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EMPOWER West and Central Africa

EMPOWERING PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS WORKING ON EMERGENCY RESPONSES IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Background

EMPOWER WCA is a three-year project funded by USAID/BHA with the goal of making the humanitarian architecture in the five targeted countries accountable, localized and inclusive. The countries are Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Mali, and Niger. The project supports local actors through capacity strengthening trainings on a variety of operational and technical subjects, depending on the needs of that partner. Once ten local humanitarian actors (LHAs) were identified in each country, the project works closely with them to evaluate their operational and technical needs to create an individualized support plan.

Following the creation of these plans and the identification of barriers to access the humanitarian coordination forums, the project is implementing a series of trainings to support the LHAs. The project has also provided small grants to some of these LHAs to overcome financial barriers to participation and leadership in the humanitarian coordination system. The project team will work closely with humanitarian coordination leadership in each country to adapt the architecture to reduce those barriers as well.

Quick Facts

Donor: USAID/BHA

Budget: \$3 million

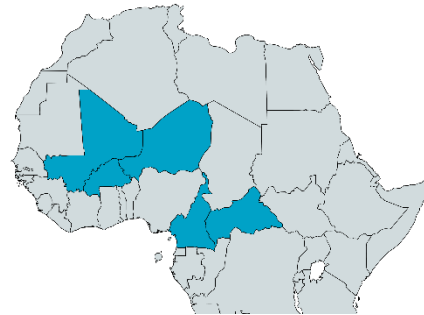
Timeframe: October 2021-September 2024

Target: 50 partner organizations; 1,000 staff members

Location: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Mali and Niger

Objective

The objective of this project is to have the humanitarian architecture in the five targeted countries be more accountable, localized, and inclusive. This will be done by supporting local humanitarian actors (LHAs) to fully develop and implement critical organizational and operational policies which will reduce identified barriers to full participation in humanitarian forums at a leadership level.



The project will also work with the current leaders in humanitarian coordination to adapt the architecture to be more open and inclusive of LHA participation through demonstrable commitments to Grand Bargain initiatives, Charter4Change, and IASC guidance.

Barrier Analysis

During project start-up, the team did a barrier analysis in each of the five countries to better understand the barriers to LHA access and leadership within the humanitarian coordination system in each country. Through a series of key informant interviews, the team interviewed approximately 60 individuals working for LHAs as well as 60 individuals working in leadership positions in the humanitarian coordination system. The results of the analysis were used to inform the training plans for LHAs and for discussions within the humanitarian architecture.

LHA Selection and Evaluation

LHAs were identified through an open call, which was shared through the humanitarian network in each country as well as through any other channels deemed appropriate. LHAs needed to meet certain criteria, which were also adapted to the local context as needed:

- Active LHA whose mission includes humanitarian response
- Current participation or interest in coordination system
- Interest in a leadership role
- Preference for LHAs with women in leadership or demonstrated commitment to increasing women in leadership
- Willingness to commit time and ideally two focal points (one for programs, one for operations) who will participate in trainings and disseminate learnings

Once participating LHAs were identified, the program managers worked closely with each LHA to complete an auto-evaluation of both operational and technical needs. This allowed for the creation of a highly personalized support plan, which spearheaded by the partner with CRS support to ensure maximum buy-in and that the support is appropriate for the needs of that actor.

LHA Training

Once the LHAs personalized plans were created, the project team organized a series of trainings to address those needs, benefiting from the expertise of CRS technical advisors who have been supporting the implementation of these trainings. These sessions will be carried out both in-person and online, depending on the context and needed. These trainings include subjects such as:

- Humanitarian coordination systems at regional, national and global level and Core Humanitarian Standards on Quality and Accountability
- Financial risk management and fraud mitigation
- Leadership and coordination roles
- HR/staffing policies, including SEA prevention measures, to recruit and retain qualified staff
- Resource mobilization strategies - each organization developed a strategic plan for resource mobilization

Collaboration within Coordination System

Additionally, the project team works within the humanitarian coordination system to use the results of the barrier analysis to lobby coordination mechanisms in each country to address identified barriers, with the aim of increasing the number of LHAs participating in the forums and holding leadership positions. These discussions also build upon the newly drafted IASC Guidance document on Strengthening Participation, Representation and Leadership of Local and National Actors in IASC Humanitarian Coordination Mechanisms.

Small Grants

In addition, LHAs were eligible for small grants to finance staff who are selected for leadership positions within the humanitarian forums in country (i.e., Cluster lead or co-lead roles) or other costs related to the reduction of key barriers to LHA leadership. EMPOWER-WCA also focused on creating strong resource mobilization plans for all participants to help them in sustaining financing after the period of the grant.

Results

To date, the project has completed a significant portion of the planned activities and is moving into the close-out phase with a particular focus on how to continue to support the identified LHAs as well as how to keep adaptations within coordination moving forward.

Trainings

The five standard trainings have been carried out, training 402 unique people on the following subjects:

1. Resource Mobilization
2. Safe & Dignified Programmed (Protection Mainstreaming)
3. Sphere and CHS
4. Management of Risk of Fraud
5. Leadership and Preparedness in Emergencies

Small Grants & Coordination Leadership

The project was able to award 30 total small grants to 27 LHAs in two rounds. The first round was for \$266,510.53 and the second round was for \$204,425.42. At the start of the project, only 12% of LHAs held a leadership position and that number has now risen to 40.8%.

Additionally, there are now localization task forces in Cameroon and CAR—CRS is co-lead in both with the EMPOWER-WCA Program Manager being the main focal point. The task force in CAR is a direct result of the project’s start-up visioning workshop. There are similar initiatives starting up in the other countries, but they are not yet functional.

The team has interacted with coordination bodies for 386 total hours, and currently, 31% of the targeted 42 fora have made adaptations. Since the beginning of the project, 67% of the targeted fora have seen a slight or significant increase in leadership of LHAs.

Support to LHAs

Country	Number of hours of individualized support to LHAs	Main areas of support given
Burkina Faso	179	Cash transfer preparedness; finance and accountability; gender
Cameroon	228	Finance and accountability; gender; leadership
CAR	193	Finance and accountability; operational norms
Mali	197	Finance and accountability
Niger	354	Governance; finance and accountability; operational norms
Overall	1,151	Finance and accountability; governance; operational norms

Success Stories

The project has recorded 42 success stories for 29 AHLS. These revolve around major wins or adaptations due to significant contributions from the EMPOWER project. Some examples include:

- NGO ADKOUL in Niger won a grant for \$950,000.
- ASOPV in Cameroon was able to be appointed Lead in a new forum
- AVS in Mali was able to receive SAM.gov registration after two years of trying unsuccessfully.
- AVAD in Burkina Faso mobilized \$532,113.57 from FHRAOC and \$88,934 from DRC.