

Incorporation of a Rights-Based Approach into CARE's Program Cycle A Discussion Paper for CARE's Program Staff*

Note: This paper is intentionally short and tries, as much as possible, to use simple language and illustrations. It is intended to stimulate reflection and discussion among colleagues worldwide and, eventually, to lead to improved guidelines for program planning, design, monitoring and evaluation. It is not directed at the broader organizational implications of integrating a rights-based approach, a careful review of which is absolutely essential if CARE is to achieve and sustain the evolution in programming outlined below.

Background

CARE's definition of a rights-based approach is the following: "A rights-based approach deliberately and explicitly focuses on people achieving the minimum conditions for living with dignity (i.e. achieving their human rights). It does so by exposing the roots of vulnerability and marginalization and expanding the range of responses. It empowers people to claim and exercise their rights and fulfill their responsibilities. A rights-based approach recognizes poor, displaced, and war-affected people as having inherent rights essential to livelihood security – rights that are validated by international law." For purposes of this paper, the following *principles of a rights-based approach* are highlighted:

- ❑ *RBA affirms people's right to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives* – The right to participate in such processes includes the right to have access to relevant information. Genuine participation and control over our own destinies is not a luxury; it is a right. Relevant decision-making processes take place at all levels of governance, from the community to the national and even international levels, as well as in other spheres (e.g., the decisions of private actors – including CARE – intervening at the local level).
- ❑ *RBA requires identifying and seeking to address the roots of poverty and suffering* – The achievement of rights and, indeed, poverty eradication are impossible without embracing a holistic perspective and identifying and addressing the underlying, basic causes of people's inability to realize their rights, e.g., to food, health, etc. Interventions that fail to target these causes can only have limited, if any impact on poverty and people's ability to live in dignity and security.

* This paper was prepared by Andrew Jones, to the extent that any one person is responsible for its content. In reality, it is the offspring of a lengthy, group effort. Many people reviewed and commented on earlier drafts, helping to make the paper true to CARE's evolution to date, reflective of a range of perspectives on the significance of RBA integration, and, hopefully, as accessible as possible to a wide range of colleagues around the world. Comments from John Ambler and fellow RBA Reference Group members Marie Cadrin, Johan DeWilde, Michael Drinkwater, Daw Elbeit, Kathy McCaston, Dan Maxwell, Elisa Martinez, Paul O'Brien, Michael Rewald, Sofia Sprechmann, and Marcy Vigoda were especially appreciated.

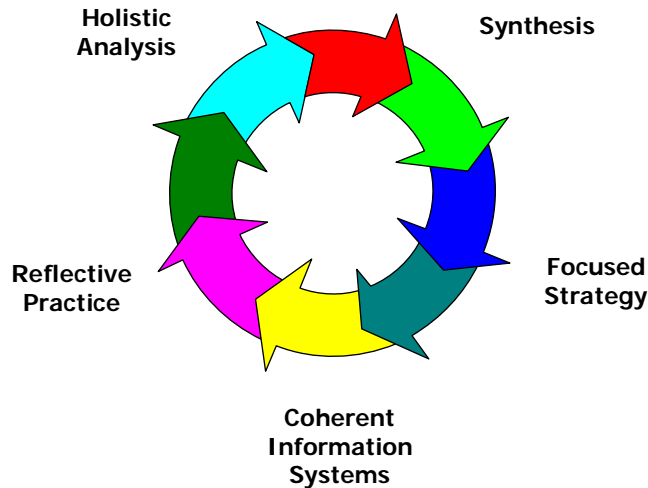
- *RBA refuses to tolerate discrimination and inequities that impede peace and development* – An emphasis on the equal dignity and worth of all underlies the promotion of tolerance, inclusion, nondiscrimination, and social justice. The building of more just societies requires identifying and overcoming barriers preventing excluded or oppressed people from realizing their rights. It also calls for a specific focus on empowering such groups to stand up for their rights and effectively assume responsibility for their own futures.
- *RBA holds all of us accountable for respecting and helping to protect and fulfil human rights* – We all are born not only with rights, but also with duties, or responsibilities. Affirming our moral nature and mutual solidarity, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is explicit on this fundamental point. Unlike needs, which can be viewed in isolation, rights generate responsibilities. In addition, those responsibilities are tied to defined and universally agreed standards. The relational nature of rights adds new force to our commitment to be advocates for global responsibility.

What does applying these core principles to CARE's program cycle suggest? And how can a rights-based approach help CARE to bring together what to date have been disparate program initiatives and approaches under a single coherent and strategic framework to guide our programs worldwide? The rest of this piece explores the answers to these questions. Not to disappoint anyone, but to be clear, we do not have definitive answers. Nonetheless, we can, and must for the sake of program colleagues around the world, provide at least some preliminary answers, even as we identify lingering or unresolved questions. It is incumbent on Program staff at the HQ level to offer clear guidance at this stage, even while we recognize that organizational learning on a rights-based approach to achieving livelihood security will sharpen our understanding only over time.

A Rights-Based Approach and CARE's Program Cycle

The HLS framework guides CARE's program cycle. It centers our programming on household-level impact (regardless of the level at which we intervene) and a holistic understanding of livelihoods, yielding focused strategies intended to have the greatest leverage effect on improving poor households' livelihood security. The main principles of HLS analysis and planning are as follows: (1) holistic analysis of the environment; (2) strategic program design based on the synthesis of such analysis; and (3) coherent information systems and reflective practice. The following diagram of CARE's program cycle reflects these principles.

Program Cycle



Let's turn to how a rights-based approach can enhance each stage of the program cycle. Before walking through the stage-by-stage implications, the above-described core principles of a rights-based approach suggest a profound commitment, throughout the program cycle, to the following:

Ensuring that our assessment, analysis, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation are participatory – People's participation should be right at the center of CARE's program cycle. Community members have the right to participate in comprehensive analysis of their own situations and to decide which causes of poverty to address and how. They also have the right to participate in deciding which information should be collected for monitoring and evaluating progress, to collect such data, and to adapt interventions that are not yielding desired results. Not only is it right for the people whose lives and livelihoods are directly at stake to set the agenda; it is also beneficial to CARE. Community members' insights and perspectives will deepen our understanding of conditions, the problems and opportunities that can and should be pursued, and the true impact of our programs. Importantly, a commitment to people's right to participate implies, as a preliminary matter, a commitment to processes of education and empowerment of community members whose ability to participate is often extremely limited (e.g., by illiteracy, or by oppressive environments).

Ensuring that our assessment, analysis, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation are sensitive to inequalities – At the same time, our data collection, analysis, and action must be sensitive to groups that are outside of the mainstream. These include, for example, women, children (especially girls), the aged, landless groups, and minority racial, ethnic and religious groups. Throughout the program cycle, disaggregations of data and separate consideration of the distinct plights of marginalized groups are

essential. CARE's gender initiative has advanced institutionalization of a focus on women and girls considerably.

Working with others – at all levels – to pursue shared rights-based goals – The relational nature of rights emphasizes the responsibilities that we all share with respect to enabling people to achieve their rights. And international rights standards offer a unifying framework for all relief and development actors to coordinate and collaborate toward the achievement of shared goals. The implication of this is that CARE must work with others – systematically and at every stage of the program cycle – to:

- More fully understand the causes of human suffering and livelihood insecurity;
- More strategically pinpoint the action we will take as part of a larger collective; and
- More deeply reflect on our and others' experiences.

Moreover, CARE often will not be in the lead, instead playing a supporting, facilitating role on equal terms with a range of other actors. The gaps in the protection and fulfillment of rights in most areas where CARE works are so significant that nothing short of widespread collaboration toward shared goals can get the job done.

Already CARE is demonstrating real commitment on these three fronts; a rights-based approach pushes us further and more rapidly in these directions.

Holistic Analysis

Holistic analysis concerns the assessment and analysis of human conditions, at a more macro level in strategic planning and a more micro level (geographically speaking) in processes leading to program design. Incorporation of a rights-based approach emphasizes building our capacity to understand and take into account vulnerability and marginalization, diagnose power relations, and incorporate legal, policy and institutional analyses.

Broadening our analytical framework to include all human rights – Human rights reflect an integral vision of what humanity is and, as such, represent a comprehensive yardstick for measuring human well being. Even while CARE focuses on livelihood security conditions (e.g., food, water and sanitation, nutrition, health, education, and economic opportunity), we have to consider other conditions affecting livelihood security and, more broadly, life with dignity (i.e. the enjoyment – or lack thereof – of additional human rights, such as personal security, freedom of movement, and participation in public affairs). Such conditions are interdependent. For example, the pursuit of secure livelihoods is frustrated where members of a certain ethnic group are physically prevented from getting their goods to market, or women are not allowed to participate in community health or education associations. While awareness of major gaps in the enjoyment of human rights may, in some cases, lead us to focus on new programmatic areas (e.g., domestic violence or women's political participation), our "core business" will remain the advancement of livelihood security (or economic and social rights). In pursuing our core business, we will better understand the bigger picture facing the communities we serve, the inter-relationships between different rights, and the need for collaborative and complementary action with other organizations focusing on other parts of the human rights spectrum.

The benefit-harm “profile” tools developed by EARMU offer a practical way to broaden our analytical framework to include all human rights, which, for purposes of simplicity, are divided into three categories: economic and social, political, and security rights.

Broaden Our Assessment of Institutions and Their Relations to Rights Realization: We need to assess and consider what other actors are doing, at different levels, in relation to conditions on the ground. The HLS assessment process includes an institutional mapping component, which focuses on mapping the activities and long-range plans of other institutions working in the area in order to determine CARE’s role/comparative advantage. Under RBA, institutional mapping would be expanded to include a broader range of responsible actors (covering the wider spectrum of rights issues) and to identify how such actors advance or impede rights realization. The assessment would also need to include a component that helps us understand local perceptions of the legitimacy and/or value of these institutions. The institutional assessment process will become critical as RBA inherently calls for working in coalitions, networks, etc. and for engaging in advocacy vis-à-vis key responsible actors.

Analyzing more deeply underlying and basic causes – CARE is accustomed to undertaking in-depth causal analysis of why households behave the way they do. We are less accustomed (and less equipped) to analyzing, in a thorough, meaningful way, the political, economic, and socio-cultural systems and relations, at all levels, that so powerfully influence household-level conditions. Analysis of the underlying and basic causes of livelihood insecurity is a critical gap for CARE at the moment. Such analysis is essential for helping us to understand the limits of more traditional responses (focusing on the more immediate causes) and to explore the potential for higher impact interventions. Efforts are underway to build our capacity to analyze causes and power dynamics between groups (i.e., relational analysis). Recent efforts to incorporate greater analytical capacity in gender dynamics may be instructive. In addition, our commitment to partnership and, more generally, inter-organizational collaboration holds the promise of fruitful relationships with groups that conduct research and analysis in just these areas.

Questions for discussion

- How feasible is it to undertake such comprehensive assessment/analysis of conditions? When and for what purpose should such analysis be carried out?

Synthesis

Holistic analysis of the situation in a given country or region, including institutional action (or lack thereof) and livelihood conditions, sets the stage for synthesis leading to program design. Put simply, a rights-based approach focuses us on those most severely affected by discrimination, exploitation, and neglect, on the inter-related roots of their predicaments, and on how different actors are or are not living up to their responsibilities for addressing human suffering and poverty.

Consider critical rights deficits or gaps in focusing our efforts

Human rights standards provide benchmarks against which to assess food security, health, educational, political participation and other conditions. For example, the Sphere Project defined minimum standards for a basic, dignified existence for people affected by disasters. Sample indicators include 2100 kilocalories of food per person per day, 15 liters of water per person per day, and 3.5-4.5 square meters of shelter per person. The size of the gaps between reality in a given context and what people are entitled to, and the extent to which they are shrinking over time, should guide decisions on organizational focus areas – both geographic and sectoral.

Targeting the key leverage points or factors which, if not addressed, will impede significant, lasting impact – One of the core principles of a rights-based approach, as discussed above, is its focus on the roots of poverty. Addressing underlying or basic causes means going beyond addressing the immediate causes of livelihood insecurity. For example, instead of solely working to improve farm production, CARE may help to promote pro-poor agricultural policies. To some extent, addressing basic causes of livelihood insecurity implies addressing areas that previously fell into the “assumptions” column in program design, particularly the policy dimensions of poverty’s roots. In the past, these assumptions have sometimes been viewed as out of CARE’s control or too political in nature. However, with a rights-based approach, no fundamental causes or “drivers” of livelihood insecurity should automatically be “assumed away” for being too political, sensitive, or complex for CARE to touch. In fact, if our analysis shows that a certain cause is a critical leverage point, we should carefully assess opportunities for and potential risks of addressing it at different levels. We should not necessarily take direct action. In some cases, we should assume a purely indirect and discreet role of mobilizing or facilitating action by those who have stronger mandates and/or greater resources to address the situation.

The causal-responsibility analysis tool developed by CARE’s Human Rights Office is one simplified methodology for framing and stimulating analysis of root causes and responsible actors, setting the stage for the development of coalitions and focused

Questions for discussion

- ❑ Regions with the greatest rights deficits are sometimes those where the potential for significant impact appears most limited. How do we resolve geographic focus decisions where this is the case?
- ❑ How can we get a handle on the critical leverage points for CARE’s interventions? What criteria should guide their selection?

Focused Strategy

A focused strategy grows out of the synthesis of our assessments and analysis and centers on the design of CARE’s interventions. Incorporation of a rights-based approach highlights the importance of investing in local participation, empowerment, and dialogue on rights, responsibilities, and power relations, of working at multiple levels, and of seeking to have significant positive impact on people’s overall ability to live with dignity.

Broadening the menu of responses within CARE's programs – The depth of the challenge associated with combating injustice (e.g., gender inequality/inequity), addressing root causes, and achieving rights standards points to the importance of a rights-based approach's expansion of CARE's range of responses. We are and need to be thinking more and more in terms of both multi-dimensional, longer-term programs (as opposed to traditional "projects") and engagement of a much broader range of responsible actors, beyond the household and local levels. Increasingly, it will make sense for CARE to intervene at multiple levels, with work at one level complementing or reinforcing work at another. CARE's programs increasingly can and will:

- ❑ Promote peace and rights/civic education (i.e., heightened awareness and dialogue on peace and human rights and responsibilities), as CARE has begun to do in Sierra Leone and Somalia, e.g.;
- ❑ Strengthen capacities of local communities and groups that represent them to exercise and claim their rights and responsibilities, as CARE has done with indigenous groups in Ecuador and street vendor associations in the Philippines, e.g.;
- ❑ Foster the recognition and meeting of responsibilities on the part of responsible actors through IEC efforts or policy advocacy encouraging respect for, protection, and fulfillment of human rights, as CARE is doing in relation to the rights of the child in Kenya, Rwanda, and East Timor, e.g.; and
- ❑ Engage with a range of actors (from civil society, government, and the private sector) to accomplish the above, thereby strengthening civil society.

Many of these are relatively new roles, or forms of intervention, for CARE, but they represent real options for helping poor, marginalized people to combat injustice, address root causes, and realize their human rights. As highlighted earlier, the importance of CARE building and/or joining a wide range of partnerships, alliances, and coalitions is paramount, particularly given the seeming intractability of many of poverty's roots.

Anticipating and avoiding (or at least minimizing) harms that may result from our interventions - CARE is an outside agency with significant resources relative to the communities we serve. Even strategically focused, well-designed projects and programs can have negative side effects. A food security intervention may, for example, contribute to exclusion and oppression of small landholders or landless people. Or a revolving loan project targeting women may lead to their being victims of violence at the hands of male spouses who resent their newfound economic empowerment. A rights-based approach is concerned with the full range of impacts our interventions are likely to have, and seeks to maximize the net positive impact on human dignity and self-worth.

The benefit-harm "impact" and "decision" tools guide consideration of potential unintended consequences of planned interventions, enabling staff to understand the likely overall (and maximize the net positive) impact of our work.

Questions for discussion

- ❑ Local perceptions of human rights can diverge considerably from agreed international standards. How can CARE help broaden restrictive local interpretations so that they

become more in line with international standards, especially when our engagement in what are often sensitive matters is perceived to be foreign intervention?

- ❑ Can CARE capitalize on our long-term presence and relationships in many countries to more aggressively participate in and influence inter-institutional dialogue, campaigns, and policy debates?
- ❑ Does getting involved in civic education, the promotion of peace, advocacy, etc. mean that CARE is becoming (too) political?
- ❑ The achievement of rights-based goals often requires more time than allowed for in individual project timelines. How can CARE and our allies promote longer-term program support from our major donors? Can we, e.g., promote ten-year programs with two-, three- or five-year cycles?
- ❑ How will innovative, often more complex and challenging rights-based programming be rewarded by the organization, especially where it entails reductions in the size of our budget?

Coherent Information Systems

This stage of the program cycle focuses on planning for monitoring and evaluation. Incorporation of a rights-based approach entails a commitment to various accountability mechanisms, including ongoing, open engagement with program participants.

Gauging program impact in relation to the realization of human rights – Put simply, a rights-based approach deliberately and explicitly focuses on people achieving their human rights. Program goals that are framed in terms of incremental improvements in livelihood security are not sufficient without reference to the minimum standards that comprise the human rights framework (at least in all cases where those standards have not yet been met). Project goals or objectives should be thought of in terms of concrete achievements on the path to realization of the rights standard identified in the overall, program goal. These “minimum conditions for living with dignity” are standards defined in international law, although the indicators used to measure their achievement are not necessarily well defined. Recognizing this, CARE has committed to “work with others to define human rights indicators and apply them as the standard against which we measure impact.”

Monitoring processes – Within a rights framework, inclusion, participation, and empowerment become essential program objectives, not for their potential to enhance our impact on food, health, and educational insecurity, although this is important, but, rather, in their own right. A rights-based approach requires a commitment to evaluating impact not only in outcome terms (i.e., in terms of conditional change), but also in process terms.

Adapting and extending our measurement systems – The HLS framework compels us to understand better and document the household-level impact of our programs. This is harder to do with higher-level, longer-term rights-based interventions than it is for standard service delivery projects. The former raise questions concerning the household-level impact of often longer-term effects that rights-based programs have on, among other things, participation in public affairs, capacities of local groups, institutional policies and practices, and legal and other systems. It is important that we develop

intermediate and community-level measures and indicators for tracking these often less tangible, slower to materialize changes at the local level.

Questions for discussion

- ❑ How can CARE integrate human rights (outcome and process) standards – and concrete progress toward fully realizing such standards – as benchmarks for program impact?
- ❑ How can we reliably measure both the higher- and household-level impact of rights-based interventions fostering participation, strengthening local capacities, and promoting legal and policy reform, e.g.?
- ❑ Do we have the time, resources, and capacity to monitor and evaluate all this?

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice goes beyond the confines of program log frames and M&E plans to encompass deeper organizational reflection, learning, and change management at all stages of program implementation.

Monitoring the intended and unintended results (i.e., benefits and harms) of our interventions – As emphasized above, our interventions can harm people’s rights, in spite of our best intentions. From a rights perspective, what’s important is for us to be aware of how our interventions may be harmful, to select appropriate indicators to track overall impact – positive and negative - we are having, and to monitor these indicators on an ongoing basis. Where harms become more significant to the point that they may approximate benefits, we need to consider suspending programs.

The benefit-harm “impact” and “decision” tools help staff to think about unintended impacts and make the necessary adjustments when it becomes clear that programs are having significant negative impacts on people’s overall ability to live with dignity and self

Disaggregating data in order to monitor the impact of our programs on different marginalized groups – Although this was flagged as a cross-cutting principle above, it bears repeating here. To ensure that we are achieving our intended impact and positively affecting women or other marginalized groups, it is critical to disaggregate our monitoring and evaluation data. In addition to the gender breakdown, other distinctions may be important to make, for example along racial, ethnic, class/caste, age, or religious belief lines. Without this disaggregation, it will be impossible to fully monitor positive and negative (intended and unintended) results.

Learning from a diversity of rights-based approaches and their resulting impact – Successes and shortcomings in achieving our rights-based goals and objectives are precisely what we want to explain, with an eye toward learning from different approaches employed in different contexts. The program cycle is complete when such learning is folded back into our holistic analysis, synthesis, and development of focused strategies in the future.

Fostering an internal culture that encourages innovation, dissent, the airing of disparate views, and critical review – Without such an organizational culture, the transformative nature of a rights-based approach will not take hold. And a supportive internal environment is indispensable to genuine reflection, learning, and change. This is a daunting task, in reality, comprising shifts in organizational culture, systems, and processes, as well as in staff composition.

Questions for Discussion

- What are the key constraints to reflective practice in CARE's culture, policies, and systems, and how can they be addressed?

Conclusion

Being serious about rights-based programming is both as simple and as difficult as operationalizing – in all our work – a commitment to (1) affirming people's right to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives, (2) seeking to address the roots of poverty and human suffering, (3) refusing to tolerate discrimination and inequity, and (4) holding ourselves and others accountable for respecting and helping to protect and fulfil human rights. Through critical analysis of our own and others' experiences, we expect to learn what an operational commitment to these principles means and, going forward, to design and implement increasingly effective, rights-based interventions.