



EMPOWER partners from the English-speaking regions of Cameroon exchange views during a training on preparedness and leadership in emergencies. Photo by Mabel Chenjoh/CRS

EMPOWER Project in Cameroon

Empowering Partner Organizations Working on Emergency Responses in West and Central Africa

Background

EMPOWER West and Central Africa (WCA) is a two-year project funded by USAID/BHA that aims to make the humanitarian response structure in the five target countries accountable, localized, and inclusive. Based on the EMPOWER approach of CRS, the EMPOWER project is implemented in five countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Mali, and Niger. The project supports local humanitarian actors (LHA) to build their capacities on a variety of operational and technical topics, according to their needs. The EMPOWER project also works closely with humanitarian coordinators in each country to reduce obstacles/barriers to participation and leadership in humanitarian coordination forums. It is in these forums that organizations discuss and agree on response standards and coordinate to avoid duplication in their responses. This ensures quality, timely emergency responses.

QUICK FACTS

Donor	USAID/BHA
Budget in 2022	\$81,187
Budget in 2023	\$202,003
Partners	SHUMAS, SIRDEP, CARITAS KUMBO, SUDAHSER, AMEF, CARITAS KUMBA, ASOPV, CADEPI, TAMMOUNDE SPERANZA and AJED-MR.
Time frame	October 2021-September 2023. (A one-year extension was added, to end in September 2024)



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Barrier analysis in Cameroon

During the start-up phase of the project, a barrier analysis was carried out through interviews with members of different coordination structures and with local humanitarian actors to understand the barriers impeding the active participation and leadership of these actors. In Cameroon, the team conducted 26 focus group discussions - 13 with local humanitarian actors and 13 with coordination structures both at the national and regional levels. Most respondents in both groups agreed that internet connectivity was the main obstacle, followed by general infrastructure. According to their feedback, the obstacles in Cameroon are more logistical than technical.

Partner selection, capacity assessment and customized capacity-building plan

The partners were identified through a call for applications circulated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). After pre-selection and due diligence, 10 partners were selected. CRS then aided the selected organizations in carrying out a self-assessment of their operational and organizational capacities. In this process, each partner also created an action plan which they can use to make improvements on their own or request individualized support from CRS via the EMPOWER WCA project or leverage some other existing partnerships. It is worth mentioning that partners also updated some policy documents, and adopted other policies that are important to be more effective in humanitarian response. CRS supported them in the review process.

So far in Cameroon, CRS has supported partners in the following areas: finance and accountability; leadership and coordination, gender and inclusion, administration and governance, human resources, strategic planning.

Project results

Trainings



EMPOWER partners are trained on techniques for effective resource mobilization. Photo by Mabel Chenjoh/CRS

The project team organized five trainings in-person, for both French and English-speaking partners, on the following topics:

- Resource mobilization strategies (Each organization developed a resource mobilization plan).
- Safe and dignified programming (protection mainstreaming)
- Sphere standards on Quality and Accountability, Core Humanitarian principles (CHS), Humanitarian coordination systems (facilitated by CRS and OCHA).
- Financial risk management and fraud mitigation - each organization developed an action plan to prevent fraud.
- Emergency leadership and preparedness.

Collaboration with humanitarian coordination system

In addition, the project team is working with the humanitarian coordination system to use the results of the barrier analysis to work with in-country coordination mechanisms, with the aim of increasing the participation and leadership of local humanitarian organizations in coordination forums. CRS has been very active in the National Localization Working Group since its creation in 2022. The EMPOWER Program Manager in Cameroon participates in discussions and activities aimed at advancing discussions on localization.

Small grants to LHAs to support leadership positions in humanitarian coordination forums

In 2022 and 2023, CRS with support from OCHA advocated to coordination forums to encourage selective processes allowing competitive LHAs to assume leadership positions. As a result, seven amongst the ten EMPOWER partners were selected to benefit from small grants to support leadership positions they acquired in humanitarian coordination forums. The seven sub-grantees are: SHUMAS, SUDAHSER in the NorthWest, AMEF, CARITAS KUMBA in the Southwest, CADEPI, TAMMOUNDE SPERANZA and AJED-MR in the Far North.

CRS through the EMPOWER project supports these partners through small grants, to help cover some costs related to coordination (including staff cost, logistics, meeting facilities, etc.). As the project draws to a close, local humanitarian organizations continue to advocate for additional resources to sustain these leadership roles in the future.