



Technical brief

A Regional Approach for Strengthening Women's Voices in East Africa: Lessons from the Learning for Change Programme

This technical brief documents the lessons learned, good practices and recommendations from the Learning for Change (L4C) programme's Regional Approach to capacity building in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda. It highlights key considerations for future regional or multi-country programming



Uganda



Rwanda



Ethiopia

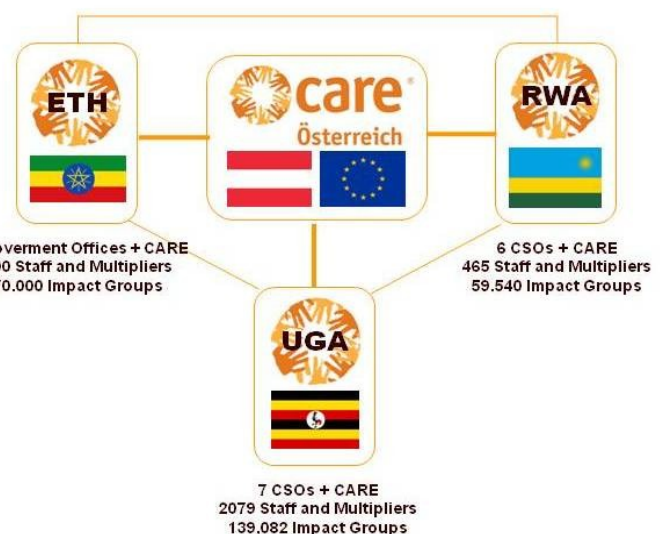
Programme Overview

Learning for Change (L4C): Strengthening Women's Voices in East Africa is a three-year regional programme ending in March 2019, with the aim of **promoting the meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes at household, community, local and national levels**. L4C is funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and implemented by CARE Austria in cooperation with CARE Country Offices in Ethiopia, Uganda and Rwanda. It directly contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially on Gender Equality (SDG 5) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

HOW DID L4C WORK?

The L4C team worked with civil society organizations (Uganda and Rwanda) and government partners (Ethiopia) to help build their knowledge and organizational and programmatic capacities in gender equality and women's empowerment. It also advocated for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Austria, at European Union level, and in the Great Lakes region.

L4C's work centered on L4C Learning Packages, which included trainings, manuals and ongoing technical backstopping on a variety of thematic areas, such as women's leadership, engaging men and boys, psychosocial support and gender integrated programming. Drawing on CARE's expertise, regional thematic leads developed learning packages and facilitated capacity building workshops in each of the three countries. The in-country follow-up was ensured by national L4C teams.



WHAT IS THE REGIONAL APPROACH?

The regional approach refers to cross-country collaboration between CARE Austria, CARE Ethiopia, CARE Uganda and CARE Rwanda in the development, implementation, coordination and management of the L4C programme.

KEY FEATURES OF L4C'S REGIONAL APPROACH

Key features of L4C's regional approach include:

- **Shared logframe, budget and team structures** across L4C country offices, with adaptation and contextualisation where necessary. This helped to homogenise work on L4C across the region and gave L4C a stronger regional dimension.
- **Cross-country Thematic Leads**, who were CARE staff based in Uganda and Rwanda and who led on the various thematic areas such as: Women's Leadership and Engaging Men and Boys (Uganda), Psychosocial Support (Uganda), and Advocacy (Rwanda). They developed learning packages and manuals, and facilitated the corresponding trainings in cooperation with the national teams. Two Technical Advisors were based in CARE Austria and supported the Thematic Leads (Psychosocial Support and Advocacy, and Gender).
- **A Steering Committee** which consisted of CARE Country Directors from Ethiopia, Uganda and Rwanda; the CARE Regional Director for the East, Central and Southern Africa Regional Office; the CARE Austria National Director and the Programme Director. The Steering Committee met biannually to monitor L4C progress at a technical level and provide strategic guidance.
- **A Coordination Team** with representatives in each of the four programme countries who were responsible for the coordination, the implementation, management and reporting of L4C activities.



A Ugandan Thematic Lead during a workshop in Rwanda

L4C's Regional Approach: Key lessons learned

The regional approach adopted by L4C provided a distinctive dimension to its design. A number of lessons have been drawn from implementing this approach:

L4C STRENGTHENED REGIONAL CAPACITY TO PROVIDE THEMATIC LEADERSHIP

L4C's regional Thematic Leads are specialists who provided sector-specific technical support to colleagues from other countries. They brought experience from working in their own countries to support colleagues from other countries to adapt tools and approaches for their specific contexts. Because Thematic Leads were from East Africa they were able to share 'real-life' experiences that were relevant and useful for the implementing teams. Because they were CARE staff they were able to provide technical support that aligned with CARE's vision and mission. L4C participants identified this as a value-added component of the L4C approach.

Thematic Leads' visits to Country Offices brought skills transfer, technical support and knowledge sharing. Participants indicated that this helped them 'think outside the box' and that colleagues from other countries encouraged them to challenge their thinking. Some L4C staff reported that an interesting consequence of the cross-country approach was that it instilled a sense of positive competition within the L4C team, in that it would encourage country office staff to "up their game" in regard to their specific thematic area, e.g. when they were to prepare and deliver a training in collaboration with Thematic Leads.

"Through L4C, I improved my planning and coordination skills, because many times the work called for contextualization for the different countries." (Thematic Lead, Uganda)

Participants highlighted that they did not only learn from Thematic Leads; knowledge sharing went two-ways as Country Office staff also shared their experiences with Thematic Leads. L4C participants particularly enjoyed the close collaboration between Thematic Leads and national staff in the development and implementation of L4C trainings.

The process of providing technical support to colleagues also enabled Thematic Leads to strengthen their own skills, ultimately contributing to a stronger technical skill-base among CARE offices in East Africa. One Thematic Lead explained, *"The regional approach helped me to build my capacity to adapt to the context. I got an opportunity to give technical support and work as a regional team with other colleagues. We shared different experiences and I was able to extend my expertise."*

A REGIONAL APPROACH REQUIRES REAL-TIME CONTEXTUALISATION

L4C avoided developing generic learning packages because of the different contexts and conditions across the three

East African countries. Since L4C worked with civil society organisations and government partners, for instance, the team had to take into consideration different needs and partnership approaches.

Learnings, in this respect, are that contextualization of learning packages require flexibility—to adapt materials in real time, if required, and regular and clear communication across CARE Country Offices to draw on local knowledge. This required that regional Thematic Leads collaborated closely with the national teams. Thus, the Thematic Leads could draw on in-country expertise and knowledge of the local context.

This can also be said for L4C planning and reporting tools, such as the regional logframe and M&E Plan. It is important to consider how the programme plays out at the national level in the first year, and then contextualize the shared regional logframe and M&E plan accordingly, in case some elements are unsuitable (i.e. an indicator that might be available in Uganda, might not be in Ethiopia). This allows the teams to factor in contextual differences e.g. in performance measurement while sharing regional objectives.



An Ethiopian participant analysing the country context

L4C'S REGIONAL APPROACH FACILITATED CROSS-COUNTRY EXCHANGE

L4C provided several opportunities for cross-country exchange, including regional workshops, coordination meetings, cross-country learning visits, regular skype calls, and technical support visits from Thematic Leads.

A good practice was, for instance, to combine regional coordination meetings with field visits. The regional exchanges proved to be very fruitful since they exposed COs to different approaches in the implementation of L4C. Coordination meetings were also a good opportunity to

identify learnings, discuss joint challenges and develop recommendations for specific problems.

However, peer learning activities could have been done more extensively and also at the level of local partners.

MUTUAL BENEFIT: A learning exchange between CARE Rwanda and CARE Uganda

In 2018, the L4C team of CARE Rwanda visited CARE Uganda to gain insights in their respective L4C implementation. The teams visited inter alia civil society partners like COVOID.

COVOID staff explained, *“The visit by CARE Rwanda was a two-way exchange. COVOID also managed to benefit from it. Their visit boosted morale in the team—we were proud that out of the many organisations involved in L4C, we were chosen to showcase our work. We visited a group of multipliers [community volunteers] and this increased their motivation and morale to do their work. In the future we would be happy to also visit CARE Rwanda and contribute or learn from their work.”*

A CARE Rwanda staff shared after the visit: *“One inspiration is based on how youth are well involved in community awareness raising. Especially teenage mothers and other girls out of schools are very committed to educate community members, including colleagues who remained at school. They have the courage to go to different schools and give their testimonies and success stories.”*

A REGIONAL APPROACH REQUIRES STRONG COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION

Inevitably, work across multiple countries presents some challenges. Some participants felt that working regionally required a more concrete platform for regional coordination and support and more time for coordination, communication and contextualization. Competing schedules and technical issues made things more complicated than a single country approach. Skype calls, for instance, were often initiated by CARE Austria, while it would have been good to have clear responsibilities for the regional communication at country level as well.

“Learning to develop tools and manuals for a regional programme is something that improved my capacity. I have developed manuals before but this time I had to take into account other contexts... Working with different cultures and different backgrounds sharpened my skills.” (Thematic Lead, Uganda)

Participants felt that remote communication is not always enough; face-to-face interaction remains most effective.



The L4C team during a coordination meeting in Ethiopia

LINKING REGIONAL AND LOCAL

Balancing the regional component with local needs was sometimes challenging. CARE's internal organizational processes sometimes delayed implementation and drew focus to the regional activities (rather than country-level activities). There were concerns about the time and costs associated with sending Thematic Leaders to other countries, and that the Thematic Leader approach denied local trainers an opportunity to use their expertise. Language barriers also complicated collaboration, with Thematic Leaders having to work through interpreters in some countries.

Regional expertise was not always used to its full extent. The backstopping (ongoing coaching and mentoring) component, for instance, was an important part of the L4C approach. The Thematic Leads were ready to support national teams with their knowledge and expertise beyond the trainings. However, there was variable uptake of backstopping across the three countries, with Thematic Leaders depending on CARE Country Offices to identify and ask for backstopping support. Regional backstopping was mostly used during in-country visits and not as systematically as it could have been.

Despite these challenges, L4C successfully linked local and regional staff competencies. It was most effective when Thematic Leads and local staff worked as joint teams to build in-house and partner capacity.

Conclusion

The regional dimension was both a challenge and a strength. Overall, however, L4C's regional approach was successful and contributed to enriching the programme's results. Cross-country exchanges facilitated through L4C enabled CARE Country Offices in East Africa to share expertise, learning and experiences and to strengthen capacities and knowledge on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the three country offices and among L4C's partners. L4C staff were able to develop and adapt their skills to new contexts, thereby improving their own capabilities. The challenge, however, was that the regional approach demanded very smooth and functional collaboration which, in the context of L4C staff members' busy schedules and distance from one another, was not always easy.

L4C demonstrated the power of harnessing regional staff expertise, presenting an important alternative to dependency on external consultants.

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