LEARNING BRIEF

Short-term interventions can lead to sustained improvement:

LEARNING FROM CAPACITY STRENGTHENING PROJECTS IN DARFUR

Festivities at Community Cultural Day event Central Darfur, December 2012. Photo by staff of West Darfur Youth Organization for Development Office (WDYOD).

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DARFUR COMMUNITY PEACE AND STABILITY FUND[3]

ESTABLISHED IN OCTOBER 2007, THE DCPSF PROMOTES COMMUNITY-LEVEL PEACEBUILDING ACTIVITIES IN DARFUR. DESPITE THE INTERVENTION OF VARIOUS ACTORS OVER THE YEARS, A COORDINATED, GRASSROOTS APPROACH THAT ADDRESSED COMMUNITY NEEDS IN DARFUR WAS LACKING. FILLING THIS GAP WAS THE ORIGINAL MISSION OF THE DCPSF — SOMETHING THEY CONTINUE TO DO TODAY BY TAKING AN EARLY RECOVERY APPROACH TO CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING.

Sustained social change requires profound change among individuals, teams, institutions, and even the external environment. Enabling and strengthening the capacity of these actors and systems requires time and often intensive, customized resources[1]. Yet those who could most benefit from strengthened capacity are frequently under-resourced and in need of short-term results. Facing these challenges in Darfur, Sudan, a consortium led by Catholic Relief Services developed a short-term capacity strengthening program that quickly improved key organizational functions. Furthermore—and arguably as important—preliminary data show that the **partner CSOs have sustained many improvements for more than one year** after the intervention's end.

SMALL GRANTS PROJECT MANAGER 1 PROJECT

Twenty-five Darfuri civil society organizations participated in the first Small Grants Project Manager (SGPM I) project between October 2011 and February 2013. Funded by the Darfur Community Peace and Stability Fund (DCPSF) (see box), SGPM I supported participating CSOs to grow their institutional systems through ongoing training and mentoring, and implementation of six-month peacebuilding projects in their communities. These partners hail from and operate in North, South, West, and later Central Darfur.[2]

The SGPM consortium is comprised of CRS, World Vision and CAFA, a national Sudanese NGO. Each consortium member led capacity strengthening for a subset of CSOs. A second phase of the project (SGPM II) involving new and a larger cohort of CSOs began in April 2014 and was completed in February 2016.

SHORT-TERM, HIGH-QUALITY INTERVENTION

Working in a condensed timeframe (about 15 active months), SGPM I used proven methodologies such as mentorship, consistent follow-up, and mutual feedback[4] to improve CSO capacity as measured by a subset of indicators derived from CRS' Holistic Organizational Capacity Assessment Instrument (HOCAI). Based on baseline (November 2011 to February 2012) and endline (February 2013) assessments using these indicators, most of the 25 CSOs increased their capacity in different areas (Figure 1).

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1 From http://www.developmentiscapacity.org/
2 Central Darfur is one of the states of Sudan, and one of five comprising the Darfur region. It was created in January 2012 as a result of the on-going peace process for the wider Darfur region. The state capital is Zalingei. The state was formed from land that was previously part of the states of West Darfur and South Darfur.
3 From http://www.sd.undp.org/content/sudan/en/home/operations/FundManagment/DCPSF.html
4 Dichter, Thomas. The Capable Partners Learning Agenda on Local Organization Capacity Development. Main Report. February 2014. 6-7, 142.

faith. action. results.

Figure 1: Capacity improvement among 25 CSOs (selected indicators)
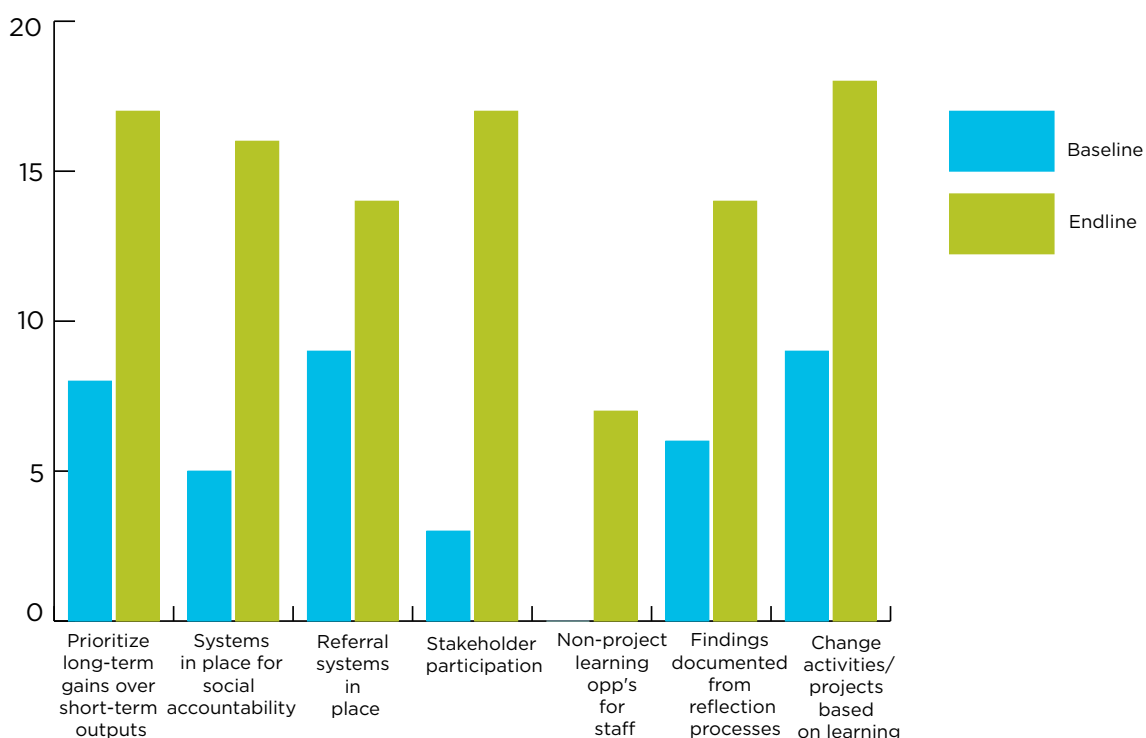
SUSTAINED IMPACT, ONE YEAR LATER

Given the uniquely short-term, high-intensity approach to capacity building under SGPM I, CRS funded and conducted a follow-up assessment in April 2014 with nine of the participating CSOs.[5] The methodology for this assessment is included as Annex A.

While improvement declined between project close and the one-year follow-up in several areas, it did not revert to pre-intervention levels, and some indicators continued to show substantial, ongoing growth. In addition to the sustained achievements highlighted in Figure 2 and detailed in Annex B, the number of established working relationships with peer organizations increased by a staggering 917 percent between baseline and endline assessments, and continued to increase to 1,083 percent improvement (over baseline) one year after the end of the project.

The follow-up assessment team also asked CSOs about the status and progression of their institutional support documents such as their organization's constitution; vision, mission, and values; financial, procurement, and human resources policies; and program and monitoring and evaluation guidance. Before SGPM I, only 13 percent of CSOs had comprehensive policies or guidance. This number grew to 91 percent at project close in February 2013. Sixty-eight percent of CSOs surveyed in the follow-up assessment reported that they had amended and improved their institutional support documents (up from 5 percent at project close). This suggests that organizations have institutionalized the importance of having relevant and up-to-date policies.

These follow-up results indicate that the changes made during SGPM I can be sustained well beyond project implementation.

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5 Assessors selected the nine CSOs based on their accessibility, given the security and difficulties traveling in Darfur. CRS supported the same nine CSOs during SGPM I.

Legend:
- % improvement: baseline-1y follow-up
- % improvement: baseline-endline
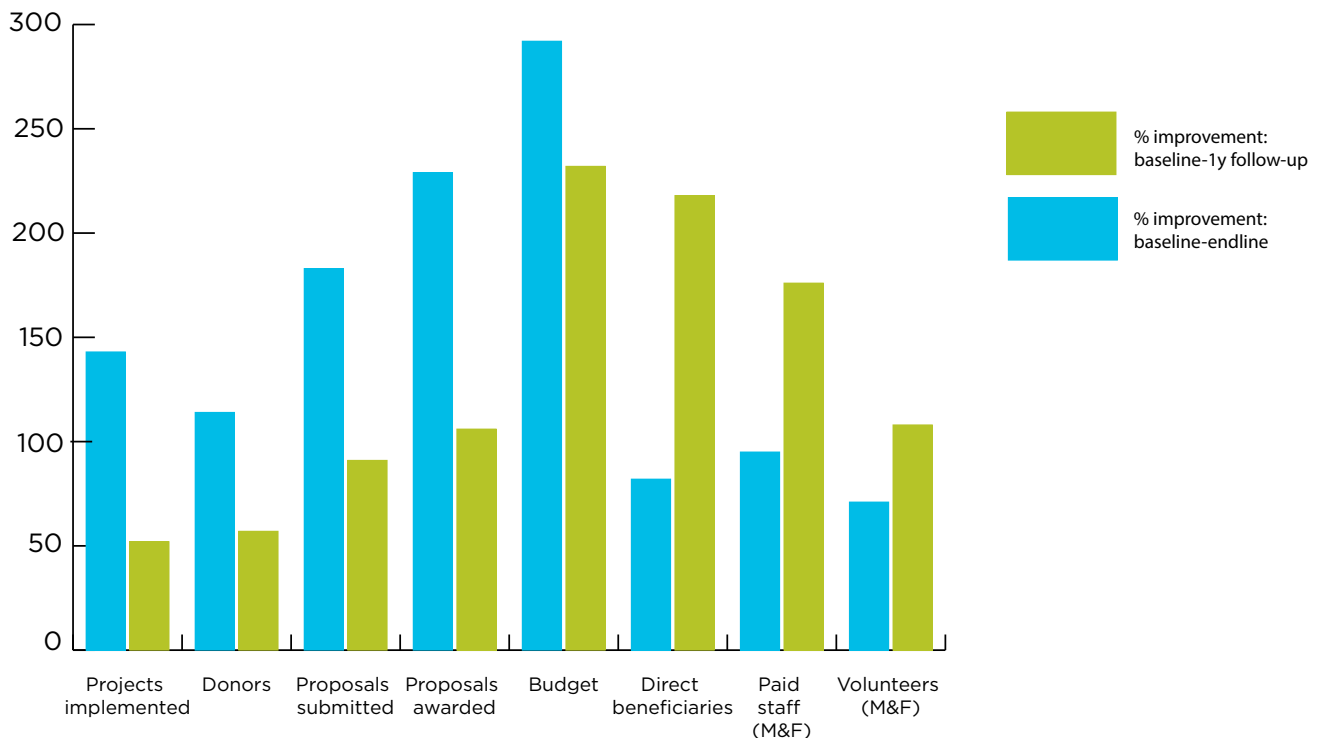
SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE FUTURE?

Data from the SGPM I follow-up study are preliminary and the sample size is small, but the findings suggest that short-term capacity strengthening conducted through a highly tailored, relationship-based partnership may have a role to play in global development programming.

CRS' CAPACITY STRENGTHENING MODEL

Firmly committed to the principle that people and organizations, in their own context, are best suited to identify and address their development needs, CRS has improved the lives of beneficiaries by working with local organizations in nearly 100 countries since 1943. Having learned and demonstrated that strong partner institutions contribute to a vibrant society — that, in turn, helps lead a country toward good governance and social transformation — CRS has made partnership and capacity strengthening one of its own institutional and competency priorities. Simply put: stronger local and connected institutions and systems can better address the needs of the populations they serve.

Over time, CRS has honed its model of local capacity strengthening, comprised of three primary components:

- **Capacity building** is focused on individuals or teams, enhances or develops new knowledge, skills, and attitudes so people or teams function more effectively.

- **Institutional strengthening** is focused on an organization, enhances or develops the systems and structures needed to function, work towards sustainability, and achieve goals. Efforts assist in developing or improving sound business processes.

- **Accompaniment** combines consistent coaching and individualized mentoring to individuals and teams after interventions such as workshops, organization design, or on-the-job training.

MEASURES OF CHANGE AND RESOURCES INVESTED

The following table enumerates (by consortium member) financial investments into the capacity development process, and direct beneficiaries of capacity strengthening activities. CRS' scope of work included activities and deliverables that other consortium member scopes did not, namely: training of trainer sessions, development of capacity strengthening manuals, and capacity building and accompaniment for consortium member field office staff. These additional responsibilities are reflected in CRS' larger budget share.

Because the exchange rate changed significantly during SGPM I (from 2.8 to 5.6), the budgeted project costs were met with fewer US dollars. By the end of the project, 296,696 USD went unused and was returned to the donor.

Table 1: SGPM I capacity strengthening investments and beneficiaries, by consortium member

SGPM I INVESTMENTS	CRS	CAFA	WORLD VISION	TOTAL
CSOs supported	9	7	9	25
Overall project costs (USD)	$779,810	$153,981	$269,130	$1,202,921
Capacity strengthening costs	$236,389	$36,330	$155,247	$427,966
Baseline assessments	$6,846	$5,325	$6,846	$19,017
Endline assessments	$5,732	$4,458	$5,732	$15,922
Capacity building costs	$154,424	$6,309	$87,738	$248,471
Direct beneficiaries: Capacity building	28[6]	14	18	50
Accompaniment costs	$69,387	$20,238	$54,931	$144,556
Direct beneficiaries: Accompaniment	37[7]	21	27	75
Capacity strengthening direct beneficiaries: Total	65	35	45	125

SGPM I CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

Given the favorable capacity returns and promising and sustained results from the follow-up assessment of CSOs that participated in SGPM I, CRS has outlined its stepwise approach here so that other projects and implementers can adapt or adopt the highly tailored, intensive capacity strengthening methods employed with SGPM CSOs.

The sections that follow map the theory of the CRS capacity strengthening cycle alongside the reality of implementing SGPM I, so the learning from this experience can be applied in other contexts. Events are grouped according to different phases of the cycle, and many events and phases overlap due to preferences and/or constraints encountered during implementation. CRS understands that any capacity strengthening process (and the implementation of any project) is dynamic and unique to its context, thus encourages fellow practitioners to adapt this approach as appropriate.

CRS looks forward to ongoing conversations about the utility and effectiveness of this approach under a wide range of circumstances. To share or to initiate a conversation about your local capacity strengthening experience, please contact partnership@global.crs.org. The overview timeline that follows presents the timing of each capacity strengthening phase during the life of the project. The subsequent sections include a more detailed timeline and brief discussion of how each phase played out during SGPM I implementation; these sections can be referenced in order or separately. See Annex C for additional details about Phase 5.

SGPM I OVERVIEW TIMELINE

This timeline highlights the high-level stages of capacity strengthening under SGPM I.

OCT '11	NOV '11	DEC '11	JAN '12	FEB '12	MAR '12	APR '12	MAY '12	JUN '12	JUL '12	AUG '12	SEP '12	OCT '12	NOV '12	DEC '12	JAN '13	FEB '13	...	APR '14	...
1. Have an interest and commit to change																			
2. Conduct a capacity assessment																			
			3. Analyze results																
	4. Prioritize needs & design interventions																		
			5. Implement interventions																
															6. M&E				
																		7. Sustain the improve-ment	
8. Document the experience																			
														9. Replicate and share					

Festivities at Community Cultural Day event Central Darfur, December 2012. Photo by staff of West Darfur Youth Organization for Development Office (WDYOD).

1. HAVE AN INTEREST AND COMMIT TO CHANGE

Key actors throughout the organization must be interested in and committed to change and to the capacity strengthening process in order to be successful. The steps may vary, but will typically include some sort of formal agreement and/or application process, and a range of internal consensus building efforts led from within the organization.

OCT 2011	NOV 2011	DEC 2011	JAN 2012
1.1. Technical agreement signed			
	[Project start-up]		
		1.2. SGPM information workshops	
			1.3. Call for concept notes
			1.4. Concept note workshop
			1.5. CSOs develop, submit concept notes

1.1. TECHNICAL AGREEMENT SIGNED

The project officially began in October 2011 with the signing of the technical agreement. Routine but streamlined project start-up work followed. Each consortium member assumed responsibility over the CSOs in one Darfur state:

• CRS: West (and later Central) Darfur
• World Vision: South Darfur
• CAFA: North Darfur

SGPM teams held one-day workshops in each of the three Darfur states to explain the project to local CSOs, and to share the proposal process and selection criteria (see box) with CSOs.

SGPM Selection Criteria for CSOs

Minimum Qualifications

- CSOs had to be Darfur-based, as SGPM I focused on building the capacity of local institutions

- CSOs had to be registered with the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) as NGOs for at least one year, or able to present a letter from HAC certifying their existence, prior to registration, equaling one year

- CSOs had to have existing projects in at least one community for a minimum of one year

- Although CSOs did not need to have an established "office," they needed to have a central location where all activities operated from, that was used as an office space

Maximum Qualifications

- CSOs could not be implementing more than three projects at the time of SGPM I

- CSOs had to have an annual operating budget of less than 300,000 SDG, as verified by a thorough review of financial accounts

- CSOs had to meet both of the criteria above, or the CSOs must not have implemented more than three donor-funded projects over the past three years (excluding religious or community contributions)

1.3 AND 1.4. CSO CONCEPT NOTES: CALL AND WORKSHOP

After SGPM issued a **call for concept notes** in January 2012, consortium members held one-day **concept note workshops** in each state. These workshops informed CSOs of:
- SGPM I project objectives
- the application process
- the information needed in the concept note template

1.5. CSO CONCEPT NOTES: DEVELOPMENT AND SUBMISSION

Workshop attendees had two weeks after the January 2012 workshop to develop and submit a concept note on behalf of their organizations (only workshop participants were eligible to apply.) A total of 89 CSOs applied: 34 in CRS-supported West Darfur, 32 in World Vision's

South Darfur, and 23 in CAFA's North Darfur. The proposed projects all contained a significant peacebuilding aspect that was embedded in each CSO's technical area of preference (i.e., food security, education, WASH, women empowerment). The concept notes had to be eight to ten pages in length, written in English and include a budget.

2. CONDUCT A CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

Capacity assessments are essential to accurately identify an organization's capacity strengthening needs and to celebrate existing organizational capacities. Data collected through the assessment process inform organizational capacity strengthening priorities and action planning. The assessment team ideally should be primarily comprised of people from the organization itself and should not be misperceived as an external evaluation or audit.

OCT 2011	NOV 2011	DEC 2011	JAN 2012	FEB 2012
2.1. Creation of capacity assessment tool				
2.2. Baseline capacity assessments				
		[CSO application process; see Stage 1]		
				2.3. Financial and program management assessments

2.1. CREATION OF CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL

The SGPM team supported an external consultant to develop a participatory capacity assessment tool for three weeks in October 2011 (including time for HAC approval). The tool is structured similarly to the CRS HOCAI tool, but is much smaller in size, and was adapted to the Darfur context during a one-day assessment tool workshop.

2.2. BASELINE CAPACITY ASSESSMENTS

SGPM obtained from the HAC a list of all legally registered CSOs in North, South, and West Darfur (total: 60) and then interviewed representatives from each during a four week period in October and November 2011. Assessment teams were comprised of two to three individuals from the consortium member leading SGPM activities in that region. Assessment teams visited the CSOs in their local offices and familiarized the staff with SGPM project objectives. At each CSO, staff were interviewed using the capacity assessment tool developed earlier in the month. SGPM assessment teams facilitated discussions, sought responses to qualitative questions, and reviewed the CSO's supporting documents.

This process was unconventional in that CSOs were assessed before they were selected for participation in capacity strengthening interventions and that the assessment team did not include members of the organizations being assessed.

SGPM I opted to conduct assessments prior to the call for proposals in order to adhere to the project's compressed timeline and to better understand the overall landscape of CSO capacity in Darfur. It also served to solicit interest in the upcoming call for concept notes and resulting small grants. Such an

Staff of Gilani Social Development Society in El Geneina, West Darfur. Photo by Alberto Andretta/CRS.

approach was feasible in this context because of the relatively small number of CSOs (60) and the consortium members' staff who were already working in each state.

To counterbalance the lack of CSO involvement in the assessments, SGPM I took care to heavily engage CSO staff in subsequent financial and program management assessments (below), the analysis of all assessments, and action planning (phases 3 and 4).

2.3. FINANCIAL AND PROGRAM MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENTS

Through the competitive concept note process, SPGM I selected 25 CSOs to participate in the capacity strengthening program. Donor regulations required participating CSOs to undergo a sub-recipient financial management review to ensure that they were financially viable to directly receive funding. SGPM assessment teams spent one six-hour day with each CSO (for a total of two weeks) in February 2012. CRS led these teams in West Darfur and Central Darfur and supported CAFA in conducting the assessments in North Darfur and East Darfur, and World Vision led the assessment teams in South Darfur. This assessment further established the baseline capacity of participating CSOs; the assessment process is outlined in Phase 3.

3. ANALYZE RESULTS

Using data from the capacity assessment phase, the assessment team (ideally comprised primarily of people from the organization being assessed) determines the organization's health as measured by predetermined indicators (e.g., from the HOCAI). All organizations have areas in which they can improve; through the analysis process, organizations identify and prioritize areas for improvement, taking care to consider how to leverage existing strengths and resources.

JAN 2012	FEB 2012
3.1. Concept note review, part 1 (state-level)	
3.2. Concept note review, part 2 (consortium-level)	
3.3. CSOs selected for participation	
	3.4. Results of finance and capacity assessments reviewed

3.1. CONCEPT NOTE REVIEW, PART 1 (STATE-LEVEL)

In January 2012, consortium members performed an initial, state-level review of the 89 concept notes submitted by CSOs. Each consortium member led the review in the state in which they also led activities. The state-level review process lasted two weeks and applications were evaluated according to previously agreed-upon criteria, including:

• Understanding of context
• Similarity between context analysis and proposed intervention
• Fit with DCPSF and SGPM goals and objectives
• Feasibility of proposed timeline
• Feasibility of budget
• Management and programmatic capacity

3.2. CONCEPT NOTE REVIEW, PART 2 (CONSORTIUM-LEVEL)

Following a state-level review (see above), a steering committee comprised of staff from all three consortium members convened in January 2012 to review the concept notes that were selected at the state level. This process took one week. Submissions that did not meet evaluation criteria were eliminated.

3.3. CSOS SELECTED FOR PARTICIPATION

Based on the two-part review of submitted concept notes, SGPM I invited 25 CSOs (nine in West Darfur and Central, seven in North Darfur and East Darfur, and nine in South Darfur) to participate in the project and recommended that the CSOs write a full proposal for their small grant.

3.4. RESULTS OF FINANCE AND CAPACITY ASSESSMENTS REVIEWED

An external consultant engaged by SGPM I reviewed the findings of both the initial capacity assessment conducted in October and November 2011, and the financial and program management assessment from February 2012. This analysis helped CSOs to identify capacity gaps and informed activities discussed in stages 4 and 5.

4. PRIORITIZE NEEDS AND DESIGN INTERVENTIONS

The assessment results reveal areas in which the organization is doing well and areas in which they can improve. Organizations might choose to prioritize capacity strengthening efforts based on potential for rapid or large improvement, short or immediate results, the organization's vision for the future, or any number of other reasons. It is important that the organization set its own priorities. An outside capacity strengthening body can make recommendations and suggest criteria for setting priorities, but the institution must own the priorities and commit to the resulting action plan and interventions.

NOV '11	DEC '11	JAN '12	FEB '12	MAR '12	APR '12	MAY '12	JUN '12	JUL '12	AUG '12	SEP '12	OCT '12	NOV '12	DEC '12
				4.1. Design CS initiatives									
				4.2. Develop ODPs									

4.1. DESIGN OF CAPACITY STRENGTHENING INITIATIVES

Findings from the baseline capacity assessments revealed eight training areas that are foundational to institutional capacity, and would be relevant and beneficial to all CSOs. SGPM I designed the curricula and training events from November 2011 through the following December.

4.2. EACH CSO DEVELOPED AN ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Based on the baseline assessment findings (including the external analysis discussed in Phase 3) and a format provided by SGPM I, CSOs developed (with SGPM I technical support) an organizational development plan during a two-week period in March 2012. These plans sought to address identified capacity gaps in each CSO. Consortium members used the plans throughout the project to track each CSO's progress in a participatory process: representatives from the CSO and SGPM reviewed the plan periodically to verify the objectives that had been completed and determine which still needed to be achieved. Additionally, the plans were sometimes adjusted in response to issues that came up during accompaniment (e.g., if a CSO needed a little more time on a topic or if they were ready to move on to the next level earlier than planned).

5. IMPLEMENT INTERVENTIONS

Guided by the action plan, organizations participate in capacity strengthening activities facilitated by an organization such as CRS. Capacity strengthening typically occurs concurrently with normal programming. An organization rarely would (or would want to) close its doors while it improves its systems, knowledge, skills and attitudes, and participants can apply new skills or systems to real-world situations.

JAN '12	FEB '12	MAR '12	APR '12	MAY '12	JUN '12	JUL '12	AUG '12	SEP '12	OCT '12	NOV '12	DEC '12	JAN '13	FEB '13
5.1. Accompaniment of selected CSOs													
		5.2. Formal capacity building and trainings											
		5.3. Proposal workshop											
			5.4. Grant proposals developed and submitted										
				5.5. Proposal review (two parts)									
					5.6. Implementation of peacebuilding projects								
										5.7. Compliance visits			
											5.8. No-cost extension period (two CSOs)		

In West Darfur, a team of two CRS staff (one technical and one partnership) conducted individual visits (see box) to each CSO every month from January to November 2012. During the implementation of the small grants, CRS staff accompanied the CSOs on joint field visits. These visits lasted 1-2 days each, and were held twice with each CSO over a period of six months.

Office-based meetings and trainings were relatively convenient and easy to arrange because CSO offices are all within a 7-kilometer radius from the CRS office in El Geneina. However, on-site coaching required more effort and resources as the geographical program areas covered by the CSOs spanned 200 km from El Geneina.

Inside an SGPM I Accompaniment Visit

On average, each mentorship and coaching visit was 4 hours. Normally, two CRS staff conducted a mentorship visit jointly: a program specialist and a partnership/capacity strengthening specialist.

During a **mentorship visit:**

- The CSO briefed CRS staff on their program work conducted in the past month.

- CRS staff read and reviewed the CSO's program report and finance report for the past month.

- The CSO shared any challenges encountered in programs/ finance and asked for advice to resolve them.

- CRS sometimes worked with the CSO to refine the next period's implementation plan or on M&E challenges.

- CRS asked for feedback on the coaching and program support provided to the CSO.

- At times, the CSO asked CRS to attend the opening of new programs or to provide specific training.

During the implementation of the small grants, CRS also supported CSOs by accompanying them on joint field visits to their sites of the (small grant) project implementation.

During such ***field visits***:

- The CSO briefed CRS on programs implemented in specific geographical areas and periods of time.

- CRS and CSOs reviewed past program reports.

- CRS met with community leaders and beneficiary groups (i.e., children, youth, women) to ask them about the benefits they were experiencing from the project and their overall impression of the CSO.

5.2. FORMAL CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAININGS

For most of the project duration (March 2012 to December 2012), the SGPM team led each of the following trainings once in each state(see box and Annex C for more detail.) Consortium members led the trainings in the same states in which they also led activities. The average training lasted for three eight-hour days and participants varied by topic.

- Training #1: Leadership and Governance (March 2012)

- Training #2: Operation Systems: Finance, Human Resources, Procurement (April 2012)

- Training #3: Project Design and Conflict Analysis (May 2012)

- Training #4: Organizational Goals and Progress Tracking (July 2012)

- Training #5: Do No Harm and Cooperative Advocacy (July 2012)

- Training #6: Program Evaluation and How It Applies to Each CSO (October 2012)

- Training #7: Compliance (December 2012)

- Training #8: Project Reflection and Learning (December 2012)

Inside an SGPM Training

Trainings were delivered by the SGPM team in each state. In addition to the CSOs implementing peace grants, the trainings were open to other local CSOs and HAC representatives. For each session, every CSO sent two staff members whose jobs were relevant to the topic of training.

Activities during trainings included lectures, PowerPoint presentations, group discussions and brainstorming, presentation of group discussion results, notes and handout distribution.

Participants practiced applying new skills and information through group work, presentation, and creating an action plan to use when returning to their CSO.

To make these events successful, trainers prepared early on, ensured that they had all the training materials they needed, and distributed those materials to the participants through handouts.

To make these events successful on their end, participants made sure that their job was relevant to the training topic, they participated actively in the training, and they completed the full training period.

5.3. PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

This one-day workshop in April 2012 emphasized and explained the DCPSF framework to the CSOs. As part of the small grant process, they were asked to make their projects relevant to the aims and outputs of DCPSF, the project donor.

5.4. FORMAL GRANT PROPOSALS DEVELOPED AND SUBMITTED

Using the DCPSF results framework and what they learned in the proposal development workshop, each CSO developed its peacebuilding project proposal during three weeks in April and May 2012. Across all five states, a total of 25 CSOs (all those participating in the SGPM I project) applied for funding by submitting their proposal by the May 15 deadline.

5.5. A. PROPOSAL REVIEW, PART 1 (STATE-LEVEL)

In a process similar to the concept note review (Stage 2), all proposals underwent a two-part evaluation process. State-level review committees convened in North, South, and West Darfur. These committees were composed of representatives from the state's consortium member lead, HAC, and the line ministries related to the technical areas of the projects.The state-level review took place during one week in May 2012. None of the proposals were eliminated from the small grants scheme. When necessary, the committee provided feedback to the CSO and asked them to review or change their project.

5.5. B. PROPOSAL REVIEW, PART 2 (CONSORTIUM-LEVEL)

CSO proposals were sent to Khartoum for final review and approval by the steering committee representing all three consortium members. This review process occurred during two weeks in May 2012. The committee awarded small grants for peacebuilding projects to 25 CSOs:
• West and Central Darfur: 9 CSOs
• South Darfur: 7 CSOs
• North and East Darfur: 9 CSOs

5.6. IMPLEMENTATION OF PEACEBUILDING PROJECTS

On June 1, 2012, small-grant recipient CSOs began implementing peacebuilding projects in their communities. The projects were scheduled for implementation from June 1 to November 30, 2012. Some of the CSOs' projects related to infrastructure, however, and the rainy season delayed activities. In West Darfur, seven of the 9 CSOs completed their projects by December 2012. CSOs actively implemented their projects for six months.

5.7. COMPLIANCE VISITS WITH EACH CSO

Each state SGPM team spent one day with each CSO in the CSO's office to review a compliance checklist. The purpose of the visit was to ensure that CSOs could meet the SGPM requirements in finance, human resources, procurement, and M&E, and were using these systems in daily activities. The teams also discussed whether each CSO had been able to apply the skills and knowledge they were gaining from the trainings. These visits occurred in November 2012.

Staff of Daroti Charitable Organization in El Geneina, West Darfur with NurElhuda Abbas (far right), Partnership and Capacity Strengthening Manager. Photo by Alberto Andretta/CRS.

5.8. NO-COST EXTENSION PERIOD

December 2012 to February 2013

Two West Darfur CSOs (Daroti Charity Association and Beida Organization for Relief and Development) were unable to complete their projects during the rainy season. They requested a no-cost extension period from December 2012 to February 2013 in which they could complete project activities, without additional costs to cover their operations (i.e., salary or vehicle expenses). By February 2013, the SGPM I-funded peacebuilding projects concluded.

6. MONITOR AND EVALUATE

It is essential to track and measure progress during implementation. Brief tests of knowledge before and after a workshop can inform necessary adjustments to an action plan, for example, spending more or less time on an activity to ensure that learners gain the necessary skills and do not spend valuable time reviewing what they have mastered. Mid-term and endline assessments track progress toward goals set out in the action plan.

FEB 2013	MAR 2013
6.1. Endline CSO capacity assessments	

6.1. ENDLINE CSO CAPACITY ASSESSMENTS

During February and March 2013, SGPM teams in each state conducted an endline capacity assessment of each CSO using the same tool used in October 2011. Because CSO responses had to be verified through documents and evidence, this assessment took significantly longer than the baseline assessment at each CSO. Each assessment required 9–10 hours, totaling 33 days.

The external consultant then reviewed each assessment and produced a final evaluation report for consideration by consortium members.

7. SUSTAIN THE IMPROVEMENT

To be truly successful, changes brought about through the capacity strengthening process should be sustained by the organization after the interventions conclude and even after involved personnel leave their positions or the organization. The objective of capacity strengthening is to help an institution become more resilient, adapting in the face of inevitable change.

APR 2014
7.1. Follow-up sustainability assessment (nine CSOs)

7.1. FOLLOW-UP SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT (NINE CSOS)

Given the uniquely short-term, high-intensity approach to capacity building under SGPM I, CRS conducted a follow-up assessment in April 2014 with the nine CSOs that CRS supported during the project. The assessment found that these CSOs continued to show promising organizational growth more than one year after project close. While improvement declined between project closing and the one-year follow-up in several areas, it did not revert to pre-intervention levels, and some indicators showed substantial, ongoing growth.

Among these, the number of established working partnerships with peer CBOs or NGOs grew by 1,083 percent, and the number of direct beneficiaries by 218 percent.

8. DOCUMENT THE EXPERIENCE

Process, adaptations, progress, and setbacks all offer useful lessons to future capacity strengthening efforts. Documentation and strategic dissemination help ensure that these lessons are captured and can serve others, advancing and improving the field.

OCT 2011	APR 2012	OCT 2012	APR 2013	...	APR 2014
Periodic reports					
			Final project evaluation (May 2013)		

SPGM I implementation has been widely documented:

- Periodic project reports during project implementation

- SGPM I Final evaluation (May 2013)

- Sustainability study, assessing organizational changes one year after project close (April 2014)

9. REPLICATE AND SHARE

Planning ahead for sharing documentation strategically can help organizations reach their target groups more effectively. Ensuring dissemination goals are met and adjusting them when necessary is a part of this process.

OCT 2011	APR 2012	OCT 2012
9.1. CSO-hosted peer and community exchange visits		

COMMUNITY CULTURAL DAYS

SEVEN SGPM I-SUPPORTED CSOS HOSTED CULTURAL DAYS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES, BRINGING TOGETHER AS MANY AS 2,000 COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO EXCHANGE TRADITIONS, MUSIC, ARTIFACTS, AND PRODUCTS. THESE DAYS CELEBRATED LOCAL DIVERSITY, AND PROMOTED COMMUNITY DIFFERENCES AS A VENUE FOR LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING RATHER THAN CONFRONTATION.

9.1. CSO-HOSTED PEER AND COMMUNITY EXCHANGE VISITS

As part of the capacity strengthening process, CSOs with valuable learning experience from the project hosted exchange visits between December 2012 and February 2013. In West Darfur, three CSOs hosted such visits. Each of the three CSOs held the visit in their home community and invited their 8 peer CSOs and members of the community to attend. These exchanges lasted one or two days each.

Additionally, seven of the 25 supported CSOs across Darfur designed and carried out cultural days in their communities (see text box below). To do this, the CSOs applied for additional funding by developing and submitting a formal proposal. The costs for these events ranged from 26,000 to 40,000 SDG and involved 1,000 to 2,000 community members.

ANNEX A: METHODOLOGY FOR A ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP ASSESSMENT

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The follow-up assessment of nine SCPM I NGOs was a collaborative effort underscored by principles of participatory research (see box). CRS deliberately engaged a range of stakeholders and actors from the 2011–2013 capacity strengthening process to identify, collect, and interpret heterogeneous data. Previously agreed-upon learning questions (also called "learning agenda") guided and structured the entire process.

By design, the data set include quantitative, descriptive, qualitative, ethnographic, and interpretive information such as:

- Notes and recordings from in-depth interviews with stakeholders from CRS, consortium members, CSO partners, and beneficiary representatives.

- Statistics on institutional growth affected by capacity strengthening efforts (e.g., program value, service diversity, and reach; staff retention)

- Financial resources invested into capacity strengthening during project implementation

LEARNING AGENDA

The learning questions that follow guided the efforts of CRS and the nine participating CSOs. The questions were designed to establish an understanding of SGPM I's capacity strengthening return on investment through a one-year follow-up assessment.

- How much did different capacity strengthening initiatives cost in SGPM I?

- What truly stands out about the project and/or partner relationships?

- Where are CSO partners now? Have they sustained some/all of the improvements they made during SGPM I?

- Do CSO partners still use the new/upgraded systems for financial management, human resources, M&E, and/or recruitment?

- Is the board established during SGPM I still functioning?

ANNEX B: SUSTAINED IMPACT, ONE YEAR LATER (DETAIL)

INSTITUTIONAL AND PROGRAMMATIC POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

In the CRS-led follow-up assessment, teams asked nine CSOs that participated in SGPM I about the status and progression of their institutional support documents such as their constitution; vision, mission, and values; financial, procurement, and human resources policies; and monitoring and evaluation guidance. See Table A1.

Table A1: Status of institutional support documents

CSOS HAVE COMPREHENSIVE POLICIES AND GUIDANCE	BASELINE	DEC 2011	JAN 2012
Yes	13%	91%	28%
No	87%	4%	4%
Amended and improved	--	5%	68%

SUSTAINED ACHIEVEMENTS AMONG NINE CRS-SUPPORTED CSOS (DETAIL)

Table A2 show changes in measurable indicators across the span of the SGPM I project and one year after its conclusion. The figures shown represent the nine CRS-supported CSOs as a whole.

Table A2: SGPM I impacts at baseline, endline, and one-year follow-up

SGPM I IMPACTS	BASELINE (OCT 2011)	ENDLINE (FEB 2013)	ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP (APRIL 2014)	% CHANGE FROM BASELINE TO ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP (2.5 YEARS AFTER PROJECT START)
Projects implemented	23	56	35	+ 52%
Donors	14	30	22	+ 57%
Proposals submitted	23	65	44	+ 91%
Proposals awarded	17	56	35	+ 106%
Budget (SDG)	2,650,000	10,389,000	8,800,000	+ 232%
Direct beneficiaries	27,314	49,829	86,912	+ 218%
Paid staff				
Female	24	52	80	+ 233%
Male	40	73	97	+ 143%
Volunteers				
Female	77	100	127	+ 65%
Male	52	121	142	+ 173%
Established working partnerships with peer CBOs or NGOs	6	61	71	+ 1,083%

ANNEX C: FORMAL CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAININGS (DETAIL)

TRAINING #1: LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Timeframe: March 2012

Duration: 3 days

Participants: The chair of the board and executive director (or equivalents) from each CSO and two additional representatives from each CSO, both in senior decision making positions.

Outcomes:

- Participants identified their roles as leaders in organizational management.

- Participants became familiar with the standard elements of organizational governance.

- Participants identified the importance and the roles of a board of directors, constitution, documented meetings and procedures, and organizational structure.

- Participants identified aspects of governance to focus on growing within their organizations

TRAINING #2: OPERATION SYSTEMS: FINANCE, HUMAN RESOURCES, PROCUREMENT

Timeframe: April 2012

Duration: 3 days

Participants: The executive director, finance officer, and 3 administrative staff of each CSO

Outcomes:

- Participants gained skills for approaching management systematically.

- Participants became familiar with the basic tools for financial management.

- Participants practiced adapting the tools to practical situations.

- Participants deepened their understanding of key principles of human resources management.

TRAINING #3: PROJECT DESIGN AND CONFLICT ANALYSIS

Timeframe: May 2012

Duration: 3 days

Participants: One project staff member (or one project manager and one volunteer), one M&E staff and/or one senior management person from each CSO

Outcomes:

- Participants became familiar with at least 4 tools for conducting conflict analysis.

- Participants gained knowledge on how to develop an assessment plan (recruit, train, schedule, adapt tools, etc.).

- Participants learned how to write conflict analysis reports.

TRAINING #4: ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS AND PROGRESS TRACKING

Timeframe: July 2012

Duration: 3 days

Participants: One M&E staff person and one senior management representative from each CSO

Outcomes:

- Participants gained a better understanding of the connection between organizational vision and a monitoring and evaluation system. This included the importance of maintaining focus on their vision.

- Participants became better prepared to track progress toward program and project goals.

- Participants gained skills on how to approach progress reporting systematically.

TRAINING #5: DO NO HARM AND COOPERATIVE ADVOCACY

Timeframe: July 2012

Duration: 3 days

Participants: The executive director and two program staff, ideally with a background in peacebuilding, from each CSO

Outcomes:

- Participants gained a clearer understanding of how conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding can be integrated into all sectors of programming.

- Participants practiced thinking about programming and its implications from the perspective of each stakeholder.

- Participants designed and discussed creative ways to access marginalized community members.

TRAINING #6: PROGRAM EVALUATION AND HOW IT APPLIES TO EACH CSO

Timeframe: October 2012

Duration: 3 days

Participants: The same participants of the Conflict Analysis training: one project staff member (or one project manager and one volunteer), one M&E staff and/or one senior management person from each CSO

Outcomes:

- Participants learned how to develop a scope of work for an evaluation.

- Participants learned key principles and practices in data collection and analysis.

- Participants became familiar with the role of evaluation in shaping future activities and programming.

TRAINING #7: COMPLIANCE

Timeframe: December 2012

Duration: 2 days

Participants: Monitoring and evaluation staff and senior management representative (2 per CSO)

Outcomes:

- Participants grasped the importance of compliance and using good documentation practices.

- Participants gained an understanding of what donors generally expect in terms of compliance.

TRAINING #8: PROJECT REFLECTION AND LEARNING

Timeframe: December 2012

Duration: One day

Participants: The executive director, head of programming and one other CSO representative (a board member when possible)

Outcomes:

- Participants were explained how to conduct an after-action review, and how to use its learning to inform the next planning cycle.

- Participants gained a better understanding of how to use learning to refine organizational identity and niche.