

A QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF CARE INTERNATIONAL NGO OPERATIONS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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Abstract

CARE is a world leader in the field of human development. The aim of the foundation is to defeat poverty and achieve social justice by empowering women and girls. A believer of the 'Girl Effect', CARE affirms that the inclusion of women in all spheres of life can catalyze the development of nations. Forming partnerships across countries, lobbying and collaborating with governments, and sharing values of equality are the main functions of CARE. The nonprofit acknowledges diversity and actively includes voices to tackle some of the most complex problems in the world. With a presence in 94 countries, CARE means to transform by using the power of people throughout the world.

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Introduction

CARE is a world leader in the field of human development. The aim of the foundation is to defeat poverty and achieve social justice by empowering women and girls. A believer of the ‘Girl Effect’, CARE affirms that the inclusion of women in all spheres of life can catalyze the development of nations. Forming partnerships across countries, lobbying and collaborating with governments, and sharing values of equality are the main functions of CARE. The nonprofit acknowledges diversity and actively includes voices to tackle some of the most complex problems in the world. With a presence in 94 countries, CARE means to transform by using the power of people throughout the world (Serhan et. al., 2011; Serhan&Bozkurt, 2012; Special Issue Supplement: Conference Abstracts from the 6th Public Health Palliative Care International Conference, 2020).

CARE’s belief in urgent action and transformation drives them to intervene in some of the most gruesome problems across the globe. In addition to encouraging and empowering women, CARE reaches out to countries facing crises as a result of wars (South Sudan) and natural calamities such as the Kerala floods in India (Serhan et. al., 2011; Serhan&Bozkurt, 2012). Reaching out to the underprivileged people across the world and connecting them to the mainstream masses is just one side of CARE’s work. The organization is actively involved in advocacy work, which includes holding discussions, lobbying with government officials, negotiating projects and explaining their vision to the governments and working collaboratively to bring the necessary changes (CARE International UK, 2007). To understand how CARE operates, and more importantly, how it communicates with its stakeholders, I talked to an officer from the Strategic Planning Division at CARE.

Focused Inclusion of Women

CARE’s main objective is the focused inclusion of women in all spheres of society. With an aim to end extreme poverty by 2030, CARE is focused to materialize the ‘Girl Effect’ that will make women in charge of the household, and will encourage them to participate in the economy, government and in various other social avenues. To make this happen, CARE tackles barriers like child marriage, child labor, sexual and reproductive health, societal stereotypes and gender-based violence through the Village Saving Loan Association (VSLA) and Strengthening Opportunities for Adolescent Resilience (SOAR).

CARE bases its work on the fact that when women are provided with money, they spend it addressing family concerns. VSLAs were started to provide women in underdeveloped areas with an economic tool that allows them to pool their savings to loan each other money to pay for education, healthcare, self-sustaining businesses

and more. The loan interest generates capital for more loans and results in profit for the entire community. Started in Niger in the year 1991, VSLA has been implemented in a majority of the countries that CARE works with. They have allowed women to generate income for their families and to lead their households. Although the VSLAs are focused on empowering women, their success in generating a tangible income has encouraged family and community participation.

SOAR and VSLAs complement each other in empowering women. While VSLAs provide women with capital for sustainable growth to ensure education for their children, healthcare for the family and a better quality of life, SOAR ensures that students get a second chance to get formal education. SOAR was developed to assist girls who either haven't had a chance to go to school or who have dropped out due to poverty or societal barriers. SOAR provides a second chance for girls, and in some regions, boys as well, to enroll in the formal education system. Local trainers and educators follow a curriculum designed by CARE in collaboration with community leaders to train these children for a period of six to eighteen months, depending on the requirements of these children. Once these students successfully pass the fifth grade, they are enrolled in formal government secondary schools to continue their education. The families are also enlightened regarding the importance of education and its role in eliminating poverty.

Decentralized System and Locally led Programs

One of the most important features of CARE is its decentralized work hierarchy. The transition of workflow from headquarter-led campaigns to programs designed locally with the involvement of local people has enhanced both outreach and outputs. Each proposal made at CARE headquarters specifies the aspects of the programs that need to be developed on the ground with the involvement of local staff and targeted groups. Country and other local offices have access to CARE's network but raise their own funds and conduct other functions independently.

Hiring and Training

CARE's aim is to ensure that by the end of its fiscal year 2019, 50 percent of the workforce in all country offices are women. Employees are hired at three levels: (1) CARE's immediate employees, (2) local partners and NGOs in-country offices, and (3) community participants from targeted groups and regions. Individuals directly hired by CARE undergo all levels of induction, including gender sensitivity training, prevention of sexual harassment and abuse training, and general management training. Although these employees require the highest level of training to meet the metrics and requirements of CARE, local partners and community participants are hired and trained differently. Employees of CARE and any

organization it partners with must undergo background checks to screen them for past sexual harassment cases, violence cases and other factors that may have marred their reputation among women. Community participants undergo management training provided by the country office staff in order to conduct development programs and deal with issues on the ground. These community participants later become community trainers responsible for communicating with local people and driving two-way participation.

Although the strategy and proposals are designed centrally, CARE CEOs and top-tier managers do not intervene in the decision-making process in the country and around offices. The employees in-country offices are trained to handle issues and communicate with the local people. Since 90 percent of CARE's staff in targeted countries is local, it is ensured that the development plans, communication strategies, and participant training are culturally sensitive and appeal to the local people. After their training is complete, the local staff trains members of the targeted communities to guide their peers and encourage families to participate. These community trainers run most of the initiatives. Therefore, it limits resistance from the communities and cultural fiction based on religious and ethnic beliefs. These trainers also have more credibility and authority to talk about sensitive local issues to publicize CARE's programs to resolve these issues.

CARE Work Communication vs. Organizational Communication

Organizational communication at CARE is challenging since the organization operates in four UN-recognized languages, i.e. English, Spanish, French and Arabic. Translations are often an integral part of communication. A message written by CARE USA President Michelle Nunn in English needs to be translated into the other three languages for global propagation. This certainly creates interpersonal barriers as the president of CARE USA would not know the message that has been received by CARE France or other nations where English is not the native language. Although this problem cannot be eliminated completely considering the global representation of CARE, its impacts are contained by using in-house translators. The in-house translators work rigorously with the communication department to ensure that the words are accurately translated to prevent misinterpretation.

Since the four languages used by CARE do not represent all 94 countries that it works with, country offices and local participants are encouraged to communicate in English. The proposals and program curriculum is translated into the local language of the respective country to maintain bilateral communication. "Our work communication takes place on the field, but our organizational communication is driven from the headquarters" – the officer.

CARE Advocacy Work

Although it doesn't oppose the governments or their ideologies, CARE believes in influencing change through advocacy. Some of the most efficacious examples are the family planning policies and sexual reproductive health policies that CARE worked on in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and South Sudan. The governments in these countries recognized the issues and changed their policies based on the work that CARE was advocating. In India CARE helped create Anganwadi centers and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), which improve women's sexual wellness and provide reproductive healthcare and elementary education to girls. The Government of India now funds these centers. CARE believes that advocacy work is more efficient than outright protests, so it tries to influence governments and their policies. Once the governments realize CARE's vision and change policies, the United Nations and the World Bank can back the development projects within the respective countries. Advocacy work and lobbying are CARE's gateway to vouch for development across the world.

Limitations and Future Discussion

The interview indicates that there were several answers that raised more important questions that need to be explored. The function of VSLAs in providing an informal financial platform that enables women to invest in their household needs is a crucial finding. However, further questions were needed to clarify the role of CARE in establishing VSLAs; measuring its effectiveness as a socio-economic infrastructure and the administrative process. For example, who heads these associations, who manages the savings and who decides how they are distributed? Also, is there a formal procedure or contract for loan sanctioning? How does the association ensure that the interests are paid and how are defaulters dealt with?

In addition, the officer points out that theocratic governments, authoritarian governments, the UN and the World Bank will not fund projects with conflicted beliefs/ideologies. The officer says this will limit CARE's opportunities to work in such regions. However, they do not address the fact that in such a religiously and culturally dominated environment, advocacy will never be enough to get equal rights. Some reforms require opposition and protests such as the Women's suffrage parade in Washington, D.C. that demanded women's right to vote.

CARE plans to reach 50 percent of women's strength among its local staff, around the world, which is currently 30 percent (Serhan et. al., 2011; Serhan&Bozkurt, 2012). This raises an ethical as well as logical concerns. The ethical concern is that focusing on women's involvement may discourage men to participate.

Participation of men is crucial in some countries with patriarchal societies where they believe men need to vouch for women's rights in order to spread awareness and promote equality. The logical concern is getting more female participants in countries with a much larger male population and gender imbalance. It is important to know how CARE plans on encountering these problems. The officer stated that translating messages in organizational communication can be a barrier. It would have been interesting to know about some major problems that inferior translations led to and whether they ever developed into a communication crisis.

Prospects of CARE

Collaboration with CARE is a good opportunity for developing countries, but not one without hurdles. It is important to understand that the nature of work at CARE is interdisciplinary and apart from being a good communicator, one needs to have a good mind for issues mapping, strategy and planning. Since English is the mode of communication at most of the CARE offices there will likely be excellent employment opportunities for people who want to travel and work in different countries, especially on the ground. CARE relies on in-house translators for sending our messages globally. Those who seek to collaborate with the organizational communication sphere will have to complement their skills with a fluency in at least one of the four UN languages that CARE works with, especially in order to excel at their roles. That being said, CARE would be a great organization to work for if one wants to gain experience in strategic planning, political communication, cross-cultural communication and international operations.

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