniment. These aspects of knowledge are essential components of PCS knowledge, so it is very positive to observe their sustained growth.

Though all aspects of PCS knowledge are at a high level, the lowest position is on adult learning. This same aspect was identified as one of two with weakest knowledge in the MTR. The other weak aspect in the MTR was Catholic partnership which has substantially increased in the last few years and is no longer the weakest area.

SKILLS

According to the baseline report, and similar to the case of knowledge, the highest skill among respondents was in communications while the lowest was in developing capacity strengthening action plans. By the time of the MTR, staff said they had improved their skills in general, with the highest levels in interpersonal communication and slight declines in institutional strengthening, organizational assessment, and organizational analysis and action planning.

For this FE, Figure 8 displays the results for changes in skills. The t-tests indicate that, on average, **all skills assessed have statistically significantly increased between 2016 and 2019**. Resembling the progress in knowledge, in all aspects measured, the mean levels of skills were around values of 3s (on a scale of 5) in 2016 and, with the exception of one, the mean levels increased to values around 4s in 2019.
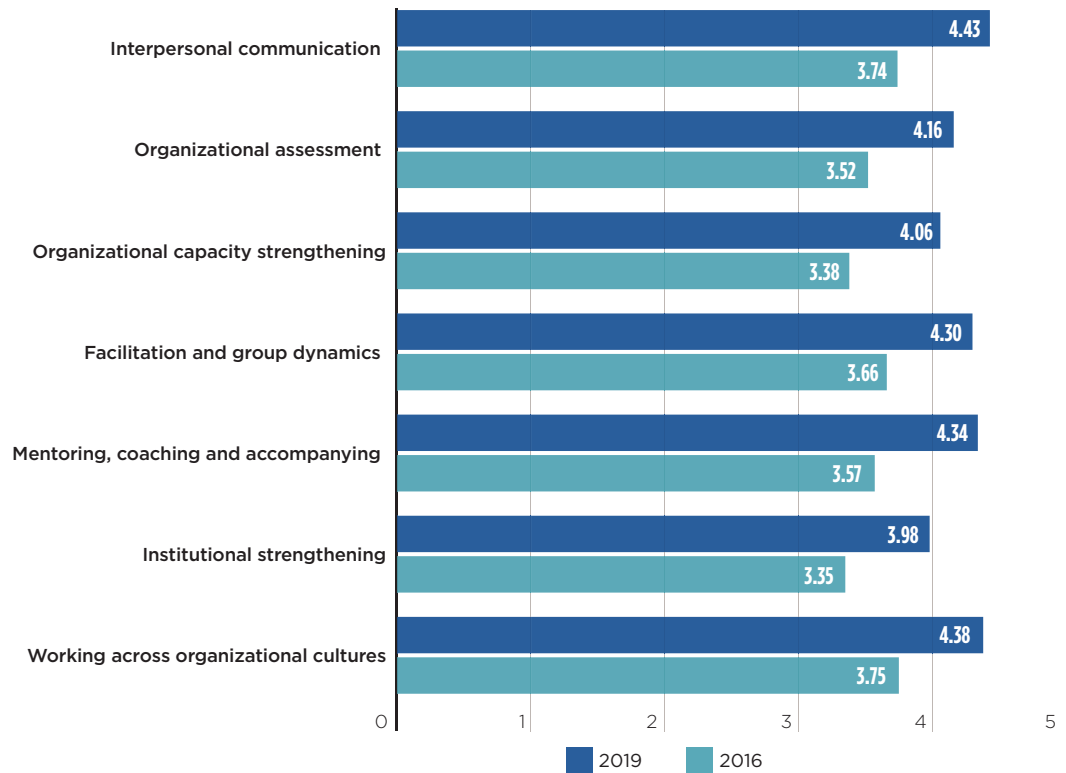
Figure 8. Staff improvement in skills

In 2016, the top three skills were in working across organizational cultures, in interpersonal communication, and in facilitation and group dynamics. The second skill had been the highest as per the MTR. By the end of 2019, two of those remain as top three skills: interpersonal communication and working across organizational cultures. This indicates that skills gains have been sustained.

Completing the top three skills in 2019 is mentoring, coaching and accompanying. This skill registered the largest gain from 2016 to 2019 and is a key component of the PCS approach at CRS. The fact that it is among the highest skills by the end of the SiS project indicates that staff are prepared to advance further in working with local partners.

ATTITUDES

Right attitudes are essential to working successfully with and within organizations. The baseline report identified attitudes conducive to work in PCS. Respondents ranked the following as the highest attitudes they could easily demonstrate: diplomacy, confidence, humility and patience. The lowest was trust.

In the midterm review, the top attitudes were humility, mutuality, patience and flexibility. Meanwhile, in contrast to the baseline, diplomacy was among the lowest ranked along with sensitivity to partners' institutional culture.

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 work showed a significant statistical increase between 2016 and 2020. They also moved from 3s to 4s levels.

Consistent with the findings of the midterm review, in 2016 the highest ranked attitudes present in staff were humility, mutuality, patience and flexibility. By the end of 2019, they remained as the top attitudes. The attitude with the largest improvements by 2019 was sensitivity to partners' institutional culture, which had been the lowest ranked in the midterm review, indicating major progress in the last
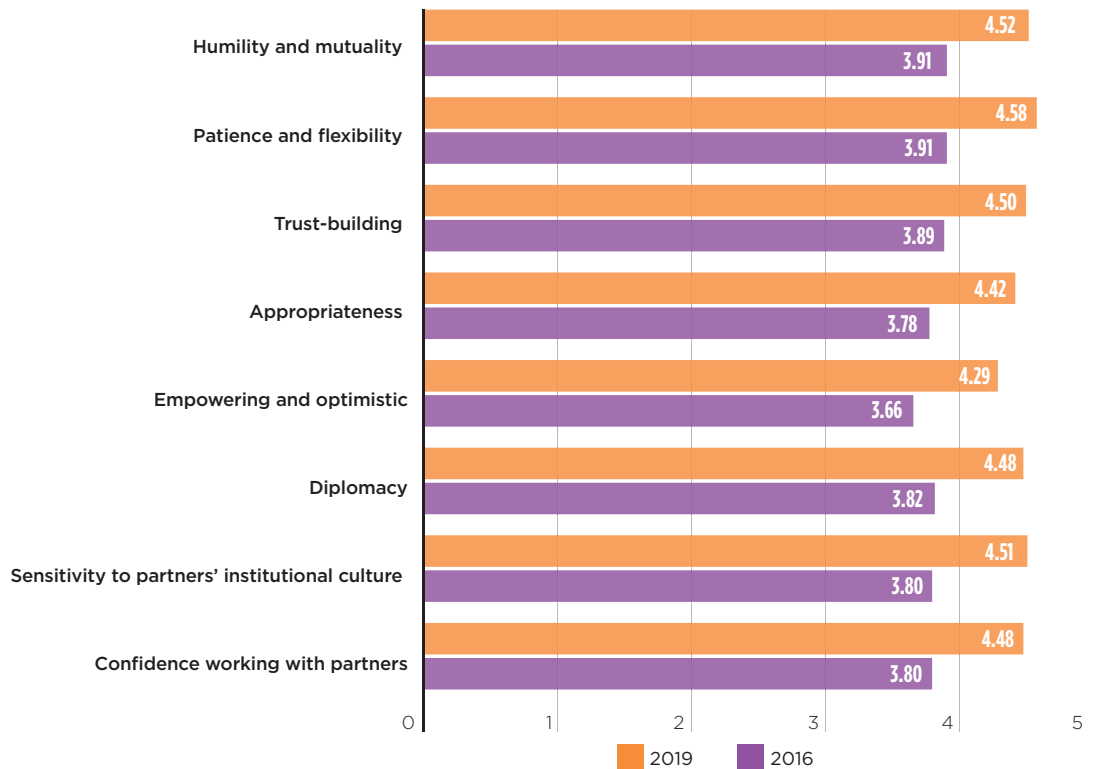
Figure 9. Staff changes in attitudes

three years. The second largest gain in attitudes is in confidence in working with partners. Advances in both attitudes signal important development in CRS staff preparedness for their work with partners.

The results of this section reveal that substantial progress has been achieved since the midterm review. Furthermore, when contrasting the evolution of KSAs during the life of the SiS project (Table 2), two trends become apparent: 1) most areas that were robust at the onset of the project gained strength throughout its duration, and 2) other "newer" areas, very relevant to PCS work, have also become robust.

The new aspects emerging as strong by the end of the project include elements that embody the comprehensive CRS approach to PCS: accompaniment, mentoring, and sensitivity to partners' institutional culture. Further work in solidifying gains achieved in these areas can help the agency become a leading organization in PCS.

TABLE 2. KSA'S STRENGTHS IN THE SiS PROJECT

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

With the results of this section, **CRS achieved the first part of the first (of three) intended intermediate results of the project:** *"CRS improves staff skills."* Considering the impressive gains in KSAs achieved by the SiS project, a fundamental question is how to sustain the growth experienced among staff. This is even more important when considering that KSAs are not static but dynamic in nature, requiring continuous work.

To sustain KSA gains, insights from KIIs suggest that it will be necessary to:

- Expose CRS staff to progressively more challenging, engaging and more in-depth content
- Continue fostering and support country-level buy-in to sustain PCS knowledge, skills, and attitudes
- Further support and operationalize the inclusion of PCS competencies into job descriptions and the wider organization performance management system
- Support an even more intentional promotion, communication, and dissemination about the PCS tools and resources within HQ, and with regions and country offices. With country offices, in particular, the communication strategy should be aimed at presenting the resources and tools that meet practical PCS needs
- Increase professional development opportunities for locally hired staff at the country program level.

PERFECTING PARTNERSHIP ALUMNI KSAS

The Perfecting Partnership initiative was designed within the work of the SiS project to provide intensive PCS training to selected staff in order to improve their KSAs in core PCS competencies and also to create a vibrant community of practice. The goals were to promote peer-to-peer learning and for participants to provide "evidence-based technical assistance resulting in strengthened organizational performance of partners and transformational change at scale" (Perfecting Partnership After Action Review).

Prior to joining the Perfecting Partnership program, participants must have completed the Level 1 Suite of courses, which were developed from the learning framework, though several parts of the Level 1 learning framework were not included. The learning framework is housed by another initiative of the SiS project: the Institute for Capacity Strengthening (ICS).

Seventy-three staff members participated in the two Perfecting Partnership editions conducted in 2017 and 2018. Because of the time it was launched, no initial results exist in the baseline or the midterm reviews, but the survey conducted for this FE collected specific information about this initiative.

Table 3 presents the results of knowledge change for Perfecting Partnership respondents. When contrasted with the staff results, Perfecting Partnership alumni had initial higher levels of PCS knowledge in all topics which is to be expected given the requirements to engage in this initiative. Importantly, through their participation in the Perfecting Partnership program, **respondents gained PCS knowledge in all categories**, and final levels were superior to those of staff respondents. Similar to staff, knowledge moved from 3s to 4s by the end of 2019 and all changes were statistically significantly different. Average levels of knowledge at the end of the project were, except in one case, above 4.5 on a scale of 5.

TABLE 3. PERFECTING PARTNERSHIP ALUM, CHANGES IN KNOWLEDGE

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT:	2016	2019	GAIN	STATISTICALLY DIFFERENT?
Organizational assessment	**3.55**	4.62	1.07	Yes
Capacity building	**3.79**	**4.86**	1.07	Yes
Institutional Strengthening	3.36	4.61	1.25	Yes
Accompaniment	3.52	**4.76**	1.24	Yes
Partnership approaches	3.32	4.73	**1.41**	Yes
Capacity strengthening approaches	3.34	4.69	**1.35**	Yes
Adult learning	3.34	4.62	**1.28**	Yes
Communication	**3.71**	**4.75**	1.04	Yes
Catholic partnership	3.21	4.31	1.10	Yes

Notes: Means are presented, comparison is from paired t-tests.
Cells in color indicate highest values.

For skills, changes appear in Table 4. Differing from the case of knowledge, Perfecting Partnership alumni did not have initial higher levels of skills than staff, but they did end with higher levels. Notably, **Perfecting Partnership alumni experienced higher gains in skills than staff**. As indicated before, staff had undergone significant improvements in skills. The fact that Perfecting Partnership alumni had even higher gains than staff is a very positive result of the SiS project activities.

TABLE 4. PERFECTING PARTNERSHIP ALUM, CHANGES IN SKILLS

SKILLS	2016	2019	GAIN	STATISTICALLY DIFFERENT?
Interpersonal communication	**3.66**	4.55	0.89	Yes
Organizational assessment	3.55	**4.66**	1.11	Yes
Organizational capacity strengthening	3.32	4.54	**1.22**	Yes
Facilitation and group dynamics	3.45	**4.62**	**1.17**	Yes
Mentoring, coaching and accompanying	**3.66**	**4.72**	1.06	Yes
Institutional strengthening	3.28	4.48	**1.20**	Yes
Working across organizational cultures	**3.66**	**4.62**	0.96	Yes

Notes: Means are presented, comparison is from paired t-tests.
Cells in color indicate highest values.

In general, all skills ended close to the highest mark of 5. The strong gains in skills contributed to making Perfecting Partnership alumni more qualified to engage in PCS work, which was the intention of the initiative.

For attitudes, Table 5 shows the results of changes from 2016 to 2019 among Perfecting Partnership alumni. Analogous to skills, Perfecting Partnership alumni did not have higher levels in attitudes than staff in 2016 but ended with higher levels in 2019. That is, **Perfecting Partnership alumni have gained more in attitudes for PCS work than staff**.

Overall, the results of this section indicate that KSAs among Perfecting Partnership alumni are at higher levels than staff. This fulfills the goal of the initiative to improve their KSAs in core PCS competencies. The translation of those higher KSAs into the intended promotion of peer-to-peer learning and the provision of internal technical assistance is explored later in this document.

Considering the strong gains in KSAs among Perfecting Partnership alumni, a key aspect is how to sustain those gains. From KIIs, this can be achieved by:

■ Full integration and institutionalization of all learning experiences and all assets that have been built into how CRS thinks about its system and overall staff.

■ Allocation of specific financial resources at the country office level to continue building KSAs of Perfecting Partnership alumni.

■ Participation in the PCS community of practice, which plays a key role in sustaining KSA gains at the regional and country-level. It is a vehicle for exchanging ideas, best practices and innovative approaches around PCS.

TABLE 5. PERFECTING PARTNERSHIP ALUM, CHANGES IN ATTITUDES

ATTITUDES	2016	2019	GAIN	STATISTICALLY DIFFERENT?
Humility and mutuality	**3.89**	4.68	0.79	Yes
Patience and flexibility	3.79	4.75	**0.96**	Yes
Trust-building	3.82	**4.79**	**0.97**	Yes
Appropriateness	3.68	4.75	**1.07**	Yes
Empowering and optimistic	3.67	4.52	0.85	Yes
Diplomacy	3.75	4.61	0.86	Yes
Sensitivity to partners' institutional culture	**3.89**	**4.79**	0.90	Yes
Confidence working with partners	**3.93**	**4.79**	0.86	Yes

Notes: Means are presented, comparison is from paired t-tests.
Cells in color indicate highest values.

3.4 USE OF TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR PARTNERSHIP AND CAPACITY STRENGTHENING (PCS)

TOOLS

CRS has created considerable PCS tools and guides for use by individuals and teams both in CRS and partner organizations and beyond. Some of these tools and resources were developed prior to the launch of the SiS project, while others were designed within the SiS project.

To evaluate tools, a distinction between knowledge and use is necessary. Table 6 compares both across the life of the SiS project. The first aspect to discuss is the number of tools available. At the onset 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% in the number of existing tools and resources**. Thus, the project was fruitful in generating more tools available for PCS work.

Moreover, **during the life of the project there was tremendous growth among staff in familiarity with existing PCS tools and resources**. As observable, low levels of knowledge about existing tools were registered among staff in 2012. By the end of the project, recognition about PCS tools had grown very strongly with percentages in all cases at 60% or higher.

While familiarity of staff about tools available for PCS work is important, the actual use of tools is necessary in order to start translating PCS knowledge into action. The second part of Table 6 indicates that the **use of PCS resources grew strongly from the beginning to the end of the SiS project even though it was still under 50% in most cases**.

This progress matters especially when considering the very low levels of usage at the launch of the SiS project, when utilization of most tools was less than 20%. At the end

TABLE 6. STAFF KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF PCS TOOLS

TOOLS	CREATED BEFORE, OR, DURING SIS	STAFF KNOWLEDGE OF TOOL AT EVALUATION TIMES (%)			STAFF USE OF TOOL AT EVALUATION TIMES (%)		
		BASELINE	MIDTERM	FINAL	BASELINE	MIDTERM	FINAL
Institutional Strengthening Guide (ISG)	Before	44	40	75	16	22	49
Holistic Organizational Capacity Assessment Instrument (HOCAI)	Before	46	47	75	17	25	50
Partnership Scorecard	Before	33	53	78	13	23	52
Consortium Alignment Framework for Excellence (CAFE)	Before	18	**16**	**66**	6	**7**	**36**
The Protocol for Relations with Church Partners	Before	30	36	72	18	21	47
Subrecipient Financial Management Assessment Instrument	Before	**60**	**61**	76	**39**	**39**	51
Robust and Sustainable Resource Mobilization: Building Comprehensive Strategies for Resource Mobilization Success	Before	**9**	18	71	**4**	9	42
Partnership and Capacity Strengthening website (formerly on CRS Global, now on MyCRS)	Before	57	60	**85**	32	36	**63**
Quick Guide: How to Incorporate Partnership and Capacity Strengthening in Proposals and Project Design	During SiS		24	73		10	45
Assessment to Action Planning Workbook (A2A)	During SiS		18	69		11	40
Sample Memorandum of Understanding for Church Partners and Non-Church Partners	During SiS		47	72		31	46
Partnership and Capacity Strengthening Basics: A Guide for Facilitators	During SiS		37	76		21	51
Partnership and Capacity Strengthening Sample Job Description	During SiS		24	73		13	47
Institute for Capacity Strengthening (ICS) website	During SiS		50	76		26	50
Partnership Reflection: A Guide for Facilitators	During SiS		30	73		18	46

Notes: Cells in green color indicate highest values at the time of evaluation, while cells in orange show the lowest values

of the project, usage has robustly improved, with only one tool under 40% utilization: CAFE at 36%, though it gained thirty percentage points above its level at that time. The resource with the most usage was the Institute for Capacity Strengthening website at 63%.

A relevant aspect of examining the knowledge and utilization of PCS resources is that the highest and lowest values for both exist among tools that pre-date the SiS project. This brings two aspects to the analysis. The first is that, encouragingly, the tools created during the life of the SiS project proved themselves capable of gaining recognition and utilization in the few years after they were developed. The second aspect is that the consistently low awareness and utilization of some tools that existed prior to the SiS project requires attention.

To fully explore the actual use of tools, Table 7 presents the breakdown of use of each tool in categories that go from minimal to high utilization. To distinguish the information on this versus the previous table, Table 6 shows the percentage of use regardless of whether that use was low or high. Meanwhile, Table 7 provides a better understanding of the degree of utilization of each tool. Two tools presented the lowest utilization: Consortium Alignment Framework for Excellence (a toolkit for building strong consortia) and a training manual called "Robust and Sustainable Resource Mobilization: Building Comprehensive Strategies for Resource Mobilization Success."

In contrast with these tools, the three tools that gathered the highest levels of utilization were the PCS page on the agency's intranet ("MyCRS"), the Subrecipient Financial Management Assessment, and the Institutional Strengthening Guide. The top three tools with the highest degree of use confirm what was observed in Table 6: that tools pre-dating the SiS project had the highest usage. It also confirms the volatility among pre-SiS tools, as they had both the highest and lowest levels of use.

Comments in the staff survey about this area were about two specific tools. Respondents highlighted the usefulness of the Subrecipient Financial Management Assessment Instrument for partners in helping them *"evaluate and work on the gaps observed to ensure they address all weak areas for better performance."* They also emphasized the practicality of a second tool, the Holistic Organizational Capacity Assessment Instrument (HOCAI), *"to identify the needs of the partners and work on them for their improvement."* In general, for the PCS tools available, staff commented that they *"have been of much help to partners in their journey of self-realization and building their systems to fully be reliable organizations."*

A repeated suggestion by survey respondents was to provide more training on tools. Another key aspect of the learning and using PCS tools and resources available was knowing about their existence. A considerable number commented in the survey about their lack of awareness of existing PCS tools or resources. Thus, this is an area in need of improvement.

Overall, the results of this section indicate the SiS project successfully added new resources for PCS work and increased the knowledge and use of all existing and new tools.

Achieving sustainability of the progress achieved means examining two aspects:

- how to maintain and increase the utilization of top-performing tools
- how to revise tools, raise further awareness about them and find new ways to communicate and market underutilized tools.

TABLE 7. STAFF, TYPE OF USE OF PCS TOOLS (%)

TOOLS	CREATED BEFORE, OR, DURING SIS	% USE IN THE LAST THREE YEARS (2016-2019)			
		MINIMAL	LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
Institutional Strengthening Guide (ISG)	Before	20	27	**36**	17
Holistic Organizational Capacity Assessment Instrument (HOCAI)	Before	21	27	34	18
Partnership Scorecard	Before	22	29	35	15
Consortium Alignment Framework for Excellence (CAFE)	Before	**32**	**32**	26	10
The Protocol for Relations with Church Partners	Before	29	24	32	15
Subrecipient Financial Management Assessment Instrument	Before	21	23	32	**23**
Robust and Sustainable Resource Mobilization: Building Comprehensive Strategies for Resource Mobilization Success	Before	**30**	27	29	15
Partnership and Capacity Strengthening website (formerly on CRS Global, now on MyCRS)	Before	15	16	**41**	**27**
Quick Guide: How to Incorporate Partnership and Capacity Strengthening in Proposals and Project Design	During SiS	24	**30**	33	12
Assessment to Action Planning Workbook (A2A)	During SiS	29	27	28	15
Sample Memorandum of Understanding for Church Partners and Non-Church Partners	During SiS	27	26	29	18
Partnership and Capacity Strengthening Basics: A Guide for Facilitators	During SiS	25	24	33	18
Partnership and Capacity Strengthening Sample Job Description	During SiS	**30**	26	26	18
Institute for Capacity Strengthening (ICS) website	During SiS	27	24	**36**	13
Partnership Reflection: A Guide for Facilitators	During SiS	22	29	35	15

Notes: Cells in green color indicate highest values in the moderate and high categories, while cells in orange show the highest percentages for minimal and low categories

To that extent, interviewees at KIIs pointed out that:

■ since the goal of the SiS project was to elevate PCS as a key area of technical competency, having a set of high-quality standardized approaches and tools was essential.

■ without the combination of both trained people and materials and tools made available by SiS, it would have been harder to demonstrate to partners that CRS was deeply committed to their leadership and success.

- PCS resources, available in multiple formats and languages, were made accessible to a wide audience, both internal and external to CRS. This was a significant contribution not only to CRS but to the broader capacity strengthening community by making those materials publicly available.

- CRS's organizational culture must be considered when assessing the effectiveness of large-scale rollouts of tools and materials. As a highly decentralized agency, deeply committed to subsidiarity and holistic development, not only was there a natural local resistance to standardization, but there was also the recognition that local needs and decisions drive choices.

- The SiS project provided resources to strengthen existing PCS tools and develop several new ones. Some of these tools (like HOCAI) were widely known by CRS staff given their longevity and widespread use. Other tools, like CAFE or the Engaging Government Guide (EGG), were meant to address more specific and targeted PCS needs and were, therefore, known by a more select number of staff.

- PCS tools competed for visibility and usage with the many other resources periodically rolled out by the organization's multiple departments. This "tools fatigue" might be mitigated by strategically matching tool development with urgent and concrete needs on the ground, promoting collaborative and participatory tool development, and ensuring clear guidance on contextualization and local adaptation to enhance tools' relevance, effectiveness and use.

The SiS project focused on making PCS tools known and utilized by staff. Only from the middle of the project were there some efforts to introduce local partners to the tools. Consistent with this, the local partners surveyed for this evaluation indicated a very limited usage of the PCS tools. Most were not familiar with the tools that exist in the area. There were only two exceptions among the fifteen instruments: the Subrecipient Financial Management Assessment Instrument with moderate use, and the CRS Partnership Scorecard with high use.

These findings of low recognition and utilization among partners as well as the two tools with some degree of usage were also present in the midterm review. It should also be noted that the among the local staff who participated in data collection efforts were senior leaders who may not have in-depth familiarity with PCS tools.

In this sense, there is clearly plenty of room to grow in improving, or rather introducing, local partners to PCS existing tools. This could strengthen partners' work and also help CRS in developing further recognition as a leader in the area.

INSTITUTE FOR CAPACITY STRENGTHENING (ICS)

A major initiative of the SiS project was the creation of the Institute for Capacity Strengthening (ICS). It was envisioned as a *"'one-stop shop' for obtaining and sharing capacity strengthening information and for joint planning towards mutual capacity strengthening."* (SiS proposal) ICS launched in 2015 with its own website, which was not intended to replace but channel ongoing PCS efforts and develop new ones. As shown in Table 6, in this final evaluation 50% of staff indicated they use the site. ICS has become one of the most visible tools of the SiS project and has gathered 36,151 site visits in 2018, according to CRS compiled data. ICS created a PCS Newsletter, which was a communications tool developed as part of SiS to promote ICS, PCS and PCS products.

A main feature of ICS is the online courses offered that are structured by topics and levels. Fifty percent of staff in the survey stated they have taken an ICS course. Table 8 presents the distributions of courses offered at ICS and the percentage taken by staff. Over 40% of respondents took Level 1 courses, while Level 2 courses had a lower intake. On this, it is important to note that Level 2 courses, especially the Assessment to Action Planning, were launched much later than Level 1 courses.

The most popular course is the Capacity Strengthening Basics—Level 1, taken by 70% of respondents, followed by Partnership Basics—Level 1 (63%). Meanwhile, the lowest attended course of level 1 is the Adult Learning Basics—Level 1 at 46%, which is still above the intake of any course in Level 2. **The level of engagement of staff in ICS courses at level 1 has been high**, though it can still improve, as 50% of staff have not taken any course. On the other hand, **much more can be done to engage staff into taking Level 2 courses**.

As indicated by staff, **the usefulness of the courses' content for their work is rated as high** by most respondents, a great achievement for this PCS tool introduced by the SiS project.

A breakdown on applicability and usefulness of ICS courses by job levels of staff respondents appears in Figure 10. In general, the applicability of content provided by ICS courses among staff is high but especially strong among senior management, followed by program staff. Another important fact is that most **staff who took ICS courses said they share their content with colleagues**. The largest sharing was registered among program staff, followed by senior management. Sharing is a fundamental aspect to expand PCS knowledge, and thus, this finding is very positive.

In their comments about ICS, survey respondents emphasize its usefulness as well as its user-friendly approach. Some pointed out that it is still not *"yet known to most of the staff."*

Based on these results, ICS courses have become a vital tool for PCS knowledge transmission and delivery of content that users appreciate and find useful. Gaining this level of acceptance and recognition for this resource developed within the SiS project is a remarkable achievement. Furthermore, in terms of sustainability, because of its engagement and hosting of other units and project-based CB material (courses, tools and resources), the ICS initiative has the potential to continue growing at a higher pace among staff.

For exploring growth opportunities, it is worth considering the three main reasons staff who have not taken ICS courses cite as impediments, in order of frequency: lack of clear instructions to take the courses, courses not being required in job description, and lack of time. The first can be remedied with further work on the website and by supervisors encouraging engagement. The second aspect can be addressed if the agency commits to including the Level 1 PCS KSAs as part of staff job descriptions, which is in line with CRS' adoption of PCS as core to its strategy. The third aspect can be partially solved by working in the second aspect, because what is determined as essential for a job's performance would find space among programming, prioritizing and scheduling of work activities. The commitment to work in putting PCS even more at the core of the work of the agency is key.
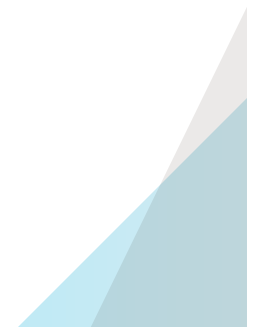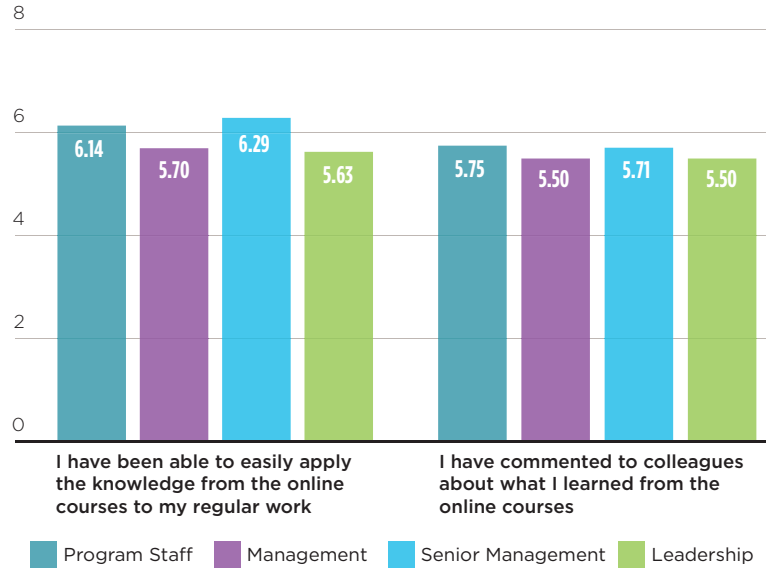
Figure 10. Application and sharing of ICS courses content, by job level

TABLE 8. PCS COURSES TAKEN ONLINE AT ICS AND USEFULLNESS (%)

COURSE	NOT TAKEN	NOT SURE	TAKEN	IF TAKEN, INDICATE ITS USEFULNESS TO YOUR WORK			
				MINIMAL	LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
Capacity Strengthening Basics—Level 1	16	14	**70**	5	6	41	**48**
Partnership Basics—Level 1	25	12	**63**	5	10	34	**51**
Relationship Basics—Level 1	32	21	**48**	5	7	37	**51**
Communication Basics—Level 1	28	17	**55**	5	8	33	**55**
Adult Learning Basics—Level 1	34	20	**46**	8	9	37	**46**
Assessment Basics—Level 1	**38**	25	37	7	10	40	**43**
From Assessment to Action Planning—Level 2	**45**	30	25	11	13	38	**39**
Partnership in Action—Level 2	**42**	35	23	12	15	36	**36**

Notes: Cells in color mark the highest percentage response for each course. Green indicates the highes percentage is for the "taken" option, while orange denotes the highest value is for the "not taken" option.

When considering efforts to further grow the rate of staff taking ICS courses, in-depth interviews suggest the following:

- If a given course is mandatory (such as Level 1 courses), the CRS staff might get through it as quickly as they can because it is perceived as an agency requirement of "ticking a box."

- The PCS Unit has tried to incentivize staff to take the ICS courses more upon interest, relevance and applicability to their work. Establishing a link between the learning content and staff's awareness of how this would better their work with partners is key.

- Tying in the rollout of competencies or capabilities of staff is a way to start a conversation between staff and their supervisors in terms of staff development and performance on what PCS knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to do their job. And as that awareness grows, then uptake of the content will increase based upon that recognition that this is an important aspect of their work.

- The proactive support of regional leadership in promoting these courses is also critical. For instance, a Deputy Regional Director for Management Quality has been instrumental in motivating staff who are under her purview, who have shown great interest in taking the courses.

- As these competencies roll out and CRS staff have more awareness of the value and the necessity of taking these courses, their access will also increase. It might have been easier to issue a policy statement to make these courses mandatory, but the end result would not have been as meaningful as with the strategy currently being pursued.

PERFECTING PARTNERSHIP ALUMNI

The Perfecting Partnership initiative was not a resource considered at the time of the SiS proposal, but it developed as a result of the work and reflection undertaken during the process. This is another major effort of the SiS project.

Launched in 2017, it consists of an annual workshop with intense learning and practical experience in PCS topics for selected staff who are hand-picked under a strict selection criterion. By the end of 2019, two rounds of Perfecting Partnership workshops had taken place.

Respondents from the Perfecting Partnership alumni group had a very positive view of the process of this initiative: 86% indicated having the support of their supervisor to apply to this initiative, while 68% believed the application process was clear and efficient. The workshop itself was highly rated with 89% of respondents stating that Perfecting Partnership improved their core PCS competencies. Upon concluding the workshop, 57% agreed that what was expected from participants was well-defined.

As per Figure 11, on the following page, Perfecting Partnership participants state that they were able to **apply over 75% of the workshop content in both partnership and capacity strengthening**. This result highlights the good design of the workshops to provide content that is useful to participants as well as the interest among participants to put it into practice.

The other key aspect of the Perfecting Partnership workshops is the extent to which participants could become experts at expanding PCS work further. This starts with

sharing knowledge acquired. Figure 12 reveals that Perfecting Partnership alumni are intensely sharing over 75% of the knowledge acquired.
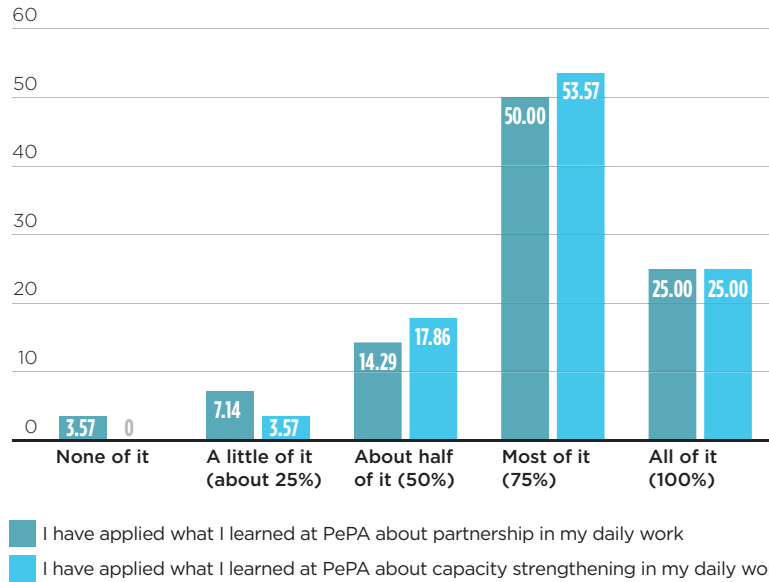
Figure 11. Participants' application of content from "Perfecting Partnership" workshops (%)

CRS considers Perfecting Partnership alumni as key staff to facilitate PCS work. Table 9 shows changes in collaboration experienced by Perfecting Partnership alumni from before joining the program versus what is taking place as a result of their participation. The results are from paired t-tests and indicate, in all cases, **statistically significant gains in the level of collaboration between Perfecting Partnership alumni and different CRS staff**. Importantly, participating in the **Perfecting Partnership program effectively expanded the network of collaboration for alumni**. While in 2016 most people collaborated within their unit (manager and staff), by 2019 alumni were not only strongly continuing the cooperation within their unit but had strongly expanded their reach.
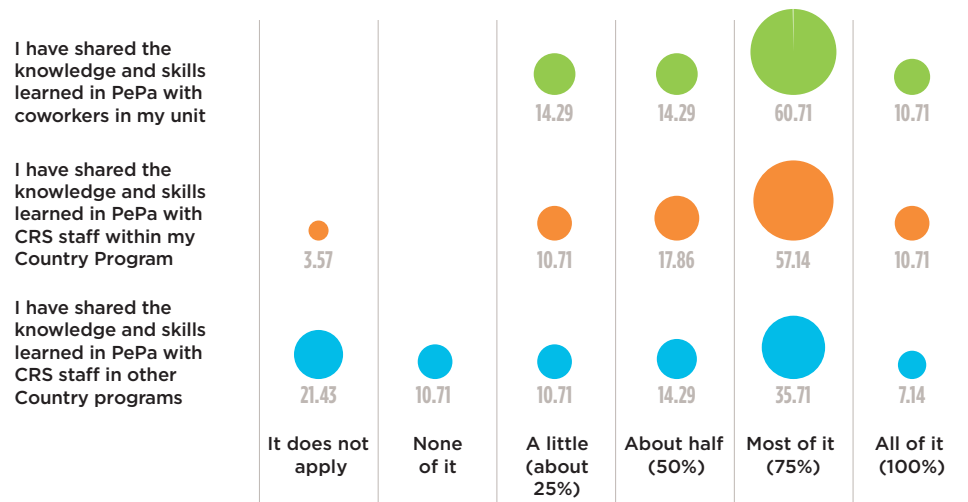
Figure 12. Participants' sharing of knowledge from "Perfecting Partnership" workshops (%)

TABLE 9. PERFECTING PARTNERSHIP ALUM, CHANGES IN COLLABORATION

PEOPLE	2016	2019	GAIN	STATISTICALLY DIFFERENT?
Experts from the Partnership and Capacity Strengthening Unit at CRS	2.89	**3.89**	1.00	Yes
Experts in PCS in the regions/country programs	2.85	**3.89**	1.04	Yes
Other PePa Alumni	2.35	3.69	1.34	Yes
Senior Leadership (Director, Senior Manager)	2.77	3.42	0.65	Yes
Manager/Supervisor	**3.28**	**4.12**	0.84	Yes
Staff in your unit	**3.27**	**4.25**	0.98	Yes
Staff in other units	**3.04**	3.73	0.69	Yes

Notes: Means are presented, comparison is from paired t-tests. Cells in color indicate highest values.

In their survey, Perfecting Partnership alumni said they unanimously recommended the program to other staff, which speaks highly of their positive experience. The main reasons behind the recommendation were, according to them: that Perfecting Partnership improves KSAs in PCS, that there is support after for implementation, that there is help to become a PCS expert, and that staff who participate in Perfecting Partnership workshops are recognized by management. An alum summarized the experience, stating that this initiative *"provided valuable materials (hand-outs, e-copies, posters), models and memories (notes during various sessions & photos) that reminded me of the importance of partnership principles and the tools at hand."*

Clearly, the Perfecting Partnership workshops were a good experience for participants. Sustaining this level of acceptance and recognition in future sessions is important. In this regard, alumni also highlighted some areas that need to be addressed to enhance the work of Perfecting Partnership: lack of support from some supervisors/managers and lack of resources to engage in work after the workshop. Those resources are financial but also time allocated to the work of alumni. As one alum stated in her survey, *"Generally, there is limited or no dedicated funding for PCS. More importantly, there is no budget for partner capacity strengthening outside of funded projects."*

Another crucial aspect to sustaining the level of cross collaboration among Perfecting Partnership alumni is their participation in CRS communities of practice. Such participation has been at moderate levels. Those venues include Yammer community groups for Perfecting Partnership alumni and Global PCS, as well as regional PCS communities of practice and a PCS community of practice quarterly call. Finding ways to increase Perfecting Partnership alumni engagement in these communities is essential.

PCS EXPERTS

A key resource for work in PCS is the availability of experts in the agency who can support staff in their work. For this, two of the three existing groups have been fully created within the SiS project: the experts at the PCS unit at CRS and Perfecting Partnership alumni. The third group, PCS experts in regions and country programs, pre-dates the SiS project.

Table 10 presents the responses from staff to questions about their awareness and work with PCS experts at the agency. Encouragingly, **53% of staff indicated they have worked with experts from the PCS unit at CRS and with PCS experts at regional offices or country programs**. While Perfecting Partnership alumni have a lower level of engagement, considering they only started as experts in late 2017, their degree of engagement is relatively high, with 36% of staff acknowledging working with them.

Table 10 shows collaboration, and its extent is illustrated by Figure 13. Staff who have collaborated with PCS experts indicate a mostly moderate level of work with people in the PCS unit at CRS and with regional experts. Meanwhile, collaboration is lower with Perfecting Partnership alumni. Still, as mentioned, considering the freshness of the Perfecting Partnership program, those levels are a positive sign.

TABLE 10. STAFF WORK WITH PCS EXPERTS (%)

PEOPLE	I DO NOT KNOW ANY	I HAVE NOT WORKED WITH ANY	WORKED WITH THEM
Experts from the Partnership and Capacity Strengthening Unit at CRS	21	26	**53**
Experts in PCS in the regions/country programs	22	24	**53**
Alumni from Perfecting Partnership (PePa) initiative in PCS	**37**	27	**36**

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

An important aspect to explore is how to strengthen the collaboration of staff with PCS experts, as there are considerable benefits for CRS from that improvement.

Staff responding to the survey expressed that to improve collaboration, *"the challenge is mostly within the agency when our colleagues chase the programmatic priorities over partnership areas… The partnership work is core for the agency and all need to understand and follow its principles."* In line with this, other survey respondents emphasized that either by design or default the PCS unit at CRS Headquarters *"is perceived as a separate unit, with distinct mission, staff (focal points) and budget that leave it as an independent entity from other units."* Survey respondents call for further integration, emphasizing it should not be only *"at program units but at management level as well"* and that a key aspect in that process it is *"integrating down to the ground of country levels."*

	Minimal	Low	Moderate	High
Experts from the Partnership and Capacity Strengthening Unit at CRS	19.54	19.92	42.53	18.01
Experts in PCS in the regions/country programs	20.77	18.08	43.46	17.69
Alumni from PePa initiative in PCS	33.73	24.26	29.59	12.43

Figure 13. Staff degree of collaboration with PCS experts (%)

Overall, the results of this section indicate **the SiS project has successfully added tools and resources for PCS work, increased staff knowledge and use of the tools, and facilitated opportunities for collaboration among staff and PCS experts.**

3.5 PARTNERSHIP AND CAPACITY STRENGTHENING (PCS) IN WORKING WITH LOCAL PARTNERS

This section explores how PCS efforts in the SiS project have translated into practice when working with local partners, and the transformations that might have been generated. Most of the aspects reviewed in this section were not analyzed in the baseline or midterm reviews, since the first years of the SiS project were focused on developing tools and materials launched later within the project.

WORK WITH LOCAL PARTNERS

Ninety-six percent of staff in the survey indicate they work with local partners. An important aspect in these efforts is documenting the work conducted. This aids in providing evidence that can be later used to track the effects of that collaboration and also in facilitating the work of other staff in accessing complete databases of information for future engagement with local partners.

Table 11 shows that **CRS staff members have been active in documenting lessons learned in their work with partners**, with 69% doing so in this area. Meanwhile, an equal 69% of staff have **recognized the contribution of local partners to PCS work by including them as co-contributors** in documenting lessons learned. On the other hand, a smaller percentage of staff, though still 49%, have updated partners' information in Gateway. Among staff who have been actively working on the three aspects discussed in Table 11, a breakdown of the extent of their work is presented in Figure 14.

TABLE 11. STAFF DOCUMENTING THEIR PCS WORK WITH LOCAL PARTNERS (%)

ASPECT	I DO NOT KNOW	I HAVE NOT WORKED ON THIS	I HAVE WORKED ON THIS
I have documented (or participated in documentation of) lessons learned in PCS	8	23	**69**
I have included partners as co-contributors when documenting lessons learned in PCS	7	24	**69**
I have updated Gateway institutional records on specific partners to improve the degree of completeness and accessibility about them	11	40	**49**

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

Assessing from minimal to high levels, the findings indicate that most staff worked at moderate levels in documenting participation (50%) and in including partners as co-contributors to PCS work (49%). Importantly, the category of high levels of effort in both aspects constitute the second largest group of answers indicating the presence of a committed group of staff in these areas. In comparison, the distribution of staff's effort in updating Gateway is lower, with the largest efforts at moderate levels (33%) followed by minimal work at 29%.

There is still room to improve in each of the three aspects of documenting work with local partners. Updating Gateway is fundamental as it serves as a central source of information to identify partners for current and future work, not just of PCS initiatives but other areas of activity as well.

	Minimal	Low	Moderate	High
I have documented (or participated in documentation of) lessons learned in PCS	12.30	15.87	49.60	22.22
I have included partners as co-contributors when documenting lessons learned in PCS	11.25	14.67	49.17	25.42
I have updated Gateway institutional records on specific partners to improve the degree of completeness and accessibility about them	28.65	20.79	32.58	17.98

Figure 14. Staff degree of documenting work with local partners (%)

In working with local partners, sharing with them the tools and resources available for PCS work is a key element of translating learning into action. Table 12 displays information on staff sharing resources for PCS. **Encouragingly, staff have been actively sharing and encouraging the engagement of local partners with PCS-related content at CRS**: 70% of staff worked on communicating with partners about options available at CRS for mentoring, coaching and training, 72% had fostered connections with partners at CRS, and 72% have encouraged partners to join CRS communities of practice.

TABLE 12. STAFF SHARING CRS AVAILABLE PCS OPTIONS WITH LOCAL PARTNERS (%)

ASPECT	I DO NOT KNOW	I HAVE NOT WORKED ON THIS	I HAVE WORKED ON THIS
I have shared with partners the opportunities available at CRS for mentoring and coaching, training and workshops	8	21	**70**
I have fostered peer-to-peer connections for partners at CRS	9	19	**72**
I have encouraged partners to join CRS communities of practice	8	21	**72**

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

By job level, efforts have been fairly even although some groups of staff have been more committed in these aspects than others. Figure 15 reveals that the largest effort in sharing opportunities available for mentoring, coaching and training have been carried out by program staff. Meanwhile, in fostering peer-to-peer connections between local partners and CRS, senior management has a higher average level. On the other hand, in encouraging partners to join CRS communities of practice, leadership had been a stronger proponent than the other groups. These results signal that different staff at different categories have been actively engaged in working with partners.

In the efforts of working together with local partners, Table 13 shows that **most staff have been diligent in adapting tools, providing accompaniment in areas needing improvement, and helping partners understand the PCS approach at CRS and its value added.**

The fact that 65% and above of staff members who work with partners have been conducting activities that reflect the agency's approach to PCS is a clear expression of the fundamental changes the SiS project has achieved. There is room to improve among the 20% of staff who in their work with partners are not yet engaging fully with them, not to the degree CRS expects the connection with partners to be.
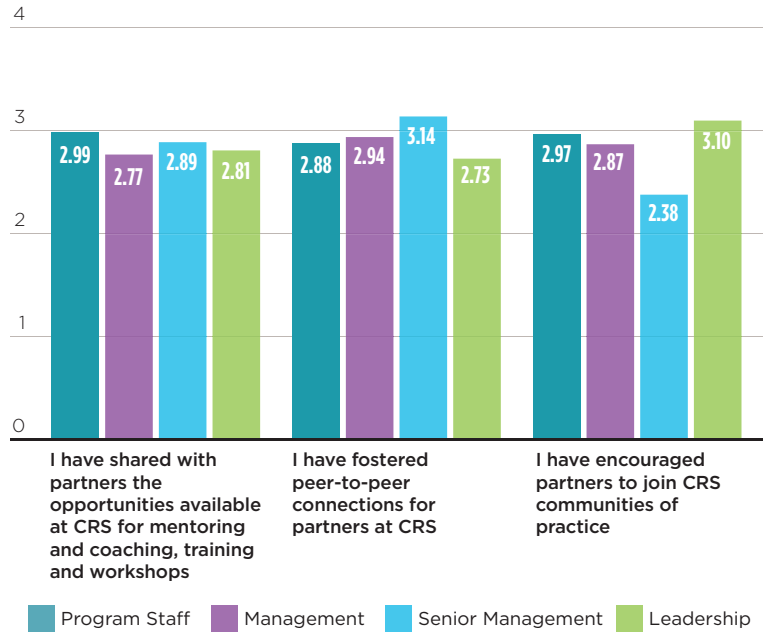
Figure 15. Staff sharing PCS opportunities with local partners (%), by job level

TABLE 13. STAFF WORK IN PCS ACTIVITIES WITH LOCAL PARTNERS (%)

ASPECT	I DO NOT KNOW	I HAVE NOT WORKED ON THIS	I HAVE WORKED ON THIS
I have adapted CRS PCS tools to match the organizational context and needs of partners	8	27	**65**
I have accompanied partners in improving areas of organizational function	6	19	**75**
I have helped partners understand and articulate CRS' value-added and overall approach to PCS	7	19	**74**

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

When assessing by job level, Figure 16 indicates that leadership has been strong in adapting tools to match the needs of the local partners, whereas senior management has done the most work in accompanying local partners. Meanwhile, in helping partners understand the CRS value added to PCS, program staff have been slightly more active.

In their survey comments, staff noticed that more access to PCS tools and resources is necessary for local partners to strengthen their capacity. In addition to this, staff stressed the importance of creating more learning opportunities for local partners in
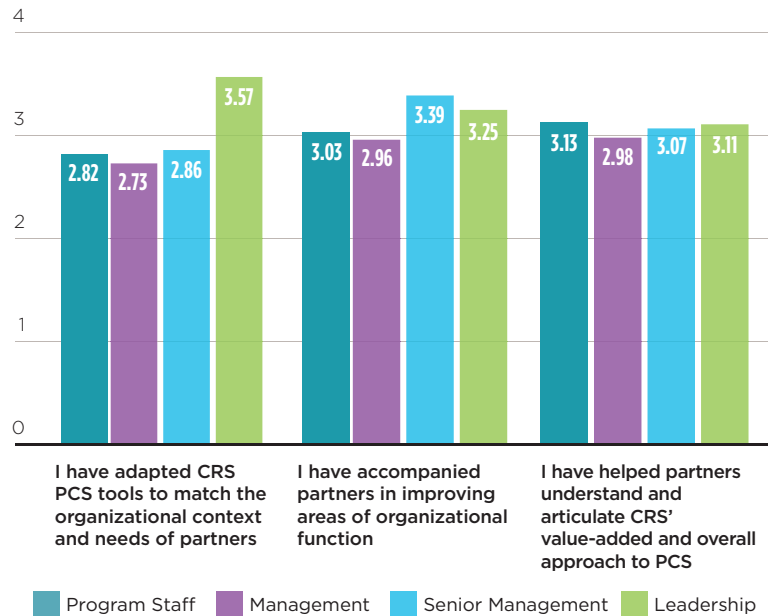
Figure 16. Staff degree of work in PCS with local partners (%), by job level

the form of training and workshops where full practical explanation on the usage of PCS tools and resources is provided. Staff say access and further training will result in an enhanced common understanding that will be more fruitful for PCS work.

On these aspects, in their survey comments, local partners asked for capacity strengthening on different aspects such as *"the use of the ICT4D tool…project design… health / nutrition, WASH, Agriculture and Agribusiness, SILC, Management of Natural Resources and Financial and Human Resources management."* Several of these areas are within the PCS realm while others suggest potential partnerships with other internal CRS units, both as operational and technical areas of competency, to help strengthen the organizational capacity of local partners.

This finding reinforces the conviction that one of CRS' main assets—in the present and future landscape of international development and humanitarian assistance—is its know-how and expertise both in programs and operations. Being able to codify, manage and provide access to such a wealth of knowledge is a fundamental aspect of CRS' competitive advantage and in alignment with its strategic aspiration of local leadership.

The PCS unit is well positioned to lead the preparation of learning and capacity strengthening packages leveraging the subject matter expertise in various units and functions within the agency.

To improve PCS work with partners, staff also suggested funding be allocated to PCS-related activities. As one respondent put it, *"CRS has contributed to capacity strengthening of its staffs and partners. A deliberate effort to put aside financial resources to support partners and staff would strengthen the PCS endeavors."* Such financial resources should not be intended solely as the result of discretionary funding. Properly costed and budgeted technical assistance packages need to be introduced in new submissions or offered as services to local prime recipients.

The local partners who responded to the survey had a very positive view of CRS' efforts over the last three years. They appreciated the agency's efforts to support their institutions in improving their organizational functions and to help them articulate CRS' value-added and overall approach to strengthening partnerships and organizational capacities. CRS' colleagues suggested that more efforts could be invested in adapting its tools and resources to the organizational context and needs of partner organizations. Interestingly, partners responded to the same inquiry more optimistically, expressing their appreciation for the current quality of offerings.

To understand the changes that have taken place in the relation of staff with local partners, Figure 17 displays information from paired t-tests and compares their levels between 2016 and the end of 2019. As observable in all cases, there has been a statistically significant increase in staff connection with local partners. This is a great accomplishment of the SiS project, as it speaks to a transformation taking place within the agency in the way staff members relate to partners and in how the tools and resources created within the project are resulting in concrete improvements.

In 2016, the top aspects of the relations with partners were the support to local partners to strengthen their capacity and the support to improve their performance. By the end of the project, those aspects had significant gains, but the other two aspects had surpassed them in highest values: trust and transparent communications between CRS and local partners and the extent to which CRS supports local partners to strengthen their capacity. The largest gains in improvement registered in the overall quality of the relationship between CRS and local partners and in the level of
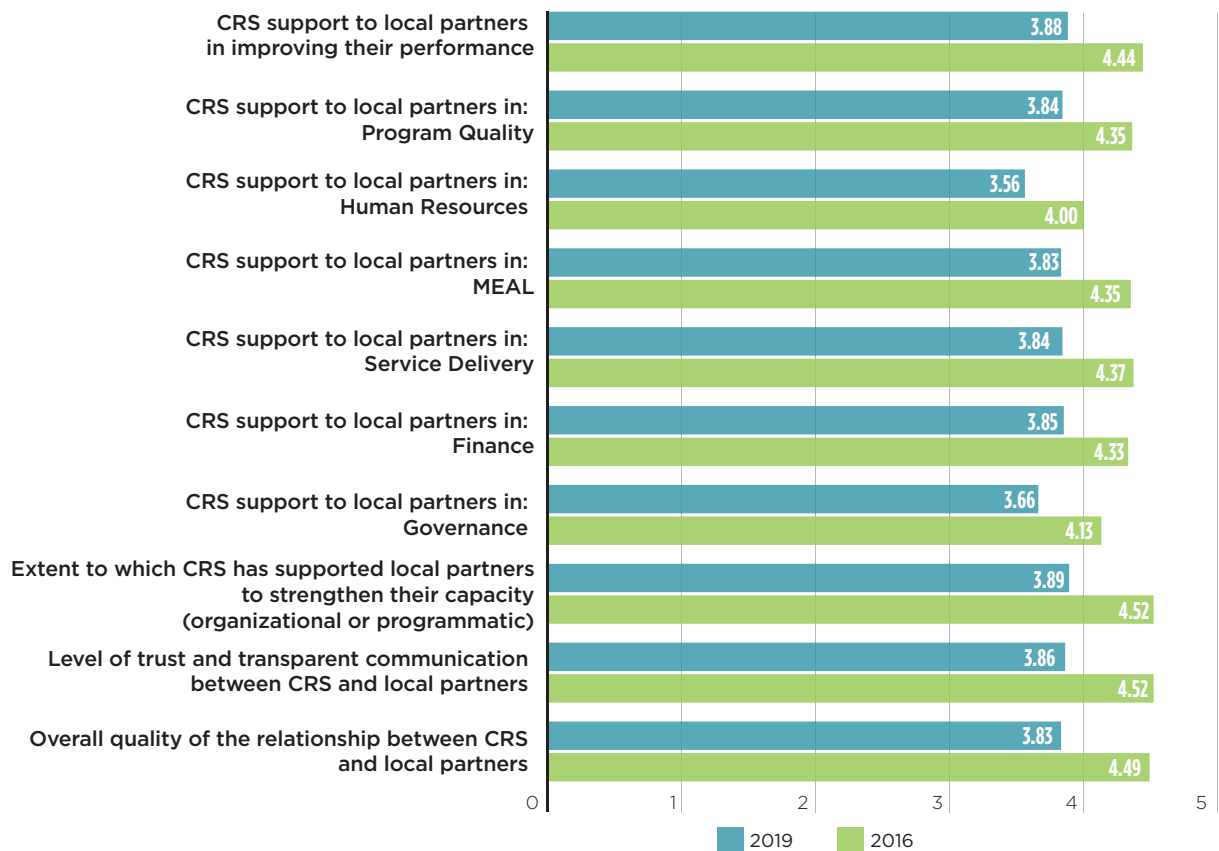

Figure 17. Staff changes in their relationship with the local partners

trust and transparent communication between CRS and local partners. Overall, all aspects of the relationship of staff with local partners have experienced significant improvements as per CRS staff responses.

When considering the responses collected from local partners, the view on CRS' support to partners was somewhat different. While one aspect—CRS' support to the partner's organization in improving its performance—was seen as having improved in 2019 versus 2016, other areas were viewed more positive in 2016 than in 2019. For instance, while 60% of respondents indicated that the overall quality of the relationship between their organization and CRS was high in 2016, only 45% considered it high in 2019. Similarly, 45% of respondents valued CRS support to their organization in Program Quality as high in 2016, but only 35% indicated that level of response in 2019. These results undoubtedly require further exploration. The survey comments from CRS staff provide some insights.

In their survey comments, staff acknowledges that sometimes *"partners find it difficult to apply advice"* and stress that it takes time to develop and nurture partnerships and that such a process can feel *"very limiting to fulfill especially for short-termed engagements/projects."* On this, some staff suggest developing a mechanism that provides time to hear more from partners and to show trust in the relationship. This may be achieved by increasing promotion and use of existing tools (e.g. Partnership Scorecard and Partnership Reflection.) and also by pondering on potential revisions that help to increase usage.

Another aspect highlighted by staff is to expand the collaboration to new partners *"and don't just collaborate with the same local NGOs every year."* In this area, some staff suggest exploring partnership with the private sector for some projects and to add or adapt PCS guidelines on how to work with them.

With respect to partners from the local Church, staff stress the special attention this relationship requires. Staff identify two central aspects: 1) the demand for support from Church partners is very high and to fulfill it, suggest considering additional funding for effective support, and 2) review/adapt partnership policies in order to include some commitment by church-based organizations about the use of CRS resources. The latter point applies not only to church partners, as staff note that for all local partners, "*there must be more commitment and responsibility from the partners*" and that CRS partners must *"be made aware of this so that there will be reciprocity between CRS and its partners in terms of partnership."*

To deepen and further improve the relationships with local partners, comments from in-depth interviews recommend having an institutional capacity building or system strengthening component for partners embedded into projects, i.e. built in, staffed, and budgeted for (as opposed of and/or to complement external support either at regional or HQ level).

The in-depth interviews reached out to strong and solid CRS partners, like the local Caritas, who enthusiastically highlighted CRS's support as critical for their organizational system strengthening:

- *"CRS has provided substantial support that enabled the organization to significantly strengthen its systems, especially financial systems. The organization is now in much better placed than 4 years ago".*

- *"Before CRS, we were managing the organization as a personal business, without any guideline or procedures. CRS has supported us to put policies in place, from finance to human resources. They also supported us to develop a 5-year strategic plan".*

SUPERVISORS SUPPORT IN WORKING WITH PARTNERS

The work of staff is partially influenced by the actions of supervisors. 48% of respondents to the staff survey have some degree of supervision of other staff. Table 14 presents information on the work of supervisors in fostering PCS work with local partners.

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

Reassuringly, **a large majority of supervisors have worked in fostering among staff different activities connected with PCS work**. The highest effort, at 66%, is on encouraging staff on their team to use materials available in the ICS website. This result gives even more support to the work of the ICS initiative, as supervisors are actively encouraging staff to take part in it. There are two aspects in second highest place of work among supervisors: to encourage staff to take ICS courses and to support staff to incorporate information from courses/resources from the ICS website into staff's PCS work. Once again, these results strongly highlight the validity of the ICS as a powerful resource for PCS and the recognition it has reached among staff.

On the other hand, the aspect in the lowest place of work by supervisors, at 49%, is engaging Perfecting Partnership alumni for PCS work with their team. This result, though low, has to take into account the relatively recent launch of the Perfecting Partnership initiative. Nevertheless, it is still relevant to explore how supervisors can see Perfecting Partnership alumni as additional and important sources to work in PCS related activities.

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. The highest level of engagement from supervisors is in actively encouraging staff to take ICS online courses, at 40%. Moderate efforts are the largest percentage: encouraging staff to use materials available on the ICS website, learning about specific ICS courses taken by staff, supporting staff in incorporating information from the ICS website into their PCS work, supporting staff to submit applications to Perfecting Partnership alumni, and encouraging staff to join regional or global PCS communities of practice.

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."*

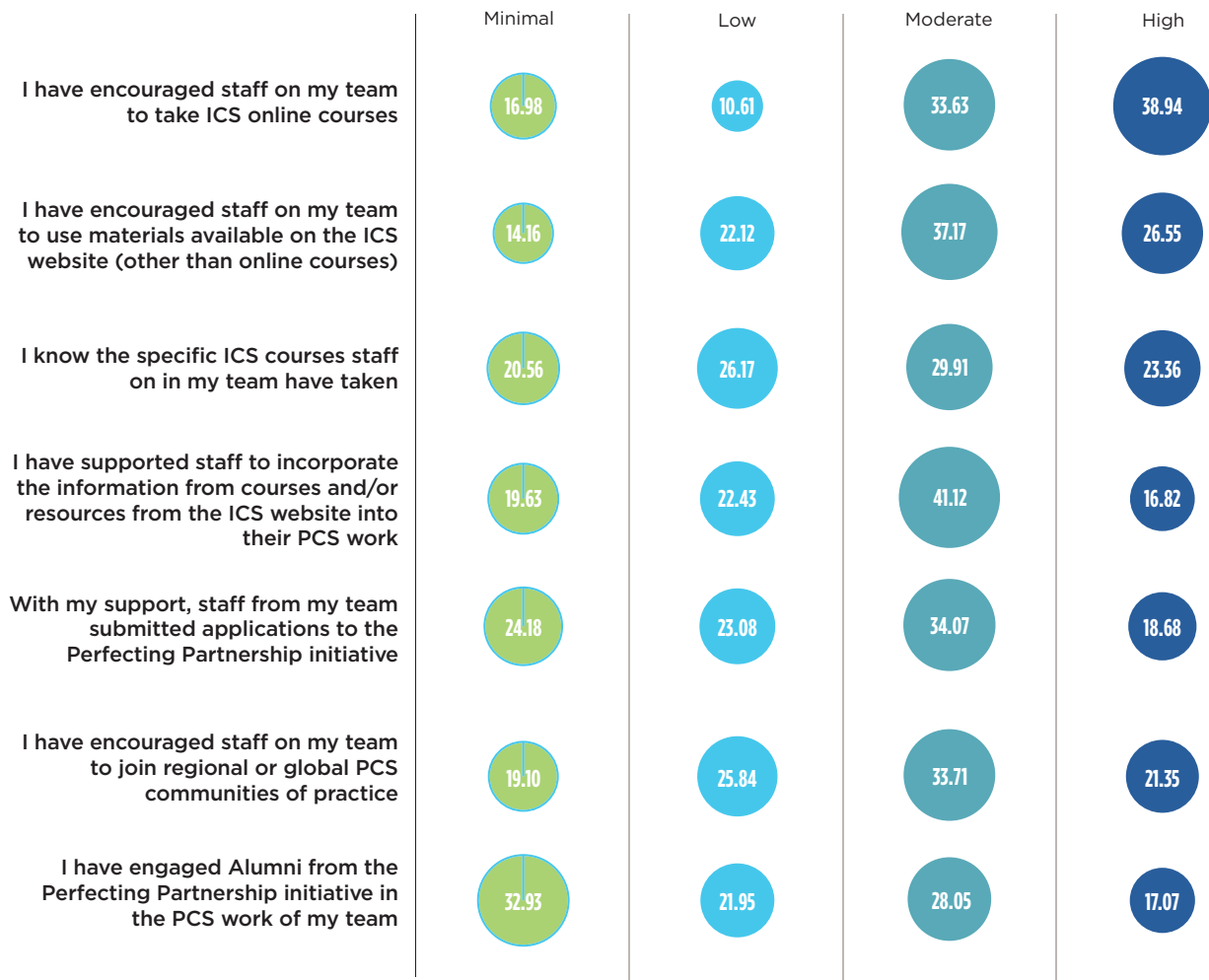|	Minimal	Low	Moderate	High
I have encouraged staff on my team to take ICS online courses	16.98	10.61	33.63	38.94
I have encouraged staff on my team to use materials available on the ICS website (other than online courses)	14.16	22.12	37.17	26.55
I know the specific ICS courses staff on in my team have taken	20.56	26.17	29.91	23.36
I have supported staff to incorporate the information from courses and/or resources from the ICS website into their PCS work	19.63	22.43	41.12	16.82
With my support, staff from my team submitted applications to the Perfecting Partnership initiative	24.18	23.08	34.07	18.68
I have encouraged staff on my team to join regional or global PCS communities of practice	19.10	25.84	33.71	21.35
I have engaged Alumni from the Perfecting Partnership initiative in the PCS work of my team	32.93	21.95	28.05	17.07

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

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. 40% 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.

TABLE 15. SUPERVISORS' ESTIMATION OF PCS ACTIVITIES IN THE LAST THREE YEARS (2016–2019)

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

While supervisors work with a relatively high number of partners, few of those partners are at a high level of organizational development. As measured by HOCAI, 38% of supervisors have only 1 to 2 partners scoring higher than 75% in any HOCAI organizational capacity areas. Still, 24% of supervisors work with either 3–5 partners or 6–10 partners that are in a better organizational state defined by scoring at least 75% in at least one area of HOCAI. This metric highlights the need for further collaboration with local partners to strengthen their capacity, as it is a central aspect of the capacity of partners to operate with programs that deliver quality services over time.

A measure of practices that support impactful PCS work is the local partners' use of PCS tools. Thirty-six percent 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.

Indicators of the strong relationship between CRS and partners are the numbers of MOUs reviewed and signed. In the first metric, 27% of supervisors had reviewed MOUs for groups of either 3–5 or 10 or more partners. Given that formally intending to establish a partnership is a sign of trust among participants, this is a positive result for the active work conducted in PCS by the agency. Consistently, 28% of supervisors have signed more than ten MOUs.

An indicator of organizational sustainability is the number of partners that pass a prime-readiness evaluation. Thirty-three percent 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.

Another metric that captures the organizational sustainability of local partners is the number of partners that receive direct donor funding. 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. Furthermore, 46% of supervisors work with 3 or more local partners who are direct recipients of donor funding. The efforts of CRS to help partners in these aspects are further explored in the next section.

Overall, the results of this section indicate that there have been strong gains in PCS work with local partners including actively sharing and encouraging their engagement with CRS for PCS related content and activities and an improvement in the relationship of staff with local partners at different levels. There are concrete ways for supervisors to foster an environment where further tools and resources for PCS are learned and utilized and to help partners improve their organizational development and their readiness to receive direct funding.

The results of this section indicate the accomplishment of intermediate result 1 and intermediate result 3: *"CRS and partners stimulate, share and apply learning and innovations from capacity strengthening efforts."*

3.6 CRS AS A LEADING INSTITUTION IN PARTNERSHIP AND CAPACITY STRENGTHENING (PCS)

In positioning CRS as a leading agency in PCS, two facets need examination: first, the extent to which PCS efforts of the SiS project have changed the agency's internal capacity and relations; and second, the degree to which CRS is being recognized among external stakeholders for its PCS work.

WITHIN CRS

Table 16 presents information on how staff use of learning opportunities and PCS tools have translated into changes to their entire work. This is not just their PCS related activities but the overall scope of their work. According to respondents, learning and using PCS tools and resources has been highly successful in improving quality of relations with partners, and improvement in their own job satisfaction. It has resulted in moderate success in increasing productivity in their own work and that of their unit, better working relations within their unit, enhanced working relations of their unit with other CRS units, improved capacity and performance of partners, and improved job satisfaction among colleagues in their team.

TABLE 16. STAFF LEARNING AND USING PCS TOOLS AND RESOURCES HAVE TRANSLATED INTO(%):

ASPECT	IT DOES NOT APPLY	I DO NOT KNOW	NO SUCCESS	SOME SUCCESS	MODERATE SUCCESS	HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL
Higher productivity in my work	7	8	2	23	**36**	24
Higher productivity in the work of my unit	8	9	2	21	**36**	24
Better working relations within my unit	8	7	2	17	**34**	32
Enhanced working relations of my unit with other CRS units	7	8	3	18	**37**	27
Improved quality of relations with partners	6	8	1	16	34	**35**
Improved capacity of partners	6	8	2	23	**35**	26
Improved performance of partners	7	9	2	22	**36**	24
Improvement on my own job satisfaction	7	6	3	15	33	**36**
Improved job satisfaction among colleagues in my team	8	9	2	18	**38**	26

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

When considering that PCS is a part of the activities staff conduct, these results are very positive given that one specific project, **the SiS project, is generating spillovers and thus transformation within the agency that go beyond the areas strictly connected to PCS work**.

Figure 19 distinguishes these gains by job level among staff. Service delivery staff have experienced the highest gains in all aspects considered. Leadership is in second position in four out of seven areas: higher productivity in my work, higher productivity in the work of my unit, improvement on my own job satisfaction, and improved job satisfaction among colleagues in my team. Meanwhile, management is in second position in gains in three areas: improved quality of relations with partners, improved capacity of partners, and improved performance of partners.
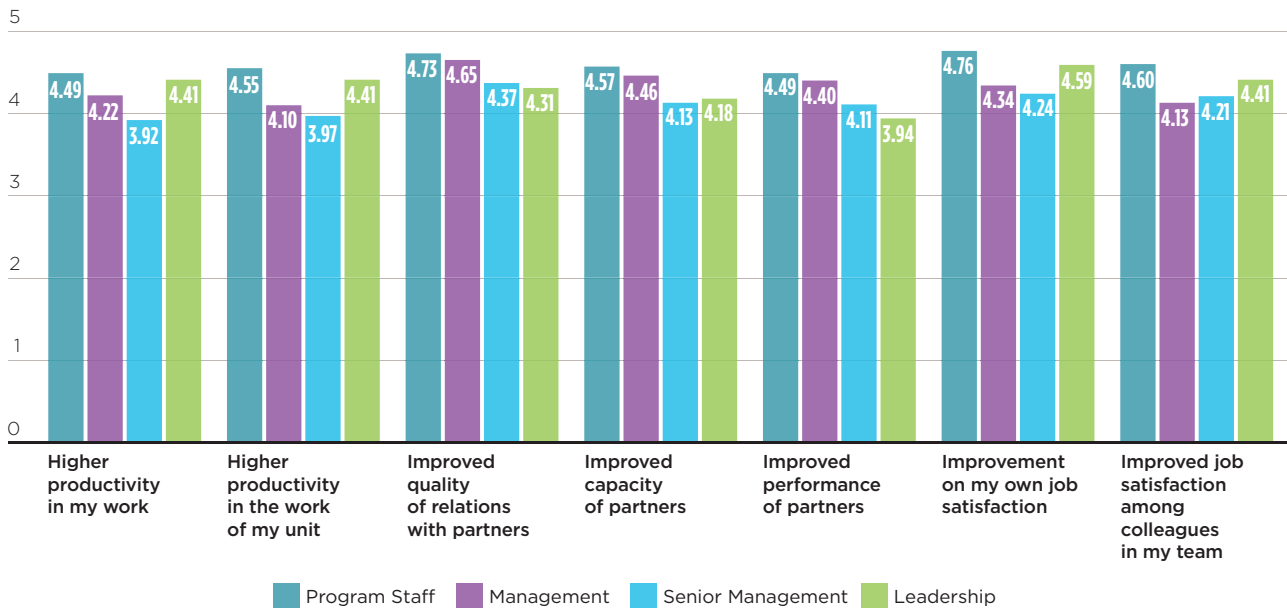
Figure 19. Effect of staff learning and use of PCS tools and resources, by job level

Based on the above, **the contribution of the work of the SiS projects to improvements across the organization has been felt at most job categories**. This finding offers possibilities of generating even further change through the use of learning and tools from PCS and also offers opportunities to the agency to utilize PCS channels in engaging further agency-wide transformation. That is, the space for collaboration across CRS units can be extensive.

Indeed, staff survey comments indicate that the learning and use of PCS tools has improved individual performance. As a staff member explains, *"knowledge in PCS has helped a lot in carrying-out tasks entrusted to me."* Many comments thanked the agency for the creation of the Partnership and Capacity Strengthening unit and its work within the agency. A respondent expresses *"a big thank you to CRS for creating the PCS unit as well as for providing the tools that help CRS to improve day by day in the management of its staff as well as those of the partners. These lead CRS to increase its resources, strengthen its credibility at the donor level and in the community, and develop the skills of these collaborators to better meet the needs of the vulnerable population that is the community."*

OUTSIDE CRS

Most local partners surveyed (Table 17) rank **the work of CRS in helping to improve their organizational effectiveness at high levels**. The highest recognition is for the accompaniment CRS provided in the journey to improve their capacity, a key finding as it relates to the core of the CRS approach to PCS. On a similar note, 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 ORGANIZATIONAL 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 (Table 18) that the **use of CRS' PCS tools and resources has translated into important gains in the individual and organization's productivity, better working relations at all levels** (within the organization, with CRS, and with peer organizations) **and in improvements in job satisfaction of staff as well as that of colleagues**. These are outstanding accomplishment for SiS project. Also, gains among local partners are stronger than those observed for CRS staff.

Table 19 displays results on local partners views of CRS as a leading agency in PCS, collected from survey responses. In general, in all aspects, there is 60% or higher agreement (addition of the somewhat agree plus fully agree categories) among local partners about the strong role of CRS in PCS work. The highest levels are achieved in three aspects: **that CRS has become a key source for knowledge about strengthening partnership relations and organization capacities by identifying knowledge needs (95%), that 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.

In their own ranking for these aspects, CRS staff gave lower scores, around 70%. However, local partners are much more positive about the agency. Comments from local partners in their survey support this highly positive view of CRS work in PCS and as a leading organization in PCS. As a local partner states, *"CRS has always proven to be a strong cooperative partner in my area compared to other organizations."* Partners stress the support in country offices and the friendly environment in 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."*

TABLE 18. LOCAL PARTNERS USING CRS TOOLS AND RESOURCES HAVE 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

Within CRS, among the areas in need of attention to enhance the leading role of the agency, two topics should be specifically noted: funding and experts' availability. In funding, budget is a major constraint for PCS related activities, which as per CRS staff translates into that PCS *"tools and means are not always applied."* The suggestions to change this situation are several: make a PCS-specific budget component mandatory for country programs, devote funding for PCS in a competitive application process where committed partners can access resources, and fund a PCS position at country program levels *"to spearhead the role of partnership strengthening."* For PCS experts, availability can be a constraint. Some staff suggest placing them in programmatic or regional areas for at least three years to generate substantial transformations. Also, staff state that a major challenge for CRS to remain as a leading organization in PCS lies on how the agency can respond to partners' needs when it is no longer a principal but a sub-recipient of funding. This shift in roles changes the dynamic of the relation with partners and as per staff's comments, the agency has not fully defined its new role in this structural change. What staff is clear on is that under this new framework of operations, *"CRS must empower local partners to be able to mobilize international and national resources".*

From local partners' survey comments, three aspects for improvement emerge: access to PCS tools and resources, funding, and the dimension of partnership. In access, most local partners request it especially for PCS tools. As a partner indicates, *"we do not have access to online capacity building courses."* In funding, partners see a constraint in their ability to continue working with CRS due to lack of financial resources.

TABLE 19. LOCAL PARTNERS VIEW 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

In the dimension of partnership, some local partners indicate their interest in seeing themselves and CRS as partners and not only CRS as a donor. *"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 a partner eloquently states, *"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."*

In order to expand the work in PCS within CRS, staff reflected about internal resources for PCS work. Figure 20 presents staff members' views about access. There are even opinions among different job levels about the existence of adequate resources (i.e., time, material, funding) to fulfill PCS responsibilities, the role and responsibility for PCS clearly defined in job description, and in the support of supervisors to PCS responsibilities. The average marks are around mid 4s on a scale of 6, which indicates there is still room for improvement.

To improve, survey comments from staff emphasize the need for continuous learning; this includes not only new staff but current employees. Importantly, staff appear to be in favor of PCS learning becoming mandatory. Furthermore, staff support that PCS should be part of the job description of every employee and that a *"PCS section should be part of the Performance Planning process"* and part of the *"the program of our annual retreats."*
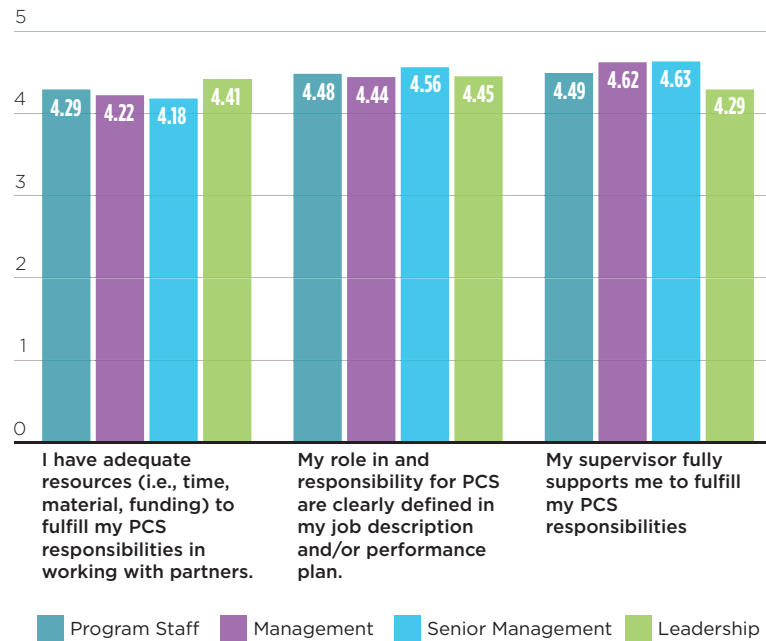
Figure 20. Resources and support for PCS work, by job level

Among local partners who responded to their survey, when considering the work of CRS in PCS and comparing it with other international NGOs, partners gave very high marks of 90% to CRS in staff approachability and in paperwork (documentation) required to work with. Partners give 80% to CRS dynamic communication, and a lower rate of 52% to funding availability.

To improve and solidify CRS as a leading agency in PCS, KIIs respondents emphasize the following:

- For CRS to be a thought leader in PCS, it needs to go "above and beyond" compared with many of its competitors or peers that have much narrower, less holistic, less participatory, and more prescriptive approaches to capacity strengthening.

- As a multi-sectoral organization (with 8 program areas), and leveraging a widespread network of local partners whose capacity has been strengthened over several years of collaboration and mutual work, CRS is uniquely placed to provide more powerful solutions to local humanitarian and developmental problems compared to other agencies.

- CRS needs to continue to sharpen its value proposition engaging not only local partners but also local governments and the private sector.

3.7 LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND LOCALIZATION

DEFINITIONS

Figure 21 presents the definitions of terms as per the Partnership and Capacity Strengthening unit at CRS.

In addition to assessing whether the SiS project has met its intermediate results and objectives, this FE provides an initial exploration on how the initiative has prepared the agency "for its renewed commitment to
local leadership as articulated in Vision 2030—the agency's strategy".

Though local leadership and localization are interconnected with both the SiS project and the wider CRS' PCS work, these concepts have emerged later in the SiS project's life. As such, they are not explicitly reflected in the project's goals, activities and results framework and thus are not part of the formal evaluation presented in this report. However, to fulfill the request to explore these topics, the collaborators used in depth interviews with selected CRS staff and other informants.

The scope, depth, and complexity of local leadership and localization call for a far more comprehensive and dedicated inquiry. While the interviews have only managed to scratch the surface in exploring CRS' aspiration on local leadership and localization, they offer some insights to inform the wider conversation, plans and further inquiry on local leadership and localization within CRS.

LOCALIZATION:
Increasing the amount of humanitarian assistance led and delivered by local actors.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP:
local civil society and local government leading and implementing their own development processes. CRS' approach to local leadership, informed by the principle of subsidiarity, believers that local actors are the drivers of sustainable development and systems-level change

Figure 21. Definitions

FINDINGS

The in-depth interviews point to a different, and at times inconsistent, interpretation and perception—among CRS staff—of the terminology and notions related to local leadership and localization. Moreover, CRS staff's responses highlight that these concepts are often interchanged and intertwined with local capacity building, system strengthening and partnership.

While there is a varied interpretation of the concepts of local leadership and localization, there is also a fairly consistent consideration from CRS staff that, regardless of the official definitions and latest trends and buzzwords, the organization has for a long time been concerned with and worked on local leadership and localization. A staff member indicated *"I think local leadership and localization are part of our DNA and how we work, though maybe we don't explicitly call them as such."* Another staff highlighted that *"Local leadership and localization have been our work, even though we did not call it that. We have always been committed to supporting partners' growth, to accompanying them through the cycle of building their capacity and to empowering them".*

In-depth interviews suggest a consistent attribution of the SiS project as a pioneer in anticipating trends in what localization and local leadership intend to achieve, concepts that have become priority themes in recent years. Predicting the changes in the operating environment that puts greater emphasis on local ownership, the SIS project has positioned CRS as a leader in local leadership and localization with donors, policy makers, partners, and peer agencies. As noted by a staff member, *"everything that SIS has done has laid the foundation for us to be really at the cutting edge of local leadership and localization".*

The SiS project, along with CRS' broader work in PCS, has both paved the way and enabled CRS' commitment to excellence in the emerging themes of local

leadership and localization. The whole approach of accompaniment and empowering the partners is foundational to build their local leadership. As stressed by a CRS staff, *"The foundation is well placed to build on the work that has been done with partnership capacity strengthening and pivot that to emphasize local leadership".*

CRS counts with solid foundations, both at the conceptual framework and operational level, to confidently pursue its local leadership and localization agenda. As a CRS staff points out, *"without the wealth of relevant and effective PCS resources and tools, the cadre of highly qualified PCS professionals, the widespread number of people in CRS and within partners trained in PCS, the systems in place, etc. it would be harder for CRS to demonstrate its authentic commitment to local leadership and localization".* This concept was echoed by another CRS staff, claiming that *"When it comes to local leadership and localization, and building capacity of local actors, CRS is indeed walking with walk."*

In the area of emergency response, the speed and depth of progress in the conceptual and operational work of local leadership might not have been matched by that in localization in humanitarian response where direct implementation is more common. However, respondents noted that the greater PCS professionalization of the agency is helping and encouraging the humanitarian sphere in CRS to be more proactive and intentional in the pursuit of localization efforts.

POSITIONING CRS

A clearly distinctive feature emerging from the in-depth interviews is the recognition that the organization's commitment to local leadership and localization is not exclusively donor driven. On the contrary, it is deeply embedded into its mission and values as the natural evolution of the long-lasting work with local partners in both humanitarian and development sectors. The integral human development rooted in and informed by Catholic social teaching, the subsidiarity and solidarity principles, the strong emphasis on exploring and building local solutions on the common good, and the emphasis on holistic integral development, firmly anchor local leadership and localization in CRS's work. A CRS staff noted that *"One of our biggest partnership principles is subsidiarity. We already work from the belief that those on the ground and closest to the problem truly have the solution".* Another CRS staff indicated that, *"You cannot be in better solidarity than by being local".*

The in-depth interviews also suggested that as a new lens for CRS, local leadership can open significant opportunities for bringing various organization's units closely together in the pursuit of this common shared goal. It provides a new framework to deepen and strengthen its holistic work with indigenous organizations and local governments. Such significant conceptual and operational shifts towards local leadership, as highlighted by a CRS staff, *"would call for CRS' internal systems and structures to be strengthened and updated accordingly".*

Other interviews stressed that CRS could leverage existing monitoring and evaluation frameworks and communication models to demonstrate measurable progress and achievements into local leadership and localization. *"Thanks to the SiS project and the great work of the PCS Unit, the 'PCS lens' has been systematically brought into every major conversation about the future strategic direction of the agency."*

CRS's leadership role in the wider local leadership and localization conversation should have higher visibility within the agency and especially externally. There seems to be quite a significant space for CRS, given its expertise and track record, to promote and influence donors, global processes, and peer agencies in local leadership and localization. As noted by a CRS staff, *"CRS's approach to local leadership and localization is unique and distinct in the global marketplace of ideas and agencies"*

Acknowledging that the era of INGOs' intermediation between the donors and local solutions is progressively over, there is the recognition that the CRS's progressive focus in local leadership and localization is both desirable and unavoidable. This will also set CRS on a path that will ultimately profoundly transform the organization as noted by a CRS staff, *"In 10, 15 years, CRS will look quite different … it'll be a much smaller agency in terms of humanitarian and development assistance."* Another CRS staff eloquently stressed that *"CRS has gone from working THROUGH partners, to working WITH partners and—in the foreseeable future—to work FOR partners."*

Supporting local leadership and localization is ultimately what CRS's partners are calling for. Those partners that, thanks to CRS, have reached high levels of organizational and operational capacity, call for CRS's local leadership and localization approach. These are the actors at the local level that, with CRS's continuous support, can drive transformational change locally. *"The SiS project has facilitated the process of building the collaborative infrastructure of tools and internal competencies to build local institutions that can lead and be successful in delivering a similar (CRS's) value-based strategy."*

CRS's strategic workstream, aimed at strengthening prime readiness of local partners, is a key component of the local leadership and localization approach. Both the process and the end-goal strengthen organizational and programmatic capacity of partners and enable them to achieve financial capability and independence to be change agents. As noted by a CRS staff: *"I think CRS is the only organization I've ever worked for that actually would actually genuinely is willing to hand over budgets to partners for management."*

Sister Esther Mutheu in the dairy barn at the Little Sisters of St. Therese of the Child Jesus congregation in Machaka village, Meru, Kenya. Photo by Will Baxter/CRS

4. Key findings

The SiS project was intended to sustainably transform CRS. The results show that the SiS project has elevated PCS work by making it more intentional, systematic, and structured. This section brings together all of the results and identifies how they have helped achieve the three Intermediate Results (IRs) of the SiS project. A summary is presented in Figure 22.

IR1: IMPROVE INTERNAL CRS SYSTEMS, STRUCTURES, AND SKILLS THAT IMPACT AGENCY EFFECTIVENESS IN PARTNER CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

This IR has been achieved as indicated by the following results:

1) Strong gains among staff in all KSAs categories during the life of the SiS project

The highest level of knowledge by the end of the project is in the areas of capacity building and communication. The areas of largest improvements are in organizational assessment, and institutional strengthening and accompaniment.

By the end of 2019, the top-three PCS related skills among staff were: working across organizational cultures, interpersonal communication, and mentoring, coaching, and accompanying. The largest registered gain in skills is in mentoring, coaching, and accompanying.

The top attitudes among staff by the end of the project are humility and mutuality, and patience and flexibility. The largest improvements appear in sensitivity to partners' institutional culture and confidence in working with partners.

When contrasting the evolution of KSAs during the life of the SiS project, 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. The new aspects emerging as strong by the end of the project include elements that embody the comprehensive CRS approach to PCS: accompaniment, mentoring, and sensitivity to partners' institutional culture.

2) Increase in PCS tools and resources

At the onset of the project there were eight major PCS tools available, and, during the life of the project, seven other major tools were added. That represents an increase of 87.5% in the number of existing tools. Thus, the project has been fruitful in generating more tools available for PCS work.

3) Significant gains among staff in knowledge and use of PCS tools and resources

During the life of the project there has been a tremendous growth among staff in familiarity with PCS tools. From very low levels of knowledge in 2012, as low as 9% and most around 30–40%, to the end of the project, recognition about PCS tools has grown strongly. Percentages in all cases were at 60% or higher. The least recognized tool by the end of the project is CAFE, but even this tool was at 66% at the end of the project which is above the highest levels of familiarity before the project. On the other

hand, the most recognizable tool by the end of the project is the Partnership and Capacity Strengthening website at 85%.

The tool with highest progress in recognition throughout the life of the project is Robust and Sustainable Resource Mobilization: Building Comprehensive Strategies for Resource Mobilization Success. Awareness started at only 9% but ended at 71%, a sixty-two percent increase. Considering only the tools created during the SiS project, the tool with most improvement in familiarity is the Assessment to Action Planning Workbook (A2A) that went from 18% in 2016 to 69% by 2019.

The use of PCS tools has grown strongly from the beginning to the end of the SiS project even though it is still under 50% in most cases. This progress matters especially when considering the very low levels of usage at the launch of the SiS project, when utilization of most tools was less than 20%.

At the end of the project, usage had robustly improved, with only one tool, CAFE, under 40% utilization. CAFE utilization was also the lowest at the start of the project, but by 2019 it reached a utilization of 36%, thirty percentage points above. The tool with the most usage was the Partnership and Capacity Strengthening website at 63%. The largest gain in usage during the life of the project has been in the Partnership Scorecard that went from a 13% utilization to 52%, an increase of thirty-nine percentage points. Among the additional tools created as part the SiS project, the tool with the most increase in use was the Quick Guide: How to Incorporate Partnership and Capacity Strengthening in Proposals and Project Design that went from 10% use in 2016 to 45% in 2019, a thirty-five-percentage point gain.

4) New resources added with strong intake: the Institute for Capacity Strengthening

A major initiative of the SiS project was the creation in 2015 of the Institute for Capacity Strengthening (ICS) with its own website, not intended to replace but rather to channel PCS ongoing efforts and develop new ones.

A main feature of ICS is the online courses offered that are structured by topics and levels. Fifty percent of respondents among staff have taken an ICS course. Over 40% of respondents have taken Level 1 courses while Level 2 courses have a lower intake. The most popular course is the Capacity Strengthening Basics—Level 1, received by 70% of respondents, followed by Partnership Basics—Level 1 at 63%. Meanwhile, the lowest attended course of level 1 is the Adult Learning Basics—Level 1 at 46%, which is still above the intake of any course in Level 2. The level of engagement of staff in ICS courses at level 1 has been high though it can still improve, as 50% of staff have not taken any course. On the other hand, much more can be done to engage staff into Level 2 courses that were introduced much later in the project and can greatly benefit from more awareness about them.

As indicated by staff, the usefulness of the courses' content for their work is rated as high by most respondents, a great achievement for this PCS tool introduced by the SiS project.

5) New resource for expanding PCS application in working with partners: Perfecting Partnership initiative

The Perfecting Partnership initiative was not a resource considered at the time of the SiS proposal, but it developed as a result of the work and reflection taken during the process. This is another major effort undertaken by the SiS project.

Launched in 2017, the course consists of a workshop with intense learning and practical experience in PCS topics for a small number of staff who are hand-picked under a strict selection criterion. By the end of 2019, two rounds of Perfecting Partnership workshops had taken place.

Surveys results showed that Perfecting Partnership alumni had a 'very positive' view of the program: 89% said the workshop improved their core PCS competencies and they can apply more than 75% of the content to both partnership and capacity strengthening. This shows the workshops were designed with participants needs in mind and that the attendees were interested in putting what they learned into practice. Furthermore, Perfecting Partnership alumni said they were sharing more than 75% of the knowledge they acquired. In-depth interviews indicate that the motivation to share and engage might be driven by a combination of empowerment and a deep sense of responsibility to pay back the investment CRS made in them. The ultimate success of Perfecting Partnership alumni will be reflected in the degree to which local staff can improve their partnership and capacity strengthening with local partners.

This highest level of knowledge-sharing is within units, where 61% of participants share 'most' and 11% share 'all'. The second highest level is at the country program level, where participants share 57% of 'most' and 7% of 'all' new knowledge. Though at lower percentages, Perfecting Partnership alumni have been able to share knowledge with staff in other country programs, 36% of 'most' and 7% of 'all' knowledge, which is expanding the regional reach of PCS and transforming Perfecting Partnership alumni into additional PCS experts at regional levels.

6) Enhanced resources: Experts contribution to PCS work

An important contribution of this initiative is the increased number of experts who can support staff as they improve their work with partners. Two of the three existing groups were created within the SiS project: the experts at the Partnership and Capacity Strengthening unit at CRS, and Perfecting Partnership Alumni.

Encouragingly, 53% of staff indicate that they have worked with experts from the Partnership and Capacity Strengthening unit at CRS, and with PCS experts at regional/country programs. While Perfecting Partnership alumni have a lower level of engagement, considering they only started as experts in late 2017, their degree of engagement is relatively high at 36%.

Another relevant result is the cross collaboration among experts. By the end of 2019, Perfecting Partnership Alumni had a high level of collaboration with experts from both the Partnership and Capacity Strengthening unit at CRS, and PCS within region and country programs. Collaboration with these two groups and other Perfecting Partnership Alumni registered the largest gains between 2016 and 2019. This enhances the continuous development of a cadre of highly qualified internal PCS experts. The in-depth interviews suggest that the Perfecting Partnership Alumni active engagement and collaboration at the regional and country level stems from their commitments outlined in their action plans. Most importantly, though, their proactive engagement is driven by the intrinsic motivation, professionalism, and pride in being a strategic organizational resource.

IR2: ENHANCE RESOURCES (FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL) AND OPPORTUNITIES TO CARRY OUT THE AGENCY'S CAPACITY STRENGTHENING MANDATE

This IR has been achieved as indicated by the following results:

1) Staff is adapting tools in working with and accompanying Local Partners

Most staff are diligent about adapting tools, providing needed support, helping partners understand CRS' PCS approach and its value added. More than 65% of staff who work with partners are conducting activities that reflect the agency's approach to PCS. This is clear evidence of the fundamental changes the SiS project intends to achieve. There is room to improve; about 20% of staff are not yet engaging to full expectations.

Local partners have a 'very positive' view of the support their institutions are getting to improve organizational functions and better understand CRS' overall approach to strengthening partnership relations and organization capacities.

2) Staff is sharing PCS opportunities with Local Partners

It is encouraging that staff are actively sharing PCS-related content to partners: 70% of staff communicated with partners about options for mentoring, coaching and training, 72% fostered connections with partners at CRS, and 72% encouraged partners to join CRS communities of practice.

Service delivery staff made the biggest effort to share mentoring, coaching, and training opportunities. A local partner said in a survey that *"Our agency has gradually been updated due to CRS's interventions with regards to organizational capacity strengthening."* Other surveyed partners said, *"I particularly appreciate CRS for the Partnership Score Card. The Score Card meetings held in the past three years resulted in development of key policy documents that include the Strategic Plan, Human Resource Manual, Financial Management Manual and the Protection Policy. These documents have been cardinal in providing guidance in processes of decision making."*

Meanwhile, senior management is more engaged in fostering peer-to-peer connections between local partners and CRS. In encouraging partners to join CRS communities of practice, leadership has been the strongest proponent of any group. On this, a local partner commented in the survey that, *"CRS has contributed a lot to improving organizational capacities through practice. In the various partnerships that have linked us, CRS has worked to strengthen relationships and organizational capacities…CRS has always advocated the theory of change through effective capacity building that leads to better results. CRS 'local approach in terms of partnership makes it possible to better serve the communities and facilitates the achievement of objectives in the services provided to the most vulnerable."*

3) Diversification and transition

40% of staff say they worked with more than ten local partners in the past three years, an encouraging sign of diversification. Most supervisors say they worked with at least three or more partners. 27% of supervisors reviewed MOUs for groups of 3–5 and 10+ partners. The formal intent to establish a partnership is a sign of trust. This is a positive result for PCS work by the Agency. 28% of supervisors have signed more than ten MOUs in the last three years.

A significant percentage of supervisors, 46%, work with 3 or more local partners who are direct recipients of donor funding. This is a positive step toward helping local partners transition to a more direct role in their own work. Furthermore, 33% of supervisors have 3 to 5 local partners that passed a prime-readiness evaluation, which is an encouraging sign.

However, challenges do exist. A local partner in the survey said *"At the moment, we have more responsibility [as] 'performer' which results in the mobilization of staff implementing soft activities when we want more responsibility in the conduct of hard activities"*. Another local partner said *"CRS should support the training of local partner staff in the area of governance, programming, and fundraising. This is important for sustainability of partners especially in the event CRS ceases to operate or could not have funds to support the running of its local partner organizations."*

IR3: FACILITATE LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE-SHARING AROUND WHAT WORKS IN CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

This IR has been achieved as indicated by the following results:

1) The contribution of PCS is more recognized within CRS

PCS learning opportunities and tools are changing the work of our staff. This is not just their PCS related activities but the overall scope of their work. According to respondents, PCS tools and resources are greatly improving the quality of relationships with partners and their own (staff) job satisfaction. It resulted in moderate success in increasing productivity in their own work and that of their unit, better working relations within their unit, enhanced working relations of their unit with other CRS units, improved capacity and performance of partners, and improved job satisfaction among colleagues on their team.

Comments from the staff survey illustrate some of these results. A staff member notices that *"PCS is relevant to my current job and has improved my relationship and working with partners"* Similarly, another said *"personally PCS has made my work effective in working with partners."*

These results are very positive. The SiS project is generating spillovers and thus transformation within the agency that goes beyond the areas strictly connected to PCS work.

Because of its contributions, there is 'high agreement' among staff about CRS' leading role in PCS work. Specifically, 79% of staff believe that CRS has become a key source for PCS knowledge, 78% believe that CRS has become an agency that lives an authentic commitment to partnership and strengthening the capacity of local **partners, and 78% believe that it ranks well compared with other INGOs.**

2) Recognition among partners of CRS' Leadership

Local partners are very positive about CRS' commitment to PCS. 100% of partners agree that CRS ranks high compared to other INGOs in strengthening partnership relationships and organizational capacities (HR, finance, programs, etc.), 95% agree that CRS has become a key source for knowledge about these areas, and 90% agree that CRS has become an agency that lives an authentic commitment to local

leadership and localization. 61% of partners agree that CRS is effective in translating needs into ready-made applications for active dissemination and discussion.

In their survey comments, local partners note that *"CRS has always proven to [be] a strong cooperative partner in my area compared to other organizations"* while another local partner said *"CRS country office staff was really supportive"* and yet another that there is a *"friendly environment when deal[ing] with CRS staff."* Another local partner summarizes the experience of working with the agency as the following: *"CRS has proven to be a true partner…They have provided timely support to facilitate work when required. They have been able to provide necessary capacity for staff to undertake responsibilities, they have done back-stopping activities to ensure we meet required standards and we have undertaken monitoring exercises together on the project. Performance of our organization has generally been satisfactory. Despite some inevitable challenges we have encountered along the way… over the years [my organization] has developed and has come of age because of the support that we received from CRS."*

IR1: Improve internal CRS systems, structures, and skills that impact agency effectiveness in partner capacity strengthening

ACHIEVED BY:

1. Strong gains among staff in all KSAs categories during the life of the SiS project

2. Increase in PCS Tools and Resources

3. Significant gains among staff in knowledge and use of PCS tools

4. New resources added with strong intake: ICS

5. New resource for expanding PCS application in working with partners: PePa

6. Enhanced resources: Experts contribution to PCS work

IR2: Enhance resources (financial and technical) and opportunities to carry out the agency's capacity strengthening mandate

ACHIEVED BY:

1. Staff is adapting tools in working with and accompanying Local Partners

2. Staff is sharing PCS opportunities with Local Partners

3. Diversification of partners and beginning work in preparing partners for transition

IR3: Facilitate learning and knowledge-sharing around what works in capacity strengthening

ACHIEVED BY:

1. PCS contributions to staff is increasing its recognition within CRS

2. Recognition among partners of CRS as a leading PCS organization

Figure 22. Summary of key findings of SiS project, by intermediate result (IR)

5. Recommendations

The SiS project has transformed PCS work for CRS and increased its recognition as a core and integral part of the agency. Sustainability and adaptability to the changing landscape of international development needs to guide further PCS work.

General recommendations:

- **CRS needs to deepen and expand the learning journey of staff around PCS**. While significant progress has been made, more investment is needed to sustain this trend. Materials need to be updated and adapted to meet the evolving needs of the development and humanitarian community.

- **Funding**. The commitment of PCS as a core element of the agency's strategy requires financial commitment. PCS funding should appear in budgets at all levels (headquarters, regional, and country) and in proposals. Another possibility is to fund a PCS positions at our country programs "to spearhead the role of partnership strengthening." Such financial resources should not be intended solely as the result of discretionary funding. Properly costed and budgeted technical assistance packages need to be introduced in new submissions or offered as services to local prime recipients.

- **Leadership commitment** to continue and sustain PCS at all levels at the agency is fundamental. This includes funding support and championing and prioritizing PCS. It is also important that leadership creates ongoing dialogue with donors and policy makers about the value of supporting this kind of work.

- **Improve local partners' use of PCS resources**. One major achievement of the project is KSAs gains and use of tools and resources among staff. Further work is needed to improve the adoption of PCS resources by local partners. This could include: develop a joint strategic plan with local partners that follows up PCS assessments (e.g. HOCAI) and that details adaptable stages of progress and particular PCS resources that are specific to a given partner's needs, size and ability to undertake change; improve the commitment of local partners (including leadership) to increase the use of PCS resources by presenting "success stories" that show detailed and concrete improvements in organizational capacity by using CRS PCS resources; assign specific funding to promote use of PCS resources among local partners including materials and time from CRS staff; and track utilization by annual data collection (sample) and analysis of usage and usefulness of PCS resources among local partners, which should serve to adapt existing PCS tools and resources and to consider creating others to position CRS as responsive to partners' needs.

- **Augment engagement with external audiences to improve CRS influence as a PCS leader**. It is important that CRS find new opportunities to present its evidence and recommendations for PCS. This will expand the sphere of influence of the agency. Activities include: present at conferences and forums globally and locally before practitioners, academics and others; coordinate and engage periodically in policy networks; organize PCS dissemination events for external audiences; and collaborate with local partners and governments to discuss PCS country specific work.

- **Scale up efforts** to explore alternative/innovative ways for PCS storytelling and communication about achievements. This may include impactful data-visualization with infographics and images, short videos of personal change stories, etc.

- **Explore venues of collaboration for the evolving work of PCS**. Start exploring opportunities of PCS as technical assistance and also the potential cooperation with the private sector in strategic alliances. Technical assistance could be charged to some partners and thus generate funding for further PCS work. There are current examples of technical assistance carried out by some consulting firms or development banks (e.g. Deloitte, KPMG, the World Bank). CRS' advantages are its expertise and excellent reputation among partners. With the private sector, CRS can lead in exploring PCS collaboration with local businesses to achieve greater development impact.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

KSAS

- **Continue to include PCS in job descriptions.** To improve competencies among staff, PCS should be included in job descriptions and performance management. Continued participation of the Partnership and Capacity Strengthening team is needed to ensure the institutionalization of PCS at CRS. This includes PCS crosscutting competencies in job descriptions, recruitment, onboarding, and staff development.

- **Provide more learning credentials.** Make PCS a professional development opportunity that results in certificates, diplomas of completion or other mechanisms of recognition among staff. Currently, the Partnership and Capacity Strengthening unit at CRS is working on a few things in this area (developing a system for micro-credentialing or providing certificates to the Perfecting Partnership Alum), but additional work will be helpful.

- **Leadership commitment.** Make leaders accountable for the promotion and planning of learning opportunities available for their team members. This can result in practical and important changes in KSAs among staff.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- **Promotion, communication, and dissemination of PCS tools and resources** is needed at all levels of the agency. With country offices in particular, the communication strategy should be aimed at presenting the resources and tools that meet practical needs. If not yet available, a user-friendly and user-centered electronic document can facilitate the matching of the user's PCS-specific needs with the corresponding resource.

- **Research on adoption and use of PCS tools and resources**. For current tools and resources, investigate using data -and metrics- the adoption, implementation and usage of tools and resources. This is conducive to understand efficiency gaps in a given product.

- **Pilot test for new tools.** For potential new tools and resources, extensive preliminary research among intended audiences will be helpful. Similarly, a gradual and smaller-scale testing phase can render better results than a larger roll out.

PERFECTING PARTNERSHIP ALUM

■ **Maintain the Perfecting Partnership Alumni program,** as it represents a foundational element of the comprehensive, holistic, and sustainable capacity strengthening organizational approach that underpins PCS agenda and the emerging local leadership workstream. When funding for holding a residential Perfecting Partnership program is a concern, consider: holding the program at HQ on a biannual basis, exploring multi-modal, blended learning delivery modalities with limited or no-travels involved, and turning it into a regional program reducing travel requirements.

■ **More support from supervisors and managers** for Perfecting Partnership Alumni to incorporate PCS knowledge into practice. This also requires additional resources to engage in PCS work. Resources include funding, time, and the support to engage with other units beyond those under purview of immediate supervisors and managers.

■ **Increase Perfecting Partnership Alumni participation in communities of practice**. "Learning by doing" can be better achieved by sharing experiences and fostering collaboration in communities of practice. Activities include: creating topics that evolve with the interests of communities of practice, create a core group that takes turn leading discussion while keeping membership open to new members, generating new ideas and nurturing participation.

■ **Create regional sharing opportunities** where Perfecting Partnership Alumni can host workshops. This will increase the role of Perfecting Partnership Alumni as peer-coaches; it will ensure (an even) stronger inclusion of PCS content and experiences.

■ **Raise the profile and impact** of the program by enhancing the impact of Perfecting Partnership Alumni; build in clear career incentives, with the opportunity for short-term deployments and longer-term placements, and develop a short, experiential Perfecting Partnership program-type bootcamp for senior leaders in CRS with Perfecting Partnership Alumni as facilitators.

ICS

■ **Continue the work with HR to make Level 1 ICS courses part of job descriptions**, which is consistent with CRS's adoption of PCS as a core part of our strategy.

■ **Explore further collaboration to create ICS content that targets programmatic or regional areas.** For instance, PCS-Health content, or PCS-Peacebuilding content. This can improve buy-in and interest among programmatic areas as well as country programs in PCS activities that are tailored and applicable to their needs.

■ Pursue the original vision **to evolve the ICS website into an open global forum** where local organizations and development/humanitarian practitioners exchange views, experiences, and expertise in PCS.

■ Look at **alternative resource mobilization models to sustain the ICS website, for instance partnering with online learning providers within the aid sector (e.g. Humentum) or the wider online education sector (e.g. Coursera) and charging a small fee to INGOs, local governments, CSOs and donors.**

LOCAL PARTNERS

■ **More access to PCS tools and resources is necessary for local partners** to strengthen their capacity. This means creating more learning opportunities where the full practical explanation on the usage of PCS tools and resources is provided. Also, exploring possibilities for online versus in-person activities for partners will help in better reaching partners.

■ **Funding for PCS work with partners**. Help country programs mobilize resources for PCS, and, have an institutional capacity building or system strengthening component for partners embedded into projects. Also, invite partners to be more involved in proposal development.

■ **Track and increase the number of local partners**. Document progress to make partners stronger. This includes documenting how CRS collaboration is making local organizations more capable of attracting donor-led funding. Additionally, CRS can increase its influence by engaging with more 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 with a higher adoption rate.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND LOCALIZATION

■ **Sustain the role of PCS in ongoing efforts to empower** local leadership**. PCS leadership in CRS internal working groups (local leadership with the necessary OOLT involvement) is instrumental in ensuring that PCS-specific experience strategically informs decision-making. Leveraging the experience and infrastructure of the SiS project, the PCS Unit and the wider IPQ unit should lead to greater professionalization of local leadership.

■ **Promote widespread ownership of the local leadership and localization agenda,** beyond senior management**. For example, the Perfecting Partnership Alumni can leverage strategic resources to support local leadership at the country level. In addition to being PCS champions they could also become Local Leadership advocates. This could consist of adjusting the Perfecting Partnership program to incorporate additional local leadership and localization focus and content. In the medium run, the program may organically evolve into a Local Leadership program.

■ **Strengthen internal dissemination and communication to improve clarity and understanding of what local leadership and localization is and is not.** Along with existing material, consider developing simple "cheat sheets" or "local leadership myth busting infographic".

■ Ensure that the conceptual and operational **progress in the localization workstream matches the growth of the local leadership area.** CRS can exert influence on the progress of local leadership to overcome the inherent challenges and resistance to localization.

■ **Further facilitate the articulation of the role and place of specific typologies of local partner organizations and institutions,** such as government and the business sector in the wider local leadership and localization framework.

■ **Explore innovative business models and new resource mobilization approaches** to support local leadership and localization. While the foreign assistance journey to "end its need to exist" (former USAID Director Mark Green) is nowhere near, the local leadership and localization agenda challenges CRS (and the wider aid community) to explore innovative resource mobilization efforts—beyond its solid private funding base—to sustain its operation in the long run.

PROMOTE CRS EXTERNALLY AS A PCS ORGANIZATION

- **Expand university collaboration in PCS research and innovation projects.** A natural target is to seek engagement with graduate programs in international development, international affairs, international economics, and public policy with a development focus.

- **Engage members of the Partnership and Capacity unit in external presentations about the results of CRS' PCS work.** This includes conferences and presentations to donors and peers from external organizations, students in graduate programs, webinars that could be hosted at the ICS website, short videos to be featured at CRS social media channels.

- **Lead a PCS working group among peer organizations and universities in the DC area.** By starting in DC, CRS can build a strong connection with participants; later the group can be expanded to the rest of the country and abroad.

CRS has committed $350,000 of internal resources for the response and continues to fundraise and is supporting Caritas Lebanon to prepare a submission to USAID/BHA. Photo by Stefanie Glinski for Catholic Relief Services