



CRS-supported teachers help children with literacy and numeracy in a child-friendly space in Kilis, Turkey. Photo by Sevket Kizildag for CRS

Preparing to Excel in Emergency Response (PEER)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINAL PROJECT EVALUATION

OVERVIEW

Emergencies are increasing in frequency and severity around the world. Local organizations are on the ground, therefore able to be in place more quickly and with more relevant language and cultural knowledge than INGOs. For international organizations to play a part in strengthening local institutions, they must shift from the role of implementer to supporter, from donor to partner – identified by the Grand Bargain as ‘localization.’

For this reason, and given its commitment to localization, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has piloted three different models for strengthening the emergency response capacity of 41 diverse Christian, Muslim and Druze local faith-based institutions (LFIs) as part of its Preparing to Excel in Emergency Response (PEER) program.

From 2015-2018, the three-year capacity strengthening program addressed a range of activities, including knowledge and skills building and institutional changes, in four different countries/contexts: Lebanon, Jordan, India and Indonesia.

HIGHLIGHTS

In two of the countries – Lebanon and India – CRS’ PEER staff directly provided the capacity strengthening. In Jordan, local partner Caritas Jordan took the lead on the activities. And, in Indonesia, CRS implemented a step-down capacity strengthening approach, in which CRS PEER staff trained local partner HQ staff to become “master trainers,” and then supported those master trainers as they went on to train local branches of their organizations. Notably, in three of the four countries, participating LFIs did not receive any funding or reimbursement of staff time for their participation in the project, yet all remained fully engaged for three years.

OBJECTIVES

In September/October 2018, CRS conducted a final evaluation of the PEER project with the following objectives, to:

1. Identify project strengths and weaknesses
2. Assess the project sustainability and its potential for scale-up and replication
3. Provide generalizations about the effectiveness of PEER’s project strategy or what works

PROCESS

The evaluation drew on a desk review of project documents and data, in-country interviews and focus group discussions with LFI staff, volunteers and CRS PEER project staff, and a survey among LFI staff. The results demonstrate that the PEER project succeeded in strengthening LFI partners' emergency and overall institutional capacity; helped to improve their financial, procurement, HR and other institutional systems as well as their use of SPHERE standards and relevant technical sectors related to emergency response.

The evaluation also illuminates lessons around emergency response capacity strengthening and partnership, and shows that diverse ways exist to successfully strengthen institutional and technical capacity of local organizations and identifies good practices and recommendations for future capacity strengthening initiatives.

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

Expected Systems Improvement

- Measurable improvement in organizational systems and procedures. Creation of new policies, procedures, and manuals enabled all partners to be more effective, creative, transparent, and responsive—and on a sustainable basis. Improvements include:
 - Writing rapid, quality emergency situation reports that led to good programming, and even new funding opportunities.
 - Contributing to cluster meetings to support more coordinated overall responses.
 - Capturing and using beneficiary feedback on programming (emergency and non-emergency) to better meet immediate needs and develop future responses.

Unexpected Outcomes

- Gaining new respect from government and peer organizations, and opportunities for collaboration:
 - The Indonesian government signed an MOU with them for future emergency responses.
 - Partners in Lebanon and Jordan are working together in groundbreaking interfaith initiatives.
 - Partners in India and Indonesia have been asked to train other organizations and are now sending staff to assist emergency responses in nearby countries.
 - Partners in India are working with communities on disaster preparedness.
 - A partner in Indonesia developed a special beneficiary needs assessment app.



A training for participating partners on child protection and targeting

LESSONS LEARNED

- A trusting, open, mutual partnership.
- A full commitment from the local partner (from the Board of Directors to volunteers)—not only to attend trainings and accompaniment sessions, but to institutionalize change.
- A strong CRS staffing structure: diverse staff with exceptional skills in partnership and capacity strengthening, with differing areas of technical expertise for supporting the range of partner needs.
- A sequence of activities that starts with institutional capacity assessments, is followed by practical/hands on training, and concludes with substantial coaching and mentoring.
 - A systemic, participatory and transparent approach gave partners not only an understanding of what a professional organization is, but also a “road map” to get there.
 - Follow up coaching with individual organizations revealed areas of weakness, deepened learning about the topics, and led to customized policies for their own use.
- Support to partners as they think through the dissemination of learning within their organizations, and how to institutionalize it.
- Accompaniment throughout the project and especially in the later stages, as partners institutionalize change.
- A three-year minimum to carry out the project. Four or five years are optimal to enable partner staff to fully apply the knowledge and skills gained, maintain systemic changes, and even extend the learning to peer organizations.
- Create a role for government or other emergency responders—including local organizations, INGOs, and/or the UN—in the project when possible to strengthen relationships.



BEST PRACTICES

- The focus of learning on SPHERE Standards and Protection Mainstreaming helped organizations experience a “mind change” about the seriousness of emergency response. For example, one partner, for the first time, intentionally included two women in its most recent emergency assessment team to best understand female beneficiary needs.
- Finding ways for all organizations to assist with an emergency during the life of the project helped them practice what they had learned.
- Enabling peer learning through exchange visits, networking events, writing workshops and secondments helped organizations deepen their understanding, and also form responder networks.

LOOKING AHEAD: THE EMPOWER PROJECT

CRS' Continuing Investment in Local/National Responders

Through the Empowering Partner Organizations Working on Emergency Response (EMPOWER) project, CRS is building the capacity of 13 local partner organizations from the Caribbean (Dominican Republic, Cuba, Antilles, Jamaica, Grenada, Trinidad & Tobago) and South America (Venezuela, Colombia, Brasil, Ecuador, and Peru) over a 2-year project (2018 – 2019) to effectively prepare for and respond to disasters. The project will support organizations to:

- Strengthen platforms to facilitate networking among emergency response stakeholders, and create joint, coordinated efforts
- Help to strengthen organizational structures and capacities
- Support their external donor positioning, proposal writing
- Improve internal controls to support partner eligibility for funding

CRS Commitment to Localization

CRS is committed to making humanitarian action as local as possible by:

- Enhancing capacity strengthening efforts to its local partners on emergency preparedness, response and coordination
- Advocating for reduction of barriers, including administrative burdens, that prevent organizations and donors from partnering with local and national responders
- Supporting the inclusion of local and national responders in international coordination mechanisms
- Advocating for and supporting attainment of the global target set at the World Humanitarian Summit that, by 2020, at least a quarter of all humanitarian aid funding will go directly to local and national responders

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“The impact of PEER is the fact that we do better projects. Our internal work in procurement, staff hiring, map of authority is better now. Beneficiaries told us that we are doing more smooth and easy work.” - Partner in Lebanon

“PEER project promoted mutual experience sharing among LFI's. This was a very important thing for us as we were learning.” - Partner in Jordan

“Thanks to PEER we prioritized the protection of our staff as well as the protection of beneficiaries. We know how to deal with beneficiaries and not exploit them.” - Partner in Lebanon

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Stay in Touch!

To learn more about the PEER project or CRS emergency responses in general, contact: emergencies@crs.org