

At CRS we employ information and communications technology for development (ICT4D) across the gamut of our programming—from our signature activities in emergency response, agriculture and health to our complementary efforts in education, microfinance, peacebuilding, and water and sanitation. We also work closely with technology partners to influence the evolution of ICT4D to ensure it meets the needs of developing communities.

THE BASICS

159 ICT4D PROJECTS
IN 2014

75% LESS TIME NEEDED
FOR DATA COLLECTION
DURING EMERGENCIES

53% FEWER ERRORS
IN DATA COLLECTION

51% REDUCTION IN COSTS
TO RUN SEED FAIRS

PRODUCED AN ORGANIZATIONAL GUIDE TO ICT4D with Nethope, Johns Hopkins University and Microsoft to help agencies build ICT4D capacity. Available at crsprogramquality.org/ict4d

BUILT STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS with technology firms and peer agencies

MADE FIRM COMMITMENT to support electronic payments by joining the Better than Cash Alliance

INVESTED in a cutting edge ICT platform for monitoring and evaluation

DEVELOPED a suite of tools to help farmer groups plan their businesses

HOW WE USE ICT

FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E)

Over the past five years, CRS has used ICT for M&E in more than 150 projects across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. The use of technology for M&E makes us more accountable to our donors and program participants, and improves the way we share learning within our agency and with other relief and development organizations.

To ensure high quality M&E at the project level, we developed a digital platform called “e-Valuate” that enables highly accurate data collection and analysis in near real time, more transparency and accountability, and better decision-making and service delivery. The platform also makes performance tracking easier across projects, countries and regions. Through the use of ICT, we reduced the time needed to collect and analyze data by 75%, and the number of errors in data collection by 53%.

IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Accurate and fast data collection is key to an effective, well-managed emergency response. As part of a program in southeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, we used cellphones and GPS watches to pinpoint the location of wells that needed to be rehabilitated. The technology mapped the water sources to help prevent the spread of waterborne diseases such as cholera.

In our response to Cyclone Haruna in Madagascar in 2013, we used iPod Touch, GPS and iFormBuilder to collect basic household



Ninon Kambemba demonstrates how he uses a cell phone and a GPS watch to locate wells that need rehabilitation in southeastern Congo, a region hit by violence and unrest in late 2013. Jennifer Hardy/CRS



Community health worker Suman Devi uses an interactive checklist on her mobile phone to advise Suman Srivastava about her pregnancy. The checklist was developed by CRS and technology firm, Dimagi, for use within a CRS program in Uttar Pradesh, India. Mark Dummett/CRS

information and store the data in a cloud-based system. Subsequently, we used ArcGIS software to map the assistance provided to each of the camps where we worked. The use of technology saved three and a half weeks of time in data collection and analysis efforts. We also used barcodes to register and verify program participants, cutting in half the time required for registration, and reducing by 40% the number of staff needed to manage distributions.

Mobile payment methods are another way to save time during crisis situations. In our response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the use of mobile cash cut costs by 25%. Under the previous paper-based system, users traveled more than an hour to receive their benefits. With mobile cash, project managers were able to transfer funds directly to the phone account of program participants, enabling them to buy what they needed immediately. The technology also reduced payroll processing from ten to two days.

IN AGRICULTURE PROGRAMMING

CRS developed the Farmbook suite of tools to enable field agents to help farmers plan their businesses and evaluate their productivity and profitability. Using the software, extension agents can register and collect information about farmer groups, write a business plan, conduct a profitability analysis, and produce a production schedule for the season. They can also keep a record of training events and asset transfers, and undertake baseline surveys and annual audits. The suite features nine distance learning modules on the skills essential to farmer cooperatives, including group organization, natural resource management, financial education, marketing, and innovation. A “map and track” function helps monitor the delivery of services by field agents.

CRS has also used SMS technology to improve the quality of its agricultural programming. In the Philippines,

program managers in our USDA-funded FARM project used text messages to provide farmer groups with coffee and cacao price information. The bi-monthly updates helped the groups decide when to sell their harvest and to whom, which ultimately allowed them to command better prices. The project also supported a web-based platform that provided project information and updates to partner NGOs and government stakeholders.

IN HEALTH PROGRAMMING

In a project that will reach more than 33,000 pregnant women and 21,000 children by 2015 in Uttar Pradesh, India, CRS and its partners are using mobile phone technology to boost the frequency and quality of home visits by government-supported community health workers. Between the beginning of the project in 2012 and the halfway point in 2014, the average number of antenatal visits nearly doubled, with the average woman receiving 45% more visits and 58% receiving the three recommended number of checkups. The coverage of the workers also improved, with fewer “low coverage” health workers at the midpoint than at the start of the project—from 61% to 19%. Results also showed a 24% increase in the workers’ knowledge of high-impact maternal and newborn care interventions as a result of using the app.

To track the progress and impact of its malaria work in Sierra Leone, CRS partnered with the country’s Ministry of Health to implement a nationwide malaria survey. We used Apple 3GS iPhones to increase the speed of data collection, monitoring and analysis. A similar paper-based survey in The Gambia required two years before results were fully compiled and analyzed. The use of communications technology in Sierra Leone allowed preliminary results to be available within two months of the end of the malaria survey, thereby providing an early road map to inform the design of malaria programming.