

Learning from comprehensive capacity strengthening in Kenya

In 2008, CRS began the Support and Assistance to Indigenous Implementing Agencies (SAIDIA) project in Kenya as part of a consortium with Jhpiego, an international nonprofit health organization affiliated with Johns Hopkins University. CRS selected 15 partners to receive capacity strengthening in comprehensive HIV and AIDS service delivery. This learning paper describes the outcomes of the SAIDIA project, seen through the implementing partners' eyes and through quantitative data.

In five years of intensive support, CRS has learned a lot about partner development in Kenya:

- In aid work, it's easy to reduce human interactions to clinical procedures—but CRS is known instead for respect, mentorship and a physical personal presence.
- Accompaniment is a new and unparalleled standard of partnership.
- Streamlining business systems and requirements can greatly strengthen CRS partnerships.
- An established monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system is essential to gathering information on the effectiveness of CRS capacity strengthening.
- The relationship between financial investment and capacity strengthening is still being defined.
- Relatively modest financial investments on behalf of CRS can have extremely high returns for local partners.

INSIGHTS ON THE CAPACITY STRENGTHENING EXPERIENCE

These insights are the product of discussions with two of the SAIDIA partners: the Kenya Widows and Orphans Support Programme and the Movement of Men Against AIDS in Kenya.

The SAIDIA project produced changes in every scope of partner operations, from the uppermost management to communities never before reached. Program diversification, with excellent technical and supervisory support, increased the impact and visibility of partners in their target communities. They were able to engage entirely new beneficiary populations. Participation in institutional strengthening events increased the productivity of partners' relationships internally (such as among board members) and externally (with national and local levels of the government of Kenya). Networking opportunities fostered participation in international forums and the preliminary discussion of a SAIDIA partner coalition. Partners' M&E also improved immensely. The complex reporting system required by CRS prompted partners to restructure their systems and adhere to them strongly. SAIDIA partners experienced valuable growth in both tangible resources and functional competencies as a result of the project.

CRS' Strengths

Asked to describe the strengths of CRS in partnership and capacity strengthening, SAIDIA partners repeatedly discussed the relationship in human terms. In development work, it can be easy to reduce human processes to clinical procedures—but CRS is known instead for respect, mentorship and a physical personal presence. CRS' strong internal policies and systems are an example to partners, and CRS offers practical tools they can adopt. CRS' commitment to transparency and partnership without superiority are evident to partners. Open, available and respectful staff embody CRS' willingness to resolve problems collaboratively. With the exception of the Finance Department, strong and immediate feedback loops are an asset of CRS partnership. Partners feel CRS is skilled in national and international advocacy. By using M&E and data systemically, CRS also exemplifies the level of organization they request of partners. Maintaining these high expectations improves the accountability of partners and helps to ensure their sustainability in the long term.

Strengthening the Partnership Model

In seeking to strengthen the CRS partnership model, SAIDIA partners made three recommendations: streamline business and communication procedures, evolve requirements, and increase focus on key capacity-strengthening areas.

At times, the review of partner reports by CRS Finance was delayed two to three months, and vouchers were returned as much as two years after submission. It's important to improve the efficiency of feedback systems in partnership. Internal processes should be evaluated for their effectiveness, especially in the Finance Department. SAIDIA partners felt that accrual should be done yearly (instead of monthly) to prevent misinterpreting funds. Duplication in business procedures, especially in processing pay slips, was identified as a challenge. **Streamlining business systems and requirements can greatly strengthen CRS partnerships.**

Looking back at “crash programs” during SAIDIA, partners emphasized the need to improve communication between themselves and CRS. When abrupt funding became available, SAIDIA partners requested numerous interventions of consortium members in a short period of time. This pressured partners to use the available funding, despite lacking the necessary structures and resources.

It's important that CRS and partners communicate information, timelines, and decisions quickly to one another as funding situations change.

The implementing partners felt that static documentation requirements made business processes tedious. During SAIDIA, they remained the same in all years of the partnership. Gradually lowering the benchmark of documentation required to receive funding, as the partnership evolves, is an alternative to a one-size-fits-all approach. During SAIDIA, the complexity of monthly reporting took as much as 50 percent of the partners' time every month. **As the partner matures, the amount of formal requirements should be revised and lessened.** Creating systemic opportunities to propose and discuss these adaptations will support an open, evolving partnership.

Partners identified resource mobilization, networking and transition planning as areas needing greater focus in capacity strengthening. CRS should guide partners in the process of transitioning staff and structures into new social contexts. Promoting partner activities through marketing platforms will support their sustainability and ability to network. Forming a coalition of partners may also be valuable. **It's important to follow through on all of the original targets for capacity strengthening in a partnership.** In SAIDIA, certain areas were identified for the project originally but ultimately remained absent.

Valuing the Accompaniment Experience

Accompaniment is a pillar of the CRS capacity-strengthening approach. CRS supports partners by working with them closely in a supportive, not superior, advisory role. Partners describe the process as “someone taking your hand until you have learned”—a humble and human approach to partnership. Accompaniment combines step-by-step mentorship with open, effective communication. The program officer plays a crucial role in solidifying these processes. Accompaniment opens doors for CRS' partners. By leveraging CRS' strong institutional relationships (with the government, for example), accompaniment provides a gateway for partners to engage with international and national actors in a new way. Accompaniment is a symbol of CRS' capacity strengthening—inclusive, effective and sustainable. It is also a new standard of partnership, unparalleled in partners' experiences with other organizations.

Sustaining Success by Enhancing Partners' Marketability

Effective capacity strengthening hinges on the ability of CRS to support the attractiveness of partners to staff and donors. Ensuring their continued marketability is a key component of sustainability. From the partners' perspective, it's important to expand networks and improve positioning in the national and international development arena. Enhancing the profile of partners requires greater capacity building in resource mobilization. CRS should help partners develop targeted skills and resources for national advocacy. Partners need support in diversifying their portfolios, as well. Together, partners and CRS should create a strategy for the sustainability of community programs. Ensuring that programs can be maintained after the project close will establish partners as viable and desirable local institutions. This sustainability will further strengthen their image with government, regional and international actors.

EVIDENCE OF CHANGE DURING THE PROJECT

In the CRS capacity-strengthening model, organizational development occurs in two domains: management quality (MQ) and program quality (PQ). Program quality includes technical processes and structures that relate to an organization's programmatic activities. Management quality includes the administrative and operational support systems that characterize the NGO as an institution. These include governance, strategic planning, finance, supply chain management, human resources and information technology. An extensive description of MQ processes is in CRS' *Institutional Strengthening* guide. Although PQ and MQ are distinct, they constantly intersect. Capacity strengthening that takes place in either area affects the other.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the SAIDIA project, a documentation team in Kenya, supported by the Strength in Solidarity Project, identified five domains of change. These were selected as a representative sample of all the possible components of MQ and PQ. The documentation team established these domains by comparing the CRS *Institutional Strengthening* guide with the World Health Organization standards for organizational development.

Domains of Change in the SAIDIA Project

MANAGEMENT QUALITY	PROGRAM QUALITY
Governance	Service Delivery
Human Resource Management	Resource Mobilization
Finance Management	

An established M&E system is essential to gathering information on the effectiveness of CRS capacity strengthening. There was no single system for M&E during SAIDIA. The information on indicators was gathered largely at the end of the project through forensic research. In the future, it's important to outline M&E systems, domains of change, and source documents from the beginning of the project, with their eventual evaluation in mind. Changes can then be tracked throughout the project, as they occur.

Management Quality

Governance

Indicator: The number of partners with established strategic plans

There were four main capacity-strengthening events in governance in SAIDIA. In FY 2010–11, one capacity-building workshop was held for board members, with 36 participants and at a total cost of \$2,197 (all dollar amounts are USD). In the institution-strengthening process, CRS engaged a consultancy firm to provide three didactic trainings. The firm also supported accompaniment. CRS accompaniment enabled partners to take advantage of all communication channels for institutional growth throughout the project. This included one-on-one mentorship and online support. When necessary, two- to three-day follow-up visits occurred to reiterate learning and review MQ systems onsite. These visits were the milestones of the overarching accompaniment process. They occurred quarterly by one CRS program person and three consultant staff. The total cost of the joint institutional strengthening and accompaniment efforts was \$47,500.

STAGE	PARTNERS WITH STRATEGIC PLANS
Pre-Workshop	6
Post-Workshop	9
Total	15

Only six of SAIDIA's 15 partners had functioning documents prior to the strategic plan development workshop. Five partners had incomplete drafts, and four lacked strategic plans. As a result of the workshop, all partners created and retained final, operational documents. CRS capacity-strengthening efforts in governance were effective.

Human Resource Management

Indicators

- The percentage of staff retention
- The number of trained staff still employed by the partner

CRS used both capacity building and accompaniment to strengthen partners' human resource management (HRM). Two capacity-building trainings, five days each, were provided in FY 2010–11, totaling 47 participants and \$10,931. Support supervision visits were made as a means of accompaniment throughout the project. The support supervision activity was a comprehensive endeavor, touching PQ and MQ issues. Over the course of the project, 83 support supervision visits were made in HRM. The cost of these visits in total was \$50,920.

After the first fiscal year, staff loss increased, while there was a high net increase in total staff. During the initial phases of SAIDIA, many partner staff were underqualified for the structural demands of their positions. To continue the process of institutional strengthening, it was necessary to release certain personnel. Partners sought staff with greater experience and the ability to navigate developed organizational systems.

From FY 2009–10 to 2010–11, staff loss plateaued, while the total staff increased by over 100. The two capacity-building trainings that occurred during this year could have bolstered retention. The Rapid Result Initiative (RRI) that occurred mid-2011 may have also increased staff.

Beginning in July 2011, a three-month RRI took place in which carryover project funding needed to be spent. In order to meet the increased targets specified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), additional staff were hired and trained for the three-month period. After the RRI (in FY 2011–12) they were disengaged. This partially explains the significant drop in staff retention in fiscal

Percentage Staff Retention During SAIDIA

FISCAL YEAR	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13
Total Staff	33	138	235	232	223
Staff Loss	1	12	12	50	28
% Retention	97.0	91.3	94.9	78.4	87.4

Staff Still Employed After Receiving Capacity-Building Training

CAPACITY-BUILDING INITIATIVES	STAFF TRAINED	STAFF STILL EMPLOYED BY PARTNER (AS OF JUNE 2013)	COST OF TRAINING (USD)
USG Financial Training June 2010	32	19	\$6,206
Institutional Capacity Building April 2011 May 2011	47	30	\$57,931
Board Members Training May 2011	36	34	\$2,197
Refresher Finance Training July 2011	38	28	\$7,319
Proposal Development June 2012	44	38	\$8,268
Total	197	149	\$81,921

years 2011–12 and 2012–13. Many of the RRI staff were subsequently employed by similar organizations.

SAIDIA was a major donor to many of the partners. As the project neared its conclusion, therefore, many staff anticipated a drop in funding with program closure. They began looking for other jobs. These perceptions were a significant factor in the lower retention rates during the last two years of SAIDIA.

From June 2010 to June 2012, CRS trained a total of 197 partner staff in various capacity-building initiatives. The total cost was \$81,921. As of June 2013, about 76 percent of the trained staff (149 individuals) were still employed by the partner.

What happened to the other 24 percent? It's not yet clear if the loss of trained staff also implies a loss of CRS investment. **The relationship between financial investment and capacity strengthening is still being defined.** When the capacity of staff is built, they become more marketable and attractive to other, similar organizations. During SAIDIA, staff loss generally occurred to organizations serving the same community with comparable missions. It's believed that investments in capacity strengthening are not inherently lost with staff turnover. They may change hands, but ultimately remain a relevant piece of local development.

Insights From Kenya

- The active indicators for HRM still need to be contextualized and defined. Discussing the variable retention rates in SAIDIA, CRS in Kenya said that “organizations grow like babies” and “when they are small, these things happen a lot.”
- HRM is likely linked to the organizations’ overall level of development at the time of capacity strengthening. All partners of the SAIDIA project were small and not yet organizationally sound. Effectively, the “younger” the partner, the greater the learning curve.
- Retention rates might be more useful in evaluating larger, well-established organizations. HRM data should also be considered in the context of the industry standard for similarly sized organizations.
- Asking the “where, why and how” of staff loss can give valuable insight into the full cycle of HRM.

Finance Management

Indicator: The number and monetary value of funding vouchers returned

CRS provided two capacity-building trainings, of five days each, in finance management in FY 2009–10 and 2011–12. These trainings totaled 70 participants and \$13,525.

Number of Funding Vouchers Returned During SAIDIA

FISCAL YEAR	VOUCHERS RETURNED	TOTAL VALUE (USD)
2008-09	Program activity not yet started	N/A
2009-10	168	\$134,000
2010-11	128	\$188,000
2011-12	85	\$77,000
2012-13 (as of January)	59	\$55,000

Between FY 2010–11 and 2011–12, there was a major shift in the finance management of partners. During this time, the total value of returned vouchers more than halved—decreasing by \$111,000! This trend continued into FY 2012–13, though current data reflect only half of the fiscal year.

These findings suggest that CRS capacity strengthening in finance management was quite effective. **The relatively modest original investment of \$13,525 provided an exceptionally high financial return as well.**

Program Quality

Service Delivery

Indicator: The total number of partner sites delivering services per required guidelines

CRS provided extensive capacity strengthening in partner service delivery. Three capacity-building trainings, focusing on Health Management Information Systems, were held in FY 2010–11, 2011–12 and 2012–13. They totaled 98 participants and cost \$3,231. Support supervision visits were provided as a means of accompaniment and comprehensive MQ–PQ support during this time as well. In these three years, there were 17 total support supervision visits, costing \$1,828.

There were significant increases in the number of partner sites offering services across the years of the SAIDIA project, culminating in a 280 percent increase from the first year. This robust, consistent upward trend of service delivery is a strong indicator that the CRS capacity strengthening efforts in this target area were effective.

From FY 2010–11 to FY 2011–12, the number of service sites more than doubled. This was the first year of a capacity building training on Health Management Information Systems. Relative to other organizational domains, however, the investments made in programmatic capacity strengthening were relatively small. SAIDIA partners’ immense expansion in services likely indicates that there is a strong correlation between program outcomes and organizational development in a greater sense.

Resource Mobilization

Indicator: The number and monetary amount of the funding proposals that were awarded to partners

In FY 2011–12, CRS offered one capacity-building training on proposal development to strengthen partners’ resource mobilization. The training was provided to 44 participants at a cost of \$8,268.

The number of proposals submitted by partners increased by over 90 percent after the workshop. This suggests that partners were more comfortable with the submission process and more confident in their ability to win funding. The workshop may have also improved their ability navigate different funding opportunities. After the workshop, two more partners submitted proposals and were awarded funding. At least two partners submitted their first successful proposal as a result of CRS training. **Most importantly, the total amount of funding awarded to partners nearly tripled with an increase of \$1.72 million—not bad for an original investment of \$8,268.**

Number of Partner Sites Delivering Services During SAIDIA Fiscal Years

SERVICE DELIVERY AREA	FISCAL YEARS				
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Abstinence and Being Faithful (AB)	10	10	10	12	12
Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC)	4	4	4	4	4
Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT)	0	0	0	29	30
HIV Testing and Counseling (HTC)	7	14	17	24	25
Tuberculosis (TB)	8	11	15	24	25
Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART)	7	12	15	16	23
Prevention with Positives (PWP)	0	0	0	15	18
Total	36	51	61	124	137

Resource Mobilization From the Beginning of SAIDIA to Present

PROPOSALS	BEFORE WORKSHOP	AFTER WORKSHOP
Submitted	22	42
Awarded funding	13	23
Total amount awarded	\$1.02 million	\$2.74 million

PARTNERS	BEFORE WORKSHOP	AFTER WORKSHOP
Submitted proposals	13	15
Awarded funding	10	12

For more information, contact Partnership@global.crs.org.