

# Technical Brief: Capacity Strengthening with the Catholic Church of Rwanda

Longtime development partners Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Rwanda and the Catholic Church of Rwanda began a unique collaboration in 2004 when CRS started providing technical assistance, accompaniment, and limited funding for capacity strengthening in the Church. These interventions evolved into the *Church Strategic Support Portfolio*. Drawn from the in-depth case study about this experience, this brief highlights points that might be useful to other implementers in related situations.

Rather than to try to re-create any of the circumstances in Rwanda, CRS suggests that readers scan their environment for characteristics that are either similar to those encountered in Rwanda or that could yield comparable situations. This brief and the accompanying case study are not how-to manuals—many organizations have different and equally valid approaches and tools to strengthen capacity—instead they seek to share one unique success and complement other capacity strengthening tools and approaches.

## WHY STRENGTHEN CAPACITY?

In Rwanda, as in many developing countries, civil society organizations are increasingly called upon to strengthen their management capacity. These improvements help the organizations to better fulfill their missions, to comply with government requirements of accountability and transparency, and to compete for international donor funds.

## LIMITED RESOURCES CAN YIELD DRAMATIC RESULTS

Capacity strengthening efforts require dedicated human and financial resources, yet even a modest budget can spark meaningful change. The Church Strategic Support Portfolio was funded with annual allotments of CRS private funding (nearly US\$800,000 over three years) and contributions (almost US\$40,000 over four years) from Trócaire. CRS committed consultants and staff time, first for specific capacity building tasks or purchases (e.g., training to use new software) and later for ongoing project management and technical assistance. CRS also funded three positions: a Strategic Plan Coordinator within the Episcopal Conference and two capacity strengthening staff in the Diocese of Cyangugu.

## CHURCH STRATEGIC SUPPORT PORTFOLIO: FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Stakeholders identified four factors for success in Rwanda. The factors are consistent with organizational development theories, but CRS does not regard them as prerequisites per se.

### External Environment

Organizational development theories often reference an environment supportive of change, but the environment in Rwanda *demand*ed change. Transformations in international donor priorities and in Rwanda's society, government, and development approaches affected the Church. Some factors were complex, such as post-genocide reflection and reconciliation. Others were direct and undeniable, such as new or newly enforced laws or donor policies. The Church realized it could not

## INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: A VISION FOR HUMAN POTENTIAL

The concept of Integral Human Development (IHD) from Catholic social teaching envisions a world where all people are able to live to their full potential, meeting their basic physical needs sustainably, while living with dignity in a just and peaceful society. CRS' IHD Conceptual Framework is a way to think about a situation in an holistic way that promotes IHD.

A key purpose of the Framework is to help CRS and our partners become more effective in assisting the people we serve to improve their **livelihood outcomes** (the primary being IHD). Livelihood outcomes are the result of the **livelihood strategies**, which are based primarily on our many different **assets**—the resources we have to work with and build on. **Systems and structures** are the institutions, rules and social norms that we work within. Our strategies also have to take into account risks that threaten lives and livelihoods: **shocks, cycles and trends**.

Source: Adapted from a 2008 CRS brochure, "Integral Human Development (IHD): The Concept & the Framework." Available at: [www.crsprogramquality.org/storage/pubs/general/IHD%20Brochure.pdf](http://www.crsprogramquality.org/storage/pubs/general/IHD%20Brochure.pdf).

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ignore the new landscape—without change, the institution risked failing in its mission and losing relevance.

**Tip:** Regularly scan your environment for conditions that enable—or require—change and consider how to leverage those conditions for meaningful capacity strengthening. CRS' Integral Human Development Framework may be useful.

### Leadership & Commitment

Effective and dedicated leaders in CRS Rwanda, the Episcopal Conference, and in the Diocese of Cyangugu were important to this work, in part because the program evolved without a multi-year work plan or objectives to guide activities. These leaders were charismatic and tireless champions for the value of management to the Church, sometimes because of their own experiences and education. By advocating within the institution, they engaged leaders at diocese and parish levels who went on to advocate with their peers and communities. This was especially critical because dioceses are autonomous, yet their full participation is vital to the goal of a stronger Catholic Church in Rwanda.

**Tip:** Look for natural leaders to advocate for the cause, but remain open to unexpected allies as well. Their dedication can help the organization to navigate change, and even embark on the journey of change.

### Meaningful Relationships & Trust

Mutually respectful relationships are critical to capacity strengthening—a process that involves addressing challenges of both the learner and the “expert.” Trusting relationships within the Church and CRS—organizations that share core values of support for the poor and vulnerable, share a faith, and share more than 50 years of collaboration—helped make organizational change possible. The institutional relationships as well as individual relationships helped prepare stakeholders for change and fortified the deep partnership and subsidiarity between the Church and CRS. Additionally CRS staff worked side-by-side with Church staff, reflecting CRS' belief that capacity strengthening more than a transfer of skills or tools. Relationships made this accompaniment possible, and the accompaniment strengthened the relationship.

**Tip:** Leverage existing relationships honorably and cultivate new relationships among individuals and organizations. In all partnerships, strive for honest communication, trust, accompaniment, and solidarity.

### Equitable Negotiation

In part because the portfolio has developed organically and resources varied from year to year, CRS and Church partners learned to navigate uncertainty. The commitment to each other and the shared vision of an improved institution (the Church) was enough. The limited scope of the capacity strengthening efforts was also a catalyst for collaboration and negotiation. Sensitization workshops helped clergy and CRS staff to jointly determine how to make the journey of change together, and which tools and training would serve the Church best. The Church learned about management practices and CRS learned more about Church structures and language. Tools such as the existing Integral Human Development Framework and canon law, the gap analysis report and deep relationships were critical to the capacity strengthening process.

Tip: Remain open to continuously learning about each other's organizations and to uncertainty. This will help stakeholders to broker the best way forward. Such negotiation also can help bring stakeholders into and ensure ownership of the change process.

### CONCLUSION

Every institution has room to grow and the Church continues on its path to sustainability and self-sufficiency. In the coming years, the Church and CRS hope to expand capacity strengthening efforts throughout Rwanda's nine dioceses and their 168 parishes. To institutionalize the ownership and sustainability of the efforts—and in keeping with CRS' commitment to subsidiarity—this expansion will rely largely on a model of trainings of trainers, and peer-to-peer training and accompaniment model that will utilize technical experts within the Church and reduce CRS' role to one of discrete and specialized technical assistance.