



# Caring for the caregivers: Understanding Rwandan OVC volunteers in a faith-based setting

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## Introduction

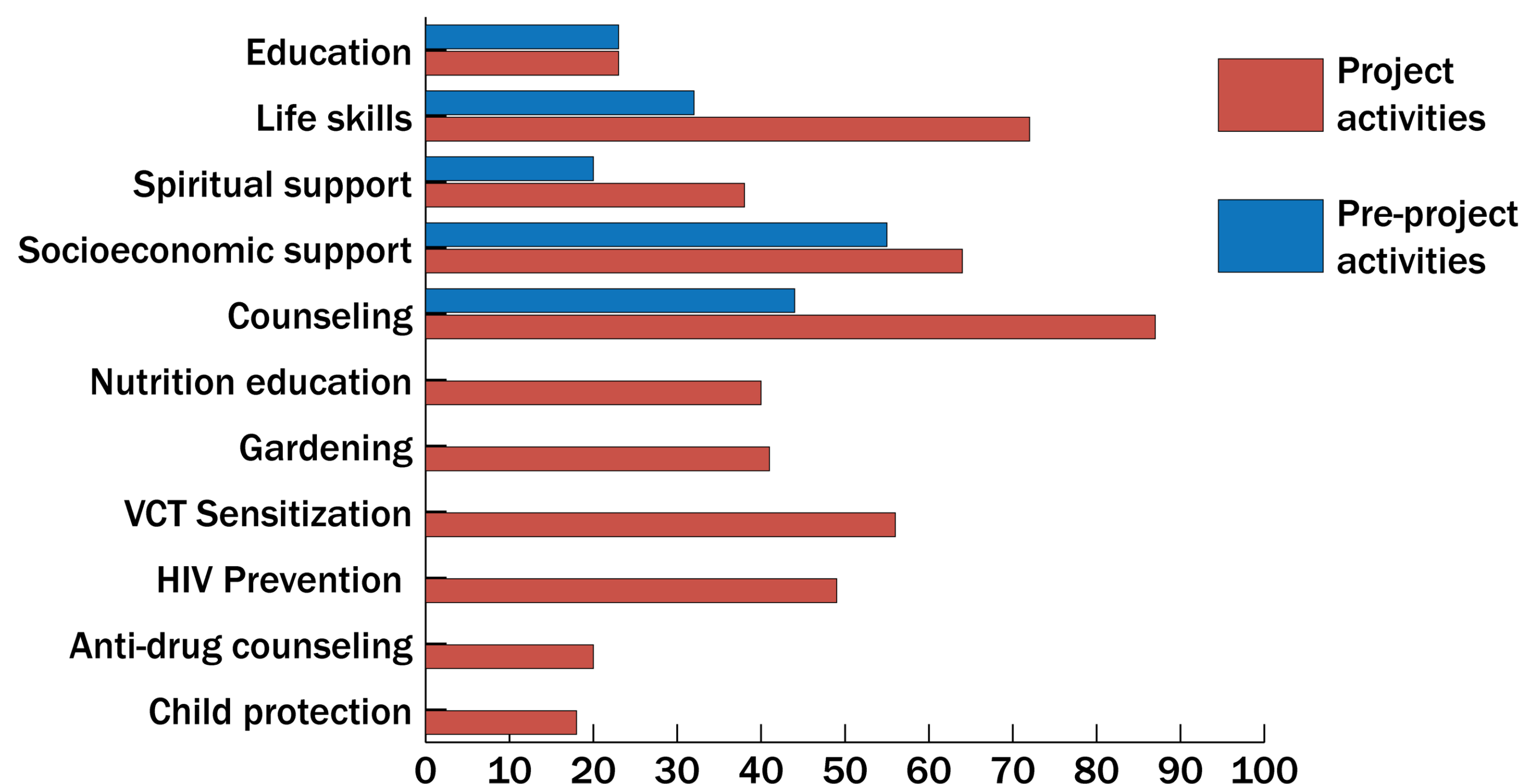
With funding from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR Track 1.0), CRS has been operating an Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Project in Rwanda since 2004. The project relies heavily on the human resource contributions provided by community volunteers. Two of the greatest challenges confronting the OVC project are retention and motivation.

CRS wanted to better understand volunteers -- their motivations and their relationship to the church. The aim of the study was to identify the most effective volunteers, what constitutes an effective incentive, and the costs associated with providing the most appreciated incentives to the best performing volunteers. The goal was to better understand what key variables promoted effective and sustainable volunteer activity.

## Methods

A questionnaire was completed by 256 out of 320 OVC project volunteers. Supervisors completed a questionnaire that ranked volunteers by performance. Twenty five percent of volunteers were ranked as high performers, 25% as low performers, and 50% as medium performers. Performance results were compared with the demographic data, the volunteers' involvement with the church, and their incentive preferences.

**Figure 1.** Volunteers increased their activities and expanded the variety of their work with children



## Findings

### Demographics

- 55% female and 45% male
- 64% married, 22% single, and 13% widowed
- 78% graduates of primary school, 18% secondary school
- 90% of the volunteers are farmers

### Church Involvement

- 95% of volunteers are regular church attendees (12% daily, 55% more than twice a week, 28% weekly)
- Volunteers are also church leaders: 58% are chairs of the Catholic Action Movement, 17% are catechists, 14% are otherwise involved, 11% are parish office workers

### Volunteer History

- 67% had volunteered for more than five years
- 81% of volunteers knew their assigned beneficiary OVC prior to the project assignment
- 76% of volunteers worked with children prior to the project
- 96% planned to continue assisting the OVC after the project has ended

### Volunteer Burden

- 31% travel more than 5km, 45% travel 4km+, 45% travel 3km or less
- 86% walk in order to reach the children, 12% use the project bike, 1% use their own bike, 1% hire a taxi bike

### Volunteer Incentives and Cost

- Volunteers ranked desired incentives: 37% bicycle, 25% cow, 23% training, 11% monthly allowances and 4% other
- Highest performing volunteer's gave similar rankings to the incentives, but were slightly more likely to consider a cow as a reasonable incentive (30%)
- Estimated costs of incentives: 1 bicycle = \$ 100, 1 cow = \$200 – \$1000, 1 training = \$150, monthly allowance = \$30-\$80.

## Discussion and Conclusions

There were no significant predictors of volunteer performance. The demographics of volunteers (gender, marital status, education level and occupation) had no significant relationship to their performance. Likewise, religious activities and other volunteer commitments did not have a significant impact on volunteer performance.

The majority (86%) of volunteers walk long distances (45% travel more than 4 km) in order to reach the beneficiaries. The highest ranked incentive for all volunteers was a bicycle, which at \$100, is one of the most reasonably priced incentives. The provision of a bicycle to volunteers could increase visits with OVC; and thus improve the quality of the program.

In this study, volunteer performance was measured by the supervisor's ranking. Future studies should consider asking older OVC or caretakers to measure volunteer performance. Alternatively, objective surveys such as the OVC wellbeing tool or the Child Status Index could be used to track OVC wellbeing and analyze volunteer performance.

This study revealed the busy lives of volunteers. Volunteers are devout church attendees and church leaders. There was a small correlation between volunteers with heavy volunteer burdens outside of the project and their performance, but it was not statistically significant. Future OVC projects should understand that church-recruited volunteers have heavy responsibilities. However, the involvement of volunteers in their parish and in the OVC project ensures that the OVC project is integrated into faith community and thus sustainable.