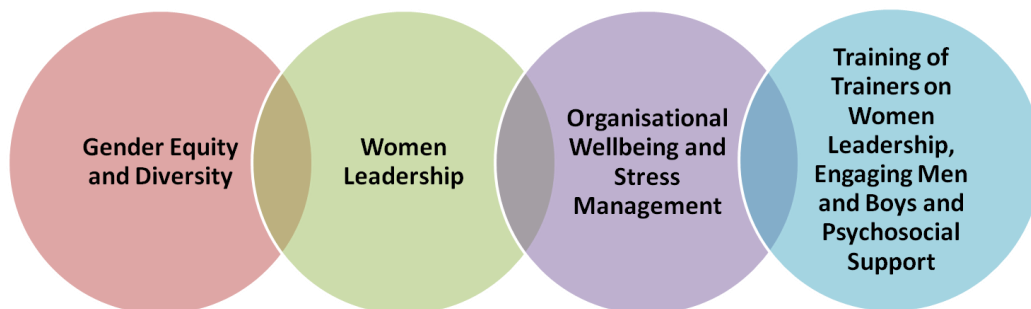




# Learning Brief

## Change starts from within: Gender equality and diversity as part of organisational culture and practice

**PROGRAM OVERVIEW** Learning for Change (L4C) is a regional program strengthening its partners' capacities to promote the meaningful participation of women and gender equality in East Africa. A core and guiding principle to the L4C program is 'to be the change we want to see' and thus that social transformation must start with the stakeholders and partner organizations on the ground. **L4C supported 18 likeminded organizations and 3 CARE offices in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda to develop conducive organisational cultures fostering gender equality and psychosocial wellbeing.**



### How did L4C work?

L4C aimed at developing the partners' capacities to promote more gender equitable working cultures, organizational policies, and practices. This included strengthening gender awareness and the capacities of staff and leadership to be able to engage, to facilitate change, to create an enabling environment for advancing gender equality and diversity at the workplace and within the workforce. L4C provided practical and contextualized workshops and technical backstopping in three key areas that were building on one another: Gender Equity and Diversity; Women Leadership; and Organizational Wellbeing and Stress Management. In addition, trainings of trainers (ToT) on Women Leadership, Engaging Men and Boys and Psychosocial Support provided concrete activities and methods to promote gender equality that could be used in communities as well as at home and at the workplace. The organizational development pillar was complemented by L4C's further learning areas addressing gender aspects in programming, in implementation and evidence-based advocacy.

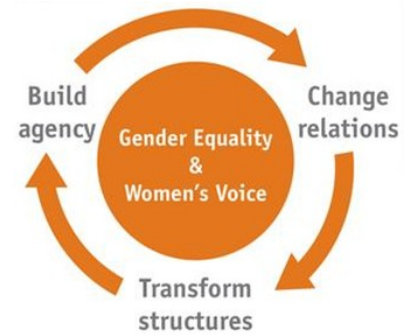
“My leadership approach was autocratic, and people were usually afraid of me and kept their distance. I did not trust others on project activities. After the stress management training, I learned about the importance of delegating tasks to others based on their area of expertise. I started to positively nurture subordinates, and developed team reflection sessions. All of this reduces stress on our team and improves our unit performance. The ToT training helped me to see what is missing from my side. The characteristics of good and bad facilitator, for instance, created a good awareness and gave me courage for change. “

Department of Education, Ethiopia

## Lessons Learned

### Organizational cultural shift requires a comprehensive and integrated approach

L4C applied an integrated approach that combined different thematic areas as well as different areas of capacity development. In line with CARE's gender equality framework, L4C worked on individual attitudes, team dynamics and organizational culture as well as organizational systems and processes. Its support crossed project lines and addressed the entire organization, not only specific program staff.



CARE Gender Equality Framework

### Change starts with the individual

The reflection of own gender biases was an important foundation to initiate change processes. One key to success was that L4C systematically challenged traditional gender norms, demystified gender, changed mindsets, attitudes and individual practices before introducing more technical issues on the implementation of gender sensitive approaches and programs. L4C's capacity development measures deliberately engaged participants in the type of sensitive discussion that encouraged a mindset flexibility and provided a practical and interactive space to facilitate the adoption of new working (and living) practices.

Before Geoffrey attended the Gender Equity and Diversity (GED) training, he didn't value diversity issues and didn't tolerate someone behaving in a different way than him and having a different way of thinking with him. After being trained he says: "Understanding diversity is key and solidifies every family, society, working environment." Geoffrey, now upholds GED principles among many other CARE staff who have witnessed positive changes and productivity in work.

CARE staff, Rwanda

### Without genuine interest of the partners and leadership buy-in, sustainable change is not possible

Organizational cultural shift requires a deliberate and long-term comprehensive process that involves leadership, staff and volunteers. In particular, senior management and strategic staff like human resource personnel had to be strategically involved. The Gender Equity and Diversity (GED) workshops were an important tool to strengthen commitment and ownership.

### The process and the findings of the organizational gender assessment were a turning point

The organizational gender assessment made partners and CARE aware of their gaps and strengths and the need for action. Partners were able to compare their own organization with peers and realized short-comings, for instance in the number of female staff or the implementation of gender related policies.

Tadfie is the Head of the Women and Children Affairs Office and knows all too well of the difficulties women face in her district. "Just a few years ago, it was impossible to think of women in leadership positions. In fact, women had no place at the decision-making tables in their communities. Female-dominating sectors, such as tourism or communications, were underpaid and there was a serious need to challenge male attitudes". She realized that in order to create change, she had to start in her own office. "The District Office itself was dominated by men. Through the trainings and support we received by L4C, we were able to shift attitudes in our own office and the wider community. Many of us thought women were too weak to lead but now we have two female Government Administrators. With the right support and demonstrated performance, we were able to change things for the better," Tadfie says.

Women and Children Affairs Office, Ethiopia

## Room for practice

L4C used a practice-oriented and participatory training methodology, encouraging participants during the workshops to work on real issues and challenges they are facing. At the end of each training, participants developed action plans on how to put the learning into practice and how to share skills and knowledge with their colleagues. Ongoing support and follow up after the trainings allowed for further reflection and technical backstopping regarding the implementation of individual and organizational commitments made. As one participant explained, despite busy schedules “*you could not put in the drawer what you have learned*”.

“Before the women leadership training, I and many other women were afraid to apply for higher jobs. We were afraid of the risk, were frustrated and had low self esteem. But then I realized that I can do it, that I can aspire and that I need to leave my comfort zone. There might be challenges on the way but once you identify them, you can overcome them!”

CARE staff, Ethiopia

## Demystifying gender equality and women’s empowerment

Before L4C, “women’s leadership” was mostly conceived of in political terms, and as a politically sensitive subject. L4C helped clarify that training on women leadership was far more, that it was about improving women’s life prospects by allowing them to appreciate their potential at all levels, professionally and personally. L4C created a safe space for women to discuss their challenges and aspirations and supported participants to develop personal development plans.

## The importance of in-house gender capacities

L4C created a pool of gender skilled Gender Equity and Diversity trainers and enhanced the gender and capacity building expertise within CARE and partners.

L4C teams in the four project countries were resource persons for gender equality and women empowerment for CARE and partners as well as for other programs and stakeholders. They provided technical support and input beyond L4C and pushed the agenda of gender equality, including Protection of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). Manuals, learning briefs and other materials were developed and made available for future reference.



PSEA Action Days, Uganda

## Organizational changes enhance performance

Changed attitudes and mindsets as well as changed organizational culture and policies energized teams to work for impact and facilitated gender mainstreaming in projects and programs. Many stories of change prove the effectiveness of L4C’s approach in strengthening capacities for the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming. As a result, women and girls were participating more meaningfully in organizations and institutions, in communities and at household level.

“In our organisation, we now share information on issues that need to be addressed in the field. For example, how to ensure that people who are blind can learn in literacy programs. We have now a feedback mechanism that allows staff to communicate such issues to the office. It allows to fetch first-hand information from community members. This has a positive impact because beneficiaries perceive the work done by the organisation as a means of support toward addressing their needs and concerns.”

Partner staff, Rwanda

## Case Study Uganda:

### “My ‘I am able’ Story”

“I began working in the organization after I graduated in 2015. At that time, the organization was overwhelmingly male-dominated, it lacked supportive work structures and we did not have defined codes of conduct.

It is not hard to feel incompetent in a space that does not support learning. I had a difficult time, I feared everything at the office. I felt powerless, I did not use my voice, I did not speak up in meetings or talk in the office. I was always afraid of making mistakes because leadership was intolerant toward mistakes. “But we learn through mistakes, don’t we?”



In November 2016, all staff members were trained in Gender Equality and Diversity. This training focused on promoting understanding surrounding differing work styles, functions, and methods present in the work place. We were asked to put ourselves in the shoes of others and look at situations from different perspectives and encouraged us to step out of our respective comfort zones. This experience helped me examine and reflect on the difficulties of my work environment in new ways. The training not only challenged me, but also challenged the organization’s leadership. At the end of the workshop, we worked to develop personal and organizational action plans to address identified gender equality issues to stimulate organizational change.

Things started to change immediately. I began to notice small changes. During weekly staff meetings every one of us was encouraged to speak about their work. The first time I spoke during a staff meeting, my heart was pounding but I did it – I shared. Everything switched into high gear, I started to share more and my colleagues became more supportive of my work as well as of what I had to offer to the team. When I first began at the organization, I would never have imagined myself confidently leading a staff meeting. Now, I regularly chair staff meetings and meetings in the community without hesitation. I wear trousers now and my organization encouraged and supported me to ride a motorbike to ease my work. I am one of the few young ladies that ride motorcycles in my community!

Work policies have improved gradually and have been received favorably by staff. We feel valued in the work place. The organization has now a female Human Resource officer to serve female staff members. We have separate female and male toilets and our female toilets have sanitary buckets – it is such a relief because it was so hard to share one bathroom with the men, especially when we had our menstruation period. The organization now respects our maternity leave, flex time policies, and breastfeeding breaks as stipulated by Uganda’s labor laws.

In 2017, I was selected to train as a facilitator on gender transformative approaches. I learned a lot, such as facilitation methods, tools for building self-esteem, and attentive listening. The exercises helped me grow personally as well as professionally. I use these skills to support 10 women’s groups in Mitooma district through their own empowerment journeys. I support the women on their journey to build self esteem and confidence. We have learned that once we learn to ride, we can help others to learn to ride too.”

**CARE Austria**  
Lange Gasse 30/4  
1080 Wien, Österreich  
T: +43 / 1 / 715-0-715-0  
Web: www.care.at

**CARE Uganda**  
P.O.Box 7280 Kampala  
Kira Road Plot 1B  
Web: www.careuganda.org

**CARE Rwanda**  
P.O.Box 550 Kigali City  
KN 8 Ave. Plot no: 720  
Web: www.care.org.rw

**CARE Ethiopia**  
PO Box 4710  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Web: www.care.org.et

