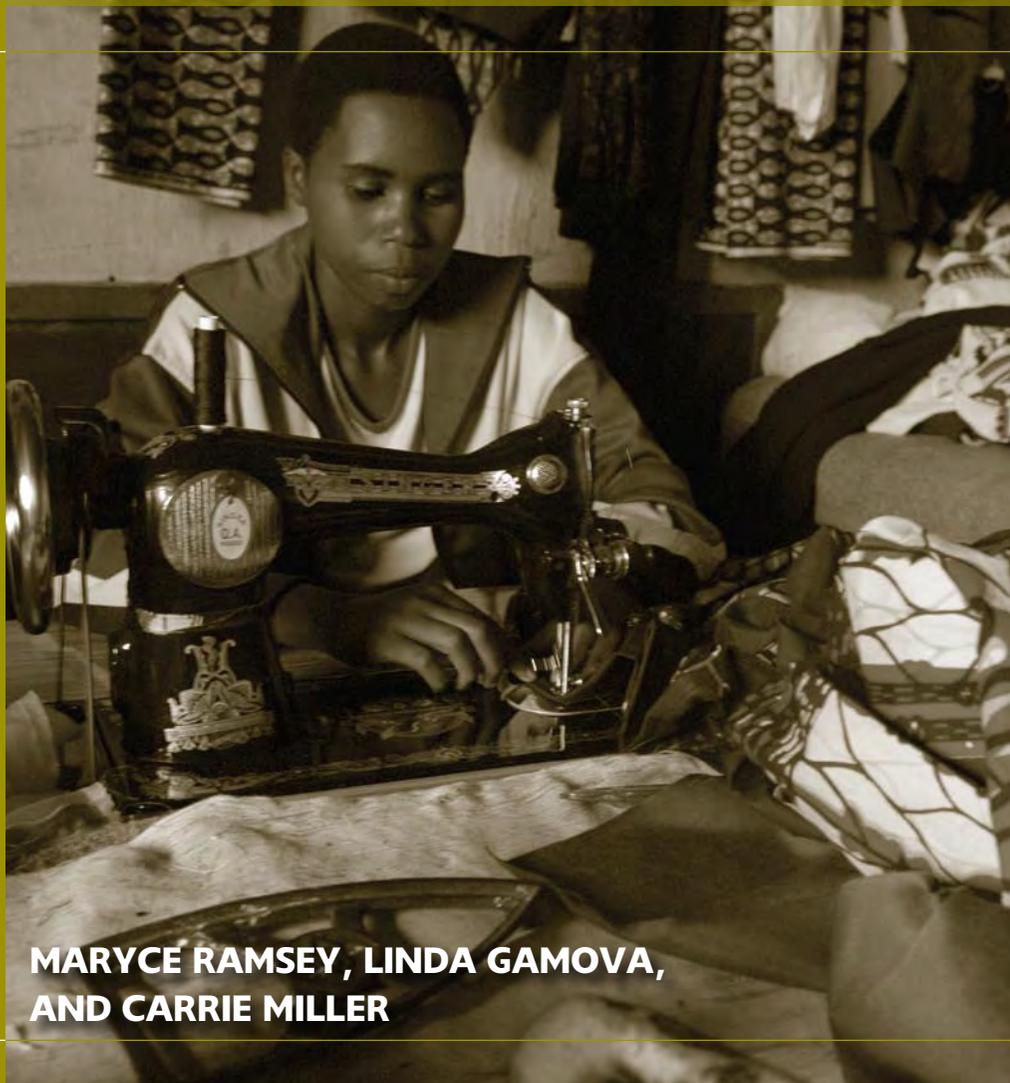


Safety Net Centers in Rwanda

Strengthening Partners to Respond to the Needs of the Most Vulnerable

PARTNERSHIP



**MARYCÉ RAMSEY, LINDA GAMOVA,
AND CARRIE MILLER**

CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDIES NUMBER 3



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

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SOLIDARITY WILL TRANSFORM THE WORLD

Partnership is fundamental to how CRS sees itself in the world. We believe profoundly that change occurs through our Catholic Church and other local partners, that by sustaining and strengthening local institutions we enhance a community's ability to respond to its own problems. Catholic Relief Services puts its approach to development, emergency relief, and social change into practice through partnerships with a wide array of organizations: local churches and nonprofits, host governments, international agencies, and others.

Our belief that solidarity will transform the world inspires a commitment to right relationships with those we serve, in collaboration with the Catholic Church and other faith-based or secular organizations closest to those in need. We strive for partnerships founded on a long-term vision and a commitment to peace and justice. For more than sixty years, CRS has worked side-by-side with our partners to alleviate human suffering, promote social justice, and assist people as they strive for their own development.

OUR PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES

- 1.** Share a vision for addressing people's immediate needs and the underlying causes of suffering and injustice.
- 2.** Make decisions at a level as close as possible to the people who will be affected by them.
- 3.** Strive for mutuality, recognizing that each partner brings skills, resources, knowledge, and capacities in a spirit of autonomy.
- 4.** Foster equitable partnerships by mutually defining rights and responsibilities.
- 5.** Respect differences and commit to listen and learn from each other.
- 6.** Encourage transparency.
- 7.** Engage with civil society, to help transform unjust structures and systems.
- 8.** Commit to a long-term process of local organizational development.
- 9.** Identify, understand, and strengthen community capacities, which are the primary source of solutions to local problems.
- 10.** Promote sustainability by reinforcing partners' capacity to identify their vulnerabilities and build on their strengths.

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Food for Peace, the United States' primary overseas food aid program, was established by Congress in 1954 with the Agricultural Trade and Development Act. Under the authority of the act, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) channels funds and food to developing countries throughout the world. Catholic Relief Services began working in Rwanda on food security issues in 1963. Since 1995 CRS has been an implementing partner of Food for Peace programs in that country.

Rwanda is a poor country in desperate need of development aid. It ranks 161st out of the 177 countries in the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Index, a combination of economic, health and education measures. That ranking puts Rwanda among the 21 countries in the index's "low human development" category.¹ Statistics on Rwandan children in particular signal their position among the most vulnerable population groups. Forty-five percent of Rwandans under the age of five suffer moderate to severe stunting.² Eighty-three percent of Rwandan children, or roughly three million, are classified as orphans or otherwise vulnerable because they cannot consistently rely on a family or informal means of support.³

These and other indicators of need form the backdrop of the CRS Rwanda Development Assistance Program (DAP), implemented from 2000 to 2005 and funded by FFP. The DAP's goal was to increase food security in Rwanda for smallholder farm families and for Rwanda's most vulnerable. Many of the most vulnerable receive assistance through institutions such as orphanages, centers for street children, schools for the handicapped, and homes for the elderly, dying and destitute. Collectively these centers are called safety net centers (SNC). An end-of-project evaluation found that program safety net centers had

¹ United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Human Development Index (HDI), 2007/2008.

² http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/rwanda_statistics.html

³ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/rwanda_1717.html

DAVID SNYDER



CRS-provided corn-soy blend and cooking oil.

increased food security for 7,000 orphans, street children, handicapped, and elderly, as well as for 4,400 households. At the same time SNC ability to manage the food aid commodities provided by USAID/FFP through CRS was also enhanced. But the evaluation also found that only partial progress had been made in building the centers' self-sufficiency and that additional capacity-building plans were undercut by staff shortages.⁴ It recommended that any follow-on project substantially expand capacity-building activities to increase SNC and individual self-sufficiency.⁵

Toward the end of the DAP, Food for Peace released its strategic plan for 2006–2010. The plan cited rising costs, growing military, diplomatic and humanitarian demands on the United States, and

the need to increase the impact of food programs to support a decision to reduce the number of countries receiving developmental food aid and focus instead on a “smaller set of strategic countries.”⁶ USAID determined priority countries through discussions with governments and an assessment process. At the same time, the Rwandan government announced a medium-term goal of reducing or eliminating international food aid. The combination of these factors meant that Rwanda was not listed as a priority country and therefore would no longer be eligible for developmental food aid assistance from FFP.

Given the impending phase-out of food assistance and the clear need to prepare individuals, communities, and safety net centers for this withdrawal of support, the Rwandan government, USAID, and CRS strongly supported a final program to prepare program participants for the future. They collaborated to launch the Comprehensive Close Out Strategy Amendment (COSA), a three-year amendment to the DAP covering the period 2007 to 2009, with the goal of decreasing food insecurity among vulnerable populations. The COSA targets the individual, household, and community levels as well as SNCs with food assistance, education, training, and livelihood-generating activities.

This study examines CRS partnership efforts under the COSA to strengthen the capacity of SNCs and the preliminary impact of those efforts on six centers. From the DAP, CRS learned that it needed to intensify its capacity-building efforts and that to do so it would need to revisit its approach to partnerships, its methods, and its activities. The COSA has sharpened the focus on preparing SNCs to raise revenues

⁴ CRS Rwanda, Development Assistance Program, *Food Security Program Final Evaluation Report*, January 11, 2005.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ USAID, Office of Food for Peace, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance, *Strategic Plan 2006-2010*, May 2005.

through better planning, improved management, and new income-generating efforts. CRS has changed its structure and increased staff to better support SNCs in these areas. Most important, CRS has raised the quality of its partnering through clearer communication, contracts that spell out expectations and mutual responsibilities, and a process of mentoring and collaborative problem solving that allowed for flexibility. Based on indications, the intensification of CRS capacity-building efforts is paying off.

Assessing the Capacity of Safety Net Centers

CRS has been providing Food for Peace food aid to safety net institutions in Rwanda since 1995. There is a reason why SNCs have been the recipients of food aid for so long. As their name implies, these centers are often the last resort for those with nowhere else to turn. The centers provide services that give their residents hope for the future and food that is the difference between having nothing to eat and a little to eat. The loss of food aid meant that money spent on critical services such as vocational training, education, palliative care, and rehabilitation services had to be redirected to the even more critical need of buying food, unless additional resources could be generated. Center residents who had already lost much—parents, homes, possessions, health, and independence—faced the loss of even the most basic requirement of life. The end of the DAP was seen not only as a professional challenge to centers and CRS staff but as a moral challenge as well.



Learning auto mechanics at the Bureau Social Gitarama.

Toward the end of 2005 and the close of the DAP, CRS took the first step in preparation for the transition from the DAP to the COSA by assessing the existing capacities and assets of the SNCs. The CRS Integral Human Development (IHD) framework was used to assess human, spiritual, physical, social, political, and natural assets. Information was gathered on a number of topics: land, livestock, and businesses; participation of clients/beneficiaries in the functions of the center; capability of clients/beneficiaries to assist the center with its functions; contributions from other donors; institutional capacity (staff, equipment, and structure). Assessments were also made of administrative, finance, and control systems. Based on these, SNCs were categorized into three groups, defined in table 1. This exercise allowed CRS to determine individual SNC's capacities to “graduate” from food aid and to plan collective capacity-building activities.

TABLE 1: SAFETY NET CENTER ASSESSMENT CATEGORIES

LEVEL 1	High organizational and management capacity
	Significant resources
	Outside funding/donors secured
	Clear vision and objectives
LEVEL 2	Low organizational and management capacity
	Some resources
	Very little outside funding
	Unclear vision and objectives
LEVEL 3	Minimum organizational and management capacity
	Little or no identified resources (assets) at this time
	No outside funding
	No developed vision or objectives

Of the 58 SNCs assessed, 19 were identified as Level 1. These centers did not need to proceed from DAP to COSA as they had already either mobilized resources or reintegrated their clientele into the community and closed their operations. Thirty-nine SNCs were categorized as Levels 2 and 3, in need of intensive capacity building. It is important to note that centers did not know by what criteria their readiness for graduation was being assessed by CRS Rwanda, nor in which year they would be graduating. However, based on their experience working with each center CRS Rwanda determined which centers would be most likely have the capacity to graduate within that year, and in preparation, graduating SNCs entered a year of intensive support and capacity building.

Graduation Day: Ready or Not

According to the COSA proposal, “SNCs graduate and food supply operation is phased over when SNCs are financially capable of purchasing food locally for their clients that they would have received from Title II food assistance. The phase over occurs through the efforts of the SNC with technical support from CRS Rwanda to undertake financial and operational strategic plans, maximizing the use of their existing resources, and finding other donors and developing income generating projects.”⁷

⁷ Rwanda/Catholic Relief Services FY07–09 Comprehensive Close-Out Strategy DAP Amendment, 2006, pp. 18–19.

When CRS met with centers to inform them that DAP would be ending and discuss what should be done during the COSA, centers were shocked to hear the news. They started to panic. “We will not be able to provide food on our own!” “We can’t ensure food provision without CRS’ support.”

—Pascasie Musabyemungu, safety net center coordinator, CRS Rwanda

The withdrawal of food aid was inevitable, and staff at both the centers and CRS realized they could not afford the luxury of despair. Ready or not, by the end of the COSA in 2009 the SNCs would have to meet their own resource needs. Most came to accept that they needed to focus on preparing themselves for that certainty.

TABLE 2: SAFETY NET CENTERS BY TYPE OF CLIENTELE AND “GRADUATION” DATE

CLIENTELE	GRADUATING SNCs			TOTAL
	2007 actual	2008 proj.	2009 proj.	
Street Children	4	6	3	13
Elderly	2	4	2	8
Orphans	2	3	7	12
Handicapped	0	4	2	6
Total	8	17	14	39

Note: Data as of May 2008, at which time all SNCs had been assigned graduation dates based on their readiness.

Strategic Accompaniment

CRS realized that helping centers become more self-sustaining would require an intensive and strategic mix of activities. The three core ways identified for CRS to accompany SNC’s in their growth to food aid independence were:

- Assisting SNCs in the development of strategic plans incorporating resource mobilization
- Providing training and small grants to SNCs to jump-start income-generating projects
- Conducting management, finance, human resource, and programmatic training.

Strategic Planning: Road Map to Sustainability

To move toward self-sufficiency, the safety net centers in this study first had to envision a future where increased sustainability was possible. Then they prepared a strategic plan for resource mobilization. The plan helped the organization clarify why it exists, whom it serves, what services it provides, and how it will pay for it all. CRS' role was to provide training for strategic planning to center directors, who in turn trained their staff to the process. Each center then prepared a concept paper proposing how they would engage in strategic planning and with what resources. The paper served as a dialogue point between center staff and CRS, allowing CRS to determine whether staff understood the planning process and their level of commitment to it. Upon approval of the concept paper, the center moved forward with strategic planning with support from CRS staff and, in some cases, external consultants. CRS reviewed and approved the final plans.

To develop a proper strategic plan we needed people with special skills. We were able to prepare some elements of the strategic plan, but we had to hire an external consultant to help us with putting it together. Now we have a five-year plan, which includes all our projects in it. In total, about 30 people from our personnel participated in a strategic planning process. Overall, the development of strategic plan was useful for us as it helped to reiterate on where we go. Now, every year we develop a plan based on the strategic plan.

—Sylvere Itangishaka, Executive Secretary, Bureau Social Gitarama

Planning in Practice: Gitagata

In the past, the Centre de Rééducation et de Production de Gitagata had considered preparing a strategic plan but did not have the skills or the time to do so. Having the development of a strategic plan as a requirement from CRS motivated them to complete what they had only thought about before. In developing their plan they consulted staff and the children served by their center. They first identified the challenges faced by the center and then the opportunities. They looked for strategies that could address the challenges and build on their opportunities. They spoke with other SNCs to learn successful strategies. They used their weekly management meetings to work on the plan together.

The plan has multiple functions within the center. Every quarter the center prepares an activity plan, with input from the staff, linked with their strategic plan. The activity plan includes the objective taken from the strategic plan, the related activities that will help the center meet that objective, and the month in which it will be carried out. The strategic plan is a source of cohesion and motivation for the center staff. Each staff member knows the plan and his/her role in achieving its success. The strategic plan is also a critical communication tool with the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF). A copy is kept on file with the ministry and the center's director provides regular updates to the minister.

The director shared the center's experiences and projections from the strategic planning document with donors and requested assistance. As a result, the government has committed to build a fence for the center, install electricity, and pay for their water. UNICEF agreed to help repair their buildings. The World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization have agreed to fund an agriculture project on land the center received from the local authorities. In August, the center's director participated in a donor meeting where donors and organizations working in child protection came together.

The director is confident that she will find other donors. Her confidence is maintained partly due to regular visits from CRS staff where together they review progress made toward the center's strategic plan.

Income Generation: Replacing Food Aid, and Fast

Although income-generation activities (IGA) played a small part in the DAP, efforts to assist centers with these activities understandably intensified under the COSA. As part of strategic planning, centers developed plans for resource mobilization. They then received training on how to prepare an IGA proposal. Working with CRS staff, centers incorporated suggestions for improving their proposals. If the SNC wanted CRS funding they submitted their proposal to CRS staff, who reviewed and assessed it against ten criteria. These included feasibility, rate of return, and management capacity as well as other, less traditional criteria, such as the center's participation in the overall program and its willingness to accept a contingent grant. Acceptance of a contingent grant meant that the center would "pay-forward" their good fortune by helping another center. This small cost-share not only increased a center's buy-in to the project but also created solidarity among the centers. All have a vested interest in seeing the group succeed.

A proposal scoring highly against the criteria receives on average about US\$6,000 in funding from CRS. The center then receives intensive training on how to manage an IGA as well as on important components such as how to carry out a market survey. One CRS staff member summarized the process this way: “CRS supports the SNC during the proposal developing process, so they have a good idea of the capacity of the centers. . . . The IGA training includes a marketing component, which includes a section on how to do a market study. After the project has been accepted, the SNC participates in the IGA management training. At the end of the training, CRS provides information on selling techniques and what might sell in order to

RICK D'ELIA



encourage the centers. Later, CRS works closely with the centers and the ISO (Institutional Strengthening Officer) goes to the field and follows each step to help centers with IGA implementation.”

Roughly eight centers received IGA funding each year under the project. Most of the income-generating activities produced goods that not only directly met center residents’ nutritional needs but could also be sold. Examples included vegetables and fruits, pigs and rabbits, baked goods, and fodder for dairy cows. One less-traditional activity was a carpentry and welding shop that not only made products to sell but also served as a training center for resident orphans and other vulnerable children, enhancing their employability.

Vocational training at the centers will lead to the jobs that will help pull children out of poverty.

In the context of this project, a quick definition of a “good” IGA was one that generated revenues in a short time. This was especially critical given that some of the graduating centers had only a year to pass through the entire process of strategic planning, capacity building, and IGA implementation before the complete cessation of food aid support.

The Challenge of Income Generation: Gitarama

“After CRS stopped providing food, the JAM Gitarama Orphanage began to. Now we provide food to the children three times a day. We decided to do a cattle-breeding project because we have lots of land. Also, we wanted to continue giving milk to the kids as we were providing milk within the CRS food provision project. It is easy to run a cattle business, though it is not profitable. We only receive 50% of the income we expected. We get 4,000 FR per day [roughly US\$8] from this business. Fertilizer is free.

“We received three cows from CRS. We ate one cow at the Christmas party last December. Now we have 10 cows. We plan to give one to another center. We have already informed CRS that we are ready to provide the cow. This is part of our culture—when you have something, you share it with others.

“We have milk from our IGA. We can provide milk to 20 children from each milking. It is impossible to feed 300 children by the profit gained, as we don’t have enough animals.

“We hired two people to be fully involved in the IGA. This is first time we’ve had a business, but it is not difficult to manage it, provided people involved in it are properly trained. IGA is a separate activity for us. We keep our separate books, to make managing the budgets easier. This is a great practice and we would recommend it to all centers.

“We went through the training on how to manage our IGA, but we would like to have more training. CRS reviewed our IGA project and advised us on its feasibility. I think it would also be important for our children to learn how to run a business. We will train them and they will help with future businesses.

“We have learned that we had to get good cattle for our IGA. A good cow is one that gives lots of milk. We had only six months to prepare, so we didn’t have enough time to find good animals. You should have enough time to do a market survey, to find out where good cattle are available. It is also important to have enough space to keep the cattle, and enough money to buy food and medicine for them.”

—Yabaragiye Odette, *safety net center coordinator, JAM Gitarama Orphanage*

In addition to producing milk for sale, JAM used its land for forage and vegetable production. While this story highlights some of the challenges, such as the need for more training and inputs, JAM’s efforts to generate income could be considered a success. They used the milk and the revenue to help feed the children

in their care. They have expanded their income-generating activities once and have plans to do so again. They have carried out their stated desire to use the small dairy as vocational training tool for the children. And they are paying forward a cow to another center. Clearly, JAM cannot solely through these efforts meet all of the center's resource needs or all the nutritional needs of the children, but they have made significant progress.

RICK D'ELIA



The terraced agricultural landscape of Rwanda.

As the story of the JAM Gitarama Orphanage illustrates, CRS funding for IGAs was not sufficient to meet the resource needs of the SNCs. In addition to the IGA grants, CRS worked closely with the graduating SNCs to approach other donors for support. CRS staff coached SNCs' staff in fundraising and the art of successful negotiation to increase their confidence in approaching existing or potential new donors. As a result, SNCs are now using their strategic plans and pamphlets to inform donors on their vision, main activities, and expected outcomes. Some

centers have achieved modest success in raising funds or in-kind contributions from donors. Additionally, CRS has successfully lobbied the Rwandan government to provide some small resources, such as payment of water and electricity costs for some of the centers.

Capacity Building: Strengthening SNCs for the Future

The third critical element of CRS' strategic accompaniment of safety net center partners was the intensive strengthening of management and, to a lesser extent, programmatic capacities. Based on the initial institutional, financial, and administrative assessments, as well as USAID requirements, core trainings were identified for all safety net centers, including:

- Strategic planning
- IGA management
- Commodity management
- Administrative and financial management
- Nutritional surveillance
- Human resource management

Each of these trainings was considered vital to the self-sustained functioning of the centers. All are interrelated. Staff must be trained before they can develop strategic plans for resource mobilization. IGA management training prepared the staff to implement key activities in those plans. Finance staff must closely track scarce resources when every cent counts. Nutritional surveillance not only tracks a particular child's progress but also allows for scarce food resources to be targeted where they are most needed. And everything is dependent on a center's ability to attract and keep good staff and protect the clients they serve.

In addition to these core trainings, other needs common to all centers were identified, and additional trainings were carried out by both CRS staff and contracted outside experts. This flexibility allowed needs to be addressed as they arose. Examples include training in child rights, report writing, how to provide psychosocial support to clients, and working with the handicapped. Among the outside experts brought in were the international volunteer organization VSO Netherlands, which provided training for SNCs working with mentally handicapped clients, and a local organization called Cinema for Education (CINEDUC) that taught SNCs to use cinema to educate youth on their rights, conflict resolution, and HIV awareness. CRS also supported access to voluntary testing and counseling services for SNC clients and linked with the prevention program "Abstinence, Behavior Change and Youth," funded by USAID and U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), to offer HIV education for orphans and vulnerable children in the centers.

All of these trainings followed CRS principles of partnership, which guide staff to "facilitate and promote the strengthening of partners' abilities to identify, build on, and address their vulnerabilities, strengths, and specific capacity building needs through a process that leads to sustainability" and to do so "in a spirit of mutual autonomy." Or, as Emmanuel Ntakirutimana, director of the Maison de la Jeunesse safety net center, said: "CRS helped us to set the standards and we will keep them after the project. Now we know the standards in accounting, HR management (e.g., recruitment), nutrition, etc. We will continue doing what we have learned so far because we realize that this is important for us. Standards were introduced by CRS for better management of our centers, they were not imposed on us."

"You can train our people"

Others besides CRS and SNC staff have noted centers' enhanced capacities and increased confidence. They have also garnered the attention of government officials, who have turned to the SNCs to meet their training needs.

The Centre De Rééducation et de Production de Gitagata knew they were in for hard times; their five years of support from CRS' Food for Peace programming is ending on September 30, 2009. To prepare, they have developed a five-year strategic plan with the support of CRS Rwanda's Safety Net Team. Their plan called for replacing the FFP bulgur, corn-soy blend (CSB) and oil that contributes to feeding the 500+ boys that live at the center at any one time. In order to do this, the center needed more land so that they could grow corn, cassava, rice, and sweet potatoes for consumption and sale.

A request was made to the district, which donated 20 hectares to the center. While the center now had the land, they didn't have the resources to pay workers to clear it or to purchase the seeds that would ensure their first harvest. The center's agronomist collaborated with CRS' safety net center coordinator to develop a project to submit to the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization for financing. The project was approved with the condition that the district officials sign a letter of support clearly stating that they have donated the land for this purpose.

The agronomist went to the district official, who read through the project. He looked up and asked the agronomist, "Who is the consultant you hired to write this document?" The agronomist responded, "We didn't, I wrote the project with the help of CRS." "CRS? Why don't you ask them to come train us as well?" The agronomist looked at the official and explained that CRS was their partner, not the district's. "Well then" the official said, "You can train our people. When should we have the training?"

Achieving Self Sufficiency

Although at the time of the study the COSA was only in its second year of implementation, the SNCs studied showed that CRS support has already yielded results. Progress has been made on reducing the number of centers dependent on external food aid, either because the centers have undergone an intensive year of institutional support and have been able to generate their own resources or because they have worked to reintegrate their clients into the community. Centers *are* "graduating." CRS had anticipated that as many as 15 centers would graduate each year. In reality eight SNCs graduated in the first fiscal year of the project (October 2006 to September 2007). Although graduating centers were identified at the beginning of each year, they were reassessed midyear by CRS staff. At the end of the fiscal year only those centers with successful IGAs, solid strategic plans, and demonstrated ability to provide food to their clients graduated. At this stage of the program, CRS'

flexibility in graduating centers, the incorporation of lessons learned from year one, and a redoubling of efforts on those SNCs held back will likely yield more centers ready to graduate in fiscal year two.

Responding to the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion's encouragement to reintegrate children, especially street children, into communities, some centers have taken that route and ended feeding programs. The Jyambere Center was, until recently, home to 600 children. The children have all been reintegrated into communities and the dorms are being converted into other uses. At Maison de la Jeunesse, staff worked with the children, their families, communities, and local authorities to ensure that all were supportive to the children's reintegration. They have successfully reintegrated 75% of their child clients.



Vocational training is a key to the long-term success of the safety net centers' efforts.

CRS should be proud of this project and relationships because CRS did not provide food only. They taught us how to produce food—this is important! They have provided us with technical skills, practical knowledge on IGAs. We went through the process together: identification, implementation and usage of the results.

—Emmanuel Ntakirutimana, director, Maison de la Jeunesse

As illustrated by the stories highlighted in this case study, some centers successfully created and implemented strategic plans, developed income-generating activities and mobilized external resources, and enhanced their institutional and programmatic capacities to manage their operations and deliver higher quality programming. These achievements have increased the centers' confidence in their ability to be self-sustaining.

Partnership Keys to Success

A few key partnership activities have been critical to the program's success to date and are likely to remain so. CRS' incorporation of lessons learned and recommendations from the DAP including restructuring staff, which has allowed the agency to deliver a model of partnership more in line with its principles. As the DAP evaluation noted,

CRS did not have sufficient staff to deliver fully on capacity-building goals focused primarily on providing commodities and monitoring the distribution and use of commodity food aid. Under the COSA, with its focus on preparing SNCs to be self-sufficient, CRS increased staff and restructured to deliver a more collaborative model of partnership to achieve this urgent objective. In addition to the SNC coordinator and nutritionist roles that existed under the DAP, new units emphasizing partner support were created: the Partner Strengthening Unit and the Institutional Strengthening Unit. As their names imply, these units exist solely to accompany partners.

Each CRS unit and staff member had clear and distinct responsibilities. All monitored the centers closely, making regular visits to assess progress, identify issues, and resolve them together. CRS created multiple monitoring tools to measure progress on components of the center's work as well as overall progress toward sustainability.⁸ Although staff made frequent visits to each center, partners did not find it overwhelming, but rather motivating, as they knew the CRS staff knew their center well, understood them, and functioned as an effective support team for them. CRS staff was able through these multiple visits to reinforce messages to individual centers, critical given the short time frame. Relationships between CRS and center staff were characterized by collaborative problem solving, with CRS staff acting as mentors.

Clarity and consistency in communication was critical for helping partners understand, accept, and prepare for graduation. Ensuring that the same message was constantly reinforced with centers was crucial to maintaining good relationships and achieving the project goal. CRS staff had been clear from the beginning that food aid would end by September 2009 and that partners needed to be self-sufficient by then. Understandably, this initially created tension between CRS and partners, but through constant communication and action, tension diminished as CRS staff demonstrated their commitment to the partner and the process. Centers understood that CRS was a true partner who would see them through and not abandon them.

“CRS was frank with us from the beginning. CRS staff did not hide the fact that they did not have resources to continue the project. And this was very important for good relationships. CRS started to prepare us for the end of the project from the beginning, and that was very good.”

—Emmanuel Ntakirutimana, director, Maison de la Jeunesse

⁸ Monitoring checklists include strategic planning; commodity monitoring; finance and administration; and services. The Project Implementation Tracking Table (PITT) assesses overall progress toward graduation.

A clear contract detailing mutual responsibilities was an important tool for communication and mutual accountability. At the beginning of each year, contracts between the partner safety net centers and CRS were developed and signed. These reinforced the message that graduation was a partnership process between CRS and the centers. The contracts were performance based, defining milestones against which both partner and CRS performance could be assessed. CRS staff and partners met quarterly to assess one another's progress against the contract. This contract is a good example of the CRS partnership principle of complementarity and mutuality.

Frequent monitoring, supportive supervision, constant and consistent communication, clearly defined responsibilities, and a partnership of mutuality allowed CRS staff to continuously assess partner's progress while allowing for flexibility in that assessment. Partners were assessed at the beginning for their readiness to graduate, they were continuously monitored on their progress against multiple checklists; their readiness to graduate was reassessed midyear and again at the end of the year. As noted above, partners were not graduated if they were not ready. This reinforced partner trust in the process and went a long way toward ensuring the success of graduated centers. CRS was flexible in this reassessment and in tailoring support to meet changing partner needs.

Summary of key changes to improve partnership and results:

- Support capacity-building activities
- Monitor frequently
- Communicate clearly and consistently
- Engage in contracts detailing mutual responsibilities
- Continuously assess partner progress
- Be flexible

CRS staff come regularly, but don't impose their decisions, rather they discuss them until there is a resolution. Then we respond and agree to what is possible and what is not possible. They create a document during the visit about what can be done and when. Then both parties sign. I see this as a contract.

—Musabwa Ntuyehe Cyprien, director, Centre Presbytérien d'Amour des Jeunes

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Several of the COSA results and keys to success identified in this study, including assessment, communication, and graduation, have corresponding lessons learned. For example, initial and subsequent assessments covered institutional and programmatic capacities to manage and deliver services. However, these assessments did not cover critical foundational capacities of the centers, such as management and leadership style, team spirit, and organizational energy and morale, which have revealed themselves as crucial to a center's ability to progress toward self-sufficiency. CRS staff noted that although centers may have many physical assets that would seem to assure successful graduation, more critical still was the center director's vision and management style in leading the center toward graduation.

While partners and CRS staff alike pointed to the important role of clear and consistent communication regarding the inevitability of graduation, partners also noted that criteria and year of graduation were not communicated in a clear or timely manner. CRS elected not to share the criteria or dates of graduation up front because they feared it would be a disincentive for centers to progress and would have a negative impact on centers that are not ready to graduate at the end of the COSA. While this motive is understandable, it is not in keeping with CRS principles of partnership.

The one-year graduation time frame, although fast paced with many critical trainings and activities, was for the most part sufficient. The exception was in getting IGA planned and off the ground. One year was too short a period for all of the partners' IGAs to yield sufficient resources. Three to five years would be a more appropriate time frame, according to partners. IGA development was a part of the DAP, but progress was limited without the sense of urgency created by the cessation of food aid. Had IGAs been a stronger component and begun in earnest under the DAP, partners would have had a more realistic chance become self-sustaining. Although CRS demonstrated flexibility in graduation dates, it would have been better to assign SNCs to graduation years and communicate them in the beginning of the project. Those SNCs that needed less time and support would graduate in a shorter amount of time, but those that needed more support and time would get it. This is what happened in fact, with some centers not graduating and rolling into another year. If that scenario had been anticipated from the beginning, it would have allowed for more accurate capacity-building planning and IGA implementation as well as reduced anxiety among SNCs about when they would graduate and whether they would be ready. However, because of focused and intensive support and partnership, the centers studied have made significant progress.

As can be expected in such a complicated program, where resources are scarce, every partner is deserving, and great need exists, there are many challenges to face and

lessons to learn. The important thing is that because of strong relationships, CRS and its partners have been able to discuss and address these together.

Conclusion

RICK D'ELIA

Faced with an ever-deteriorating world economy and a global food crisis, local churches and community-based organizations struggle to meet the basic needs of the world's poorest and most vulnerable. In Rwanda, CRS has worked in solidarity to accompany 39 such partners to envision a future where the end of international food aid need not mean the end of the provision of their vital life-sustaining services but instead provides a pathway, albeit rocky, to self-sufficiency. By working on strategic plans together, center staff, residents, communities, and government officials have validated their missions and values and developed plans for resource mobilization. Through training and grants from CRS, they have implemented plans for generating income for their programs. CRS has supported them with multiple trainings to enhance institutional and programmatic capabilities. More importantly, through training courses, regular visits, and demonstrable solidarity they have walked a long way with partner centers down the difficult path to making those visions for the future a reality.



The safety net centers will remain a vital answer to the needs of Rwanda's most vulnerable.

We are sad that CRS will be ending the project with us. We had a very close relationship, like a mother and her children. We were together all the time and we discussed, planned, and decided together. We gained experience together. So, when a mother leaves her child or when a child leaves its mother it is too sad and disturbing. . . . We knew from the beginning that we would not be implementing the project with CRS forever, and this is normal. But we would like to continue our close relationships.

—Emmanuel Ntakirutimana, director, Maison de la Jeunesse



Since 1943, Catholic Relief Services has had the privilege of serving the poor and disadvantaged overseas. Without regard to race, creed, or nationality, CRS provides emergency relief in the wake of natural and manmade disasters. Through development projects in fields such as education, peace and justice, agriculture, microfinance, health, and HIV and AIDS, CRS works to uphold human dignity and promote better standards of living. CRS also works throughout the United States to expand the knowledge and action of Catholics and others interested in issues of international peace and justice. Our programs and resources respond to the U.S. bishops' call to live in solidarity—as one human family—across borders, over oceans, and through differences in language, culture and economic condition.

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This publication is the third in a series of Catholic Relief Services Partnership Case Studies. The study demonstrates the vital role that CRS partnership played in ensuring the continuation of critical safety net centers (SNC) in Rwanda under the Comprehensive Close Out Strategy Amendment (COSA) project. Safety net centers strive to meet the myriad needs of Rwanda's most vulnerable citizens: the terminally and chronically ill, disabled, elderly, orphans, street children and the destitute. Centers range in type from those serving populations which will likely never return home, such as hospices and homes for the elderly, to those serving the temporarily needy, such as people displaced by natural disasters, orphans, and street children. What each of the centers has in common is increasing demand in the face of limited and dwindling resources. Food aid supplied from USAID Food for Peace through CRS not only serves to meet the nutritional requirements of the centers' residents but also allows the centers to spend their limited resources on needs other than food. Faced with an impending cessation of Title II food aid in Rwanda, CRS is implementing a three-year partnership project of strategic planning, income generation, and intensive capacity strengthening to prepare 39 SNCs to sustain their life-saving services when food support ends in 2009.

The Catholic Relief Services Partnership Case Studies series highlights the work of CRS and its partners, working in solidarity to increase local ownership, strengthen organizational capacity, and combat poverty, hunger, and injustice.

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