Brief No. 2

Learning and Knowledge Sharing for the Program Shift

CARE needs to learn and share knowledge more accurately, more quickly, and more reliably. The program shift work includes a new way of doing this, through a different approach to learning and knowledge sharing using learning laboratories and satellites. These are sites of strategic investment in both new practices and how to describe and disseminate those practices better so we learn faster.

Our goals are to:

1. Simplify our knowledge products – guidelines, analyses, good practice advice -- so that more staff can participate;
2. Ensure common understanding of important ideas, practices, and approaches so that we change consistently;
3. Foster wider networks of staff who can help each other;
4. disseminate good ideas more quickly and with more accuracy so that all staff can adopt and adapt them; and
5. Offer a more reliable set of contacts for advice, technical assistance, guides and manuals, training, and troubleshooting.

The learning and knowledge sharing system will focus on:

a) Better knowledge production techniques in "learning laboratories" and "satellites to learning laboratories";
b) Better processes for moving knowledge and learning from site to site in and out of CARE (that is, beyond the specific learning laboratories and satellites); and
c) Ensure clear responsibilities and accountabilities for good learning and knowledge sharing.

What Are Learning Laboratories?

Shifting to more programmatic approaches requires a holistic set of changes in CARE. We will need to create new program competencies and measures of success, and combine those with changes in program support. Over the next two years, learning laboratories will be sites of learning where the entire set of changes needed are brought together, carefully sequenced, and continuously improved.

A learning lab is a business unit of CARE with a self-declared interest in moving to a program approach. A learning lab is therefore a site:

- Of holistic change
- Of strategic investment in the competencies and systems changes to help staff make the shift
- Of strategic investment in better knowledge products and processes around how to shift towards more programmatic approaches
- Where making mistakes is accepted, and part of the learning process: but with support to make sure they do not spin out of control or do harm, particularly to the poor
- With the capacity to help others learn how to shift and where the global organization will invest in that very capacity and learning process.

Learning labs specifically have the following minimum set of obligations:

1. To Enact and test the eight characteristics of a program approach, including:
    - Measure progress against each of the characteristics, and test indicators and systems of measurement for program quality
    - Document learnings from this experience that can easily be shared.

2. To assist satellites to adopt proven practices, and to learn from them, including:
   - Hosting satellite staff on cross visits, in workshops, and in training events
   - Listening to and learning from satellite staff about the quality and usefulness of the knowledge being produced and disseminated
   - Engaging in ongoing conversation – via email, list serve, or other distance learning technology – on a regular basis.
3. To test alignments between signature, regional, and global sectoral programs and business units. 'Alignment' means that there will need to be common agreement on the role of the signature, sectoral or regional program vis-à-vis the learning laboratory in question.
4. To the region to maintain relationships and exchanges with regional learning teams and with DRDs for program quality and program support.
5. To test a holistic organizational performance measurement system
   - Operationalize and contextualize an agreed set of high-level organizational performance measures relating to impact, quality and program support
   - To design, implement, and measure impacts of programs
   - Conduct a baseline survey against these indicators
   - Set up a learning system that will ensure reflection and improvement from the indicators.

Learning Laboratories are being established at multiple levels:

Country:	Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Georgia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Laos/Vietnam
Region:	Latin America and the Caribbean
Global Sector:	Water
Global program:	all three CUSA signature programs

What are Satellites?

A satellite is a business unit (most will be COs) that is committed to moving towards a program approach and is engaged in a set of interactive, learning relationships with a learning lab. Many countries have already started to establish a program approach and have begun planning the organizational transition required to bring this about. Satellites may therefore create learning which learning labs can draw from, as well as learn from them. The satellites to the learning labs have not as yet been finalized, but it is envisaged that each learning lab will have 2-3 satellites associated with it.

A satellite is therefore a site:

- With an explicit, planned, learning relationship with learning labs
- Where that relationship is supported by global resources
- That would like to replicate some – but probably not all – of the changes that the labs are adopting and demonstrate their cross-context applicability
- That can feed back improvements on practices quickly to the learning labs
- Where the very act of knowledge transfer (between satellites and labs, in both directions) is carefully monitored by the global organization to understand how to do this most effectively.

The satellites have specific obligations too:

1. To the learning lab –
   - Apply and/or replicate ideas and/or practices and capture the lessons learned
   - Maintain sharing in both directions
   - Pay careful attention to what is different in context, process, method, and outcome when replicating a practice or idea and documenting it.

- Feed back in a timely and effective manner to the learning lab. Staff exchanges or collective reflective learning events are two examples of ways to share experiences as they occur.

2. To the region –
   - Maintain relationships and dialogue with regional learning teams, playing a particularly important role in helping create knowledge products and processes for others.

Beyond Labs and Satellites

While learning labs and satellites are sites of knowledge production, the learning architecture for the program shift work will require contributions from a) regional program quality groups or thematic communities of practice, b) CUSA global knowledge sharing and learning function and organizational performance and management staff, and c) the CARE International Programme Working Group. If the knowledge production and learning goes as planned, all country offices, regions, and CI members, will have better opportunities to adopt practices themselves. They will also have clear ways of influencing these practices, engaging in dialogue and debate with learning labs and satellites, and in improving the work.

Regional program quality groups or thematic communities of practice will be places where learning is synthesized and careful attention paid to how to move knowledge from the labs and satellites to other parts of CARE. DRDs for both program quality and program support will play important roles at this level to ensure the establishment and follow through of an explicit learning and knowledge sharing plan.

CARE USA's global knowledge sharing and learning function – which itself is distributed across multiple units and groups – will be responsible for providing technical assistance to regions and learning labs and satellites regarding good practice, for establishing global processes for ensuring that learning crosses regions, for actively lobbying for the resources needed, and for monitoring and evaluating the success of the global knowledge and learning strategy. At the global level, too, groups such as the rights-based approaches reference group (RBARG) and the gender based violence network, will also need to establish learning objectives around the program shift work.

The CI Programme working group will play a key role in assessing progress around the program shift, and determining what if any changes are needed in global program policy.

Who will learn what?

Staff in the Learning Labs ...	...will build their own understanding and talents to bring together, holistically, the changes for the program shift.
Satellite Learning Labs ...	...will develop concrete and explicit plans to "learn with the labs." COs will plan and budget for this; DRDs for program quality and strategic support will do the same at regional levels.
Regional Program Quality Teams...	...will both assist in transferring learning and lessons from labs to other countries as well as track innovations in these "satellite learning COs" that may be of use in the labs themselves. They will also learn what it takes to be a more effective community of practice.
CI member program management...	...will learn if these changes provide better results for their constituencies and donors, and how they can better work with country office programs. They will also learn how much ongoing investment is needed to keep program quality up to acceptable levels, moving forward. They may decide to pilot a program approach within their own lead countries (e.g., C-Australia and the SE Asia region).
Sectoral staff...	...will learn how technical models and standards can be developed and embedded in holistic, coherent accountability systems, how to conceptualize long term programs and projects that contribute to long-term programs, and how global strategies and fundraising can better mesh with the desire to have longer term commitments to the people we serve
Global learning staff...	...will learn what the most strategic set of knowledge products and processes are to move important lessons better across the rest of the organization. They may also gain an improved understanding of how other CI frameworks and strategies can adapt to and support the programmatic shift.