



Learning Brief

Strengthening advocacy capacities for gender equality: Lessons from the Learning for Change Programme

This learning brief documents key advocacy lessons and learnings from the 3-year Austrian Development Agency (ADA) Programme, Learning for Change (L4C), implemented by CARE and Partners in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda through CARE Austria. L4C aimed at contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 5: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". This brief is a result of consultations with partner and CARE staff as well as other learning sessions carried out throughout the project in order to support partners, peers and CARE in developing more effective capacity strengthening approaches to evidence-based advocacy and influencing.



Advocacy is a deliberate process that intends to influence decision makers in the development, change and implementation of policies

(CARE Advocacy Manual)

Introduction

In many African countries, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda included, there are numerous policies that are gender transformative. However they are often not effectively implemented. As a result, women and girls do not enjoy their full rights, including the right to participation in public and governance processes. Similarly, violence against women and girls remains high and widespread. Thus, as one important part of CARE's work to achieve sustainable change and poverty alleviation, CARE works with civil society partners and coalitions to advocate for lasting change for women and girls. **L4C aimed at enhancing partner and CARE staff capacity in conducting more effective and inclusive evidence-based advocacy/influencing and at contributing to the success of ongoing and future advocacy on gender equality and Women, Peace and Security.**

L4C's Capacity Building Approach

L4C's capacity building approach was centered on L4C Learning Packages, which included trainings, manuals and ongoing technical backstopping. The advocacy/influencing package targeted in particular programme and technical staff from partner organisations and CARE. It consisted of three phases:



The **first phase** aimed at a better understanding of advocacy in general and introduced steps for developing an advocacy strategy.

The **second phase** looked at how evidence can be collected and used to influence decision-makers or policy processes.

The **final phase** developed participant skills in using various context-specific tactics to influence decision-makers.

At the end of each workshop, the participants established **action plans** on how they would apply and share their knowledge.

All three phases were accompanied by **technical backstopping and coaching** to the partners while they implemented advocacy activities. **Training handouts** were shared with the participants.

Lessons Learned

Practical and tailor-made trainings address capacity needs more effectively

The three advocacy training phases used a variety of methods for practical, adaptive and contextualized learning including, among others, games and interactive exercises.

Different advocacy tools were introduced to participants who then had a chance to practice by applying them on issues they were actually working on. For instance, when the problem analysis tree was introduced, it was used to identify advocacy issues in regard to the prevalence of child marriage in Rubirizi District, Western Uganda. In another training, step-by-step exercises on developing campaigns or writing position papers were carried out.

In Ethiopia, CARE had previously not engaged in advocacy due to the restrictions in the political environment. After the L4C trainings, participants cited practical examples of exercises which had enabled them to advance the influencing agenda. These included the analysis of policy issues that women and girls face, such as the lack of women's participation and voice in the local agricultural extension system. Participants had also been

“Personally the trainings have helped me improve my advocacy skills, particularly using different tools to plan for advocacy. I have since used these tools when we are developing our annual advocacy plans”

(Participant from Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe, a CARE Rwanda advocacy partner)

supported in identifying leveraging spaces and opportunities within ongoing programming, for instance, quarterly meetings that CARE co-organizes with government representatives or the use of evidence from programs, such as factsheets to influence local leaders.

L4C workshop content and materials were as practical as possible and provided spaces for exchange of experiences and expertise. This facilitated new connections and synergies among partners. Cooperation between partners working at local and national level, for instance, was triggered during the joint trainings. Peer learning, however, could have been strengthened even more.

At the same time, linkages with other L4C learning packages became visible. Skills in Knowledge Management and Learning, for instance, could be used for the generation and sharing of evidence, while modules in Women Leadership supported women's political participation in practical terms. This demonstrated once again that successful advocacy needs to be linked to many different institutional processes.

Capacity Building needs to be grounded in the local context

Analysis and monitoring of the context helps us to identify what is relevant and achievable in a particular setting, to develop effective advocacy objectives and to adapt existing programmes to continually changing needs. L4C's very hands-on approach allowed partners to gain a better understanding of what is possible in their particular context, to develop appropriate tactics and to maintain smooth and effective relationships with decision making actors and institutions.

The PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental) analysis was introduced to practically analyze the contexts that partners and CARE are working in. In Uganda, where the North has experienced war and conflict, partners based in the region focused their advocacy work on addressing post-conflict challenges such as sexual violence. In Ethiopia, non-governmental organisations receiving donor money are restricted by law from working on matters of advocacy and human rights. L4C enabled the participants to study their particular context in order to design appropriate strategies. To this end, it was imperative for L4C to design training materials that fit into different contexts.

Partners' commitment is key for success

Any capacity development initiative needs to take into consideration partners' genuine interest and commitment in

increasing and using the capacities gained through trainings and coaching. This includes - but is not limited to - the partners having a vision and mission which are aligned to the advocacy trainings. Although a significant role for civil society organisations (CSOs) focusing on women and girls should be about advocacy for, with or by the people they represent, it is likely that other activities will take priority and that advocacy might not be a focus. Therefore, to ensure learning is internalized and applied, the organization needs to make a deliberate effort to integrate the new knowledge into their advocacy and programming initiatives; if possible already at the onset when designing projects, including when developing the monitoring and evaluation framework. This can only be done if organizational leadership is committed, supportive and provides the space for staff to take initiative, adapt and learn as needed.

Drawing from existing opportunities is key to successful influencing: “I worked with colleagues to encourage partners to integrate new activities into their annual work plan. We gave them the autonomy to understand the situation, develop the right message and identify the existing opportunities to influence decision-makers”

(Staff member, CARE Ethiopia)

Participants need to be carefully selected

Participants attending the trainings need to have the seniority and authority, or their leadership’s trust, to properly follow up on training within their organisations. They need to be able to implement action plans and apply their learning.

Participants could be programme staff, such as field staff whose day-to-day work involves collecting evidence for advocacy work, or those involved with developing advocacy tactics such as communications, programme quality or leadership staff members.

In addition to the importance of the participant profile, L4C trainings demonstrated that consistency in training attendance – i.e. the same participants attending successive

trainings – was another variable in the successful implementation of training learnings / action plans, in that it would allow for better implementation and monitoring of agreed actions.

Applying the learning

After each training, technical backstopping was introduced to ensure that trained participants were accompanied in applying the learnings and to reflect on progress and challenges. CARE Rwanda and CARE Uganda accompanied national partners to implement their advocacy actions and supported them to pass on their newly acquired L4C skills to other actors working within their networks.

By acting as a convener, by opening spaces to partners and facilitating partners to make use of those spaces, CARE further strengthened the partners’ capacities and voice. Thus, national partners can make use of the legitimacy and credibility to represent their beneficiary groups, as they work and live in the same communities that they serve.

“My day-to-day job includes coaching and mentoring our member organizations’ staff in carrying out advocacy for women’s rights and gender equality. Coaching provided by CARE Rwanda helped me to transfer this knowledge to others. In 2018, I successfully supported our member organisations’ staff to develop and implement their advocacy actions”

(Pro-Femme Twese Hamwe Advocacy Coordinator)

Case Study 1: Uganda

CARE and local partner COVOID work in Rubirizi District, Western Uganda to empower women and girls. Around 40% of girls in Uganda are married before their 18th birthday and 1 in 10 is married before the age of 15. These are the highest rates in the country. The L4C capacity building on advocacy allowed COVOID to develop a campaign targeting local leaders, girls and parents. In 2018, COVOID and Partners launched the campaign called “Otantorooboza” which included door to door awareness raising led by girls in the community who called upon parents to sign a declaration form committing themselves to reporting cases of child marriage within their villages. In the end 170 households signed the form. COVOID also drafted an ordinance, which was then presented to local government officers. The ordinance is informed by Uganda’s Children Act of 2016, which sets the minimum legal age of marriage at 18 years with no exceptions.



COVID and partners march against child marriage, Rubirizi District

Case Study 2: Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, CARE convenes and supports local government to increase the participation of women in decision-making. CARE has been working closely with government actors and institutions to create and facilitate spaces for their dialogue with communities. One of the issues identified by CARE Ethiopia was the low numbers of women in local decision-making processes such as water and sanitation committees and agricultural extension services. Through L4C trainings, CARE developed an engagement plan to sensitize local government to women’s participation and, ultimately, increase the number of women in these crucial local governance structures.

One of the regions CARE has worked in for years is in the Afar region in the North. Access to safe drinking water is an issue the community has been grappling with. Each morning, women and girls have to travel for 4-hours round trip to fetch water, yet they have no role on the water management committees, known as WASHco. This is largely due to the cultural norms that give men power and decision-making. According to a CARE staff member, the community believes that “women are good at home and not in public representation.” After the L4C training, CARE staff worked with local area Woreda officials to increase their understanding of the benefits of women’s participation in WASHco. As a result, women started taking up leadership positions in these committees. In Gerebina Kabele, Medina Jemal, one of the women members of the WASHco said: *“It is important for women to participate in how water is managed because women and girls are the ones that fetch water each morning and are always faced with the difficulties when they leave their houses at 5 in the morning. Today I am happy to be a member of the WASHco; I am confident, with excellent communication skills and I can express myself without fear.”*



Women members of the local WASHco

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