

## Designing sustainable communities of practice at CARE

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### Introduction

This paper describes an approach for creating, managing and sustaining communities of practice (CoPs) to generate and share strategic knowledge at CARE International. This approach has been recently piloted by CARE's Asian Regional Management Unit in Bangkok, and two communities consisting of members from 7 CARE country offices in Asia (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Sri Lanka) have been successfully launched. If the pilots continue to remain successful, this approach will be disseminated across all of CARE as a best practice for creating a sustainable culture of learning. This approach should also be relevant to any organization that is distributed globally and has limited resources to hire dedicated knowledge management resources. In this paper, we describe the organizational imperatives that defined our approach and present a model that outlines the steps we have followed. We also describe our methodology for implementing the model in our pilot, and share some lessons learned and next steps.

We will begin this paper by defining what we understand by communities of practice (CoP). Definitions of CoPs abound in the knowledge management literature – for our purposes, we use one proposed by Nickols (2000) that states:

*Communities of practice are groups of people in organizations that form to share what they know, to learn from one another regarding some aspects of their work and to provide a social context for that work.*

### Background

CARE is an international, non-governmental relief and development agency working in 70 of the world's poorest countries. Founded in 1945, CARE began with the distribution of food packages to World War II refugees. Today, it supports nearly 900 projects worldwide that reach more than 45 million people. CARE's vision, adopted in 1999, calls for the organization to be a partner of choice and global force contributing to a world where poverty has been overcome and people live in dignity and security.

In the past 10 years, CARE's development approach has evolved to keep pace with changes in theories of poverty and development. As the world view of development has moved from alleviating poverty by providing relief to eliminating poverty by

strengthening government systems and by empowering the poor, CARE's programming is moving away from a sole focus on improving household livelihoods to an additional emphasis on supporting people's efforts to take control of their lives and end inequality and discrimination, as well as creating a sound enabling environment that is responsive and responsible to constituents.

The common focus on underlying causes and rights has resulted in greater similarity in programming approaches across the diverse CARE offices than ever before. There is therefore a great opportunity to improve the effectiveness of programming by enhancing the ability to quickly share successful field practices across country offices. Moreover, as CARE's programming experience grows along these new themes, it becomes equally important to be able to share these practices with the broader development community. There is therefore a strong need now to develop the processes and structures to support organizational learning at CARE.

Integral to these rights based approaches to programming is to allow the communities to learn and gain strength from each other and for CARE to incorporate learning from its community experience in future programmes. This results in a need to develop the processes and structures to support social learning at CARE.

## **Knowledge management efforts at CARE**

CARE has been seriously engaged in knowledge management activities for the past two years. These activities have focused both on social and organizational components. Since CARE is a widely distributed organization, and country offices have a lot of autonomy in deciding their own strategy, knowledge management initiatives have evolved at CARE from the bottom-up, in different regions and programme units, based on the needs and interests of the local organizations. This paper describes one of these initiatives, sponsored by the Asian Regional Management Unit, to develop communities of practice. Other initiatives focus on approaches to promote learning among the communities served by CARE and its NGO partners in the region, activities related to knowledge sharing within country offices and between CARE and other development partners, developing multi-media approaches to gathering, documenting and disseminating best practices in the field, and promoting the creation and sharing of innovative programming approaches addressing cross-sectoral themes.

As these individual initiatives progress and come to fruition, the Learning and Organizational Development (L&OD) unit at CARE headquarters in Atlanta is treating them as pilot projects, and is following them through their completion. In 2006, L&OD will evaluate the success of these projects, assess their applicability to other CARE units and regions, and will create a strategic blueprint for knowledge management at CARE that includes these initiatives as examples. The project described in this paper is therefore a building block in CARE's evolving knowledge management journey.

## Designing CoPs at CARE

CARE's reputation and credibility derives from its field presence and relations with local communities, grassroots organizations and government agencies. In the new development environment, it is more necessary than ever for CARE to share innovations from the field. This knowledge acquired in the field is not explicit knowledge that can be transmitted through training programmes or manuals. Rather, it is tacit knowledge situated in the experience of CARE field staff and of CARE's partners which can be best shared by people coming together and sharing stories. Therefore, it is important to create, encourage and sustain CoPs in CARE at this time as a supplement to traditional skill and capacity building activities.

As Wenger (1999) has described, CoPs can spontaneously emerge in any organization where there is everyday interaction between people engaged in a common line of work. In organizations where people performing similar work activities are located in the same geographical space, knowledge sharing through social interactions takes place naturally and randomly as employees run into work mates at lunch and engage in shop talk or colleagues go out for drinks and trade 'war stories'. These interactions typically do not take place at CARE. This is because CARE is such a highly distributed organization that there are usually not enough people within a country office in a single line of practice to form a spontaneous community. Therefore, communities within CARE are unlikely to spring up without some kind of external design.

Apart from the issue of geographical dispersion, there is another reason why communities of practice at CARE need to be designed. It is an organizational objective to create communities that bring together everyone who can potentially contribute to the community's knowledge sharing activities. Spontaneous communities that form through random interactions may not support this because membership may depend on one's social network and social skills at building such networks. In the communities we seek to build at CARE, the core community will consist of potential members from around the world who are selected from their country offices because of their expertise in the particular topic area. The core community will be primarily responsible for on-going interaction and knowledge sharing activities. Once the core community has been established, membership can then be opened to the wider population within and outside CARE.

Design is important, but it is equally important not to over-design. As Wenger (1998) states, we need a 'balance between design and emergence'. Particularly, we must not forget two key aspects of CoPs that gives successful communities their essence and dynamism. The first is that learning in communities is a social process, and learning takes place through membership and engagement, not through formal instruction. The second is that learning in communities is facilitated through the creation of a common language, and this language often takes the form of narrative. Story swapping is an important aspect of dialogue in communities, and Lave and Wenger (1991) have observed that the progression of newcomers who are initially peripheral learners to 'old timers' is manifested by the quality and quantity of the stories they tell. The design approach that

we have followed supports the creation of a social identity for our communities and should encourage the use of narrative language for communication and interaction.

## **Role and structure of CoPs at CARE: personal and organizational transformation**

Given that CARE country offices operate under very tight resource constraints, a community can be successful only if it can demonstrate that it can add immediate value to areas of strategic importance to CARE. Moreover, CARE does not have the resources for dedicated facilitation of communities. Therefore, CoPs at CARE need to consist of *self-motivated* individuals, who are *passionate* about their area of expertise, and are *committed* to the growth of knowledge in strategic areas of interest to CARE. Thus the formation of communities at CARE is an *active choice* by members from different country offices who want to make the time to engage with each other because they perceive the value of sharing knowledge for themselves and for the organization. Successful communities need to effect an organizational transformation at CARE, where regular interactions between members of different country offices for the purpose of knowledge sharing is not the norm, and where project priorities typically encourage a narrow, dedicated approach. Participation in a CoP is also likely to be a personal transformation for its members as they begin to articulate ‘who am I and what do I bring to this work?’, rather than just focusing on the what of the work itself.

Because of these considerations, the decision to create a community of practice must be a *voluntary choice* made by the potential members. In organizations where employees engaged in the same practice meet each other every day, this choice eventually gets made over time as a byproduct of the daily interactions. But in CARE’s distributed environment, there is no opportunity for this prolonged interaction. Our solution is create a ‘crucible’ for relationship building through a single, intense, facilitated face-to-face event, a community building workshop, that brings together participants from different country offices who are working on a common theme. In this event, we create the opportunity for potential core community members to build personal connections and to provide them with the opportunity to explore issues of mutual commitment and what a CoP will mean for them.

We expect the output of the workshop to be either the details of what a CoP would look like for the members, and what the next steps are in the creation of such a community, or clearly articulated reasons for why a community of this sort is not appropriate at this time. In order to guide the participants towards this decision, we use a structured approach called the 5-D model which is described in the following section.

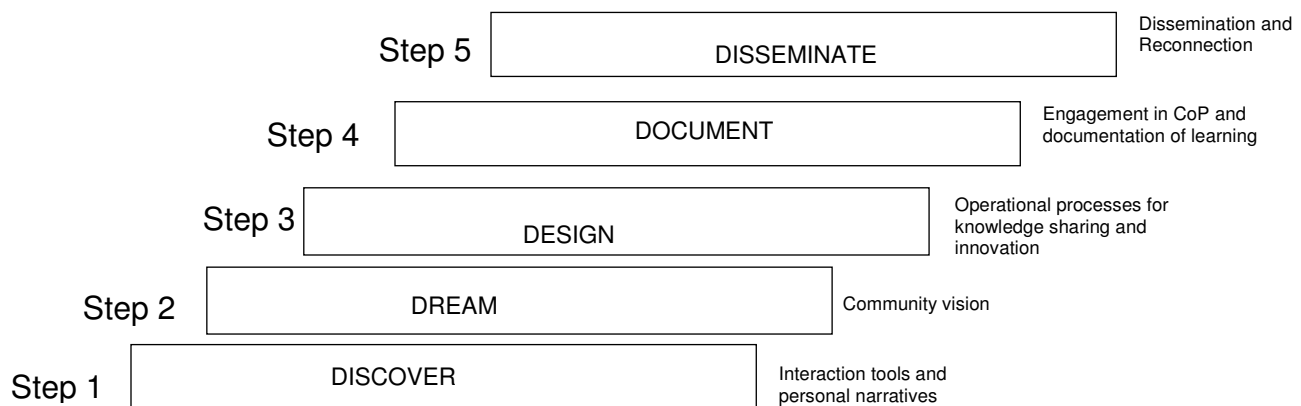
## The 5-D Model

We have created a 5-step model called the 5-D model to help potential community members design viable communities at CARE and manage them through their life cycle. This model is adapted from the appreciative inquiry approach developed by Cooperrider and Srivastava (1987). This approach is implemented through the 4-D cycle of *Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny* (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2003). The similarity between the activities described in this paper and some of the appreciative inquiry concepts made it logical to adopt a modified version of the 4-D cycle as our framework.

The 5-D model has its theoretical basis on research by Lave and Wenger (1991) and by the Institute of Research in Learning at Stanford University (see Abbott, 1996). This research proposes that learning is a social process, and that learning is an act of membership in a CoP. The extent to which one learns depends on the extent to which one wishes to engage in the community, and therefore learning becomes transformed into a personal choice about engagement. The idea behind this model is that individuals form a community, and that it is not possible for individuals to engage in a CoP unless they explore their own journey around their practice. The model uses personal stories as a medium for participants to reflect on their own relationship to the community and then weaves these personal narratives together into a community dream. This dream then serves as the mutually created ‘essence’ of the CoP that the participants draw on to design and plan the ongoing activities of the community. At the time of writing this paper, we have tested the first four steps of the 5D model in a community building workshop in Bangkok. Below, we will describe how we did this in greater detail.

An outline of the model is shown in Figure 1 below and involves the following steps;

- *Discover* – Exploring relationship to community through individual narratives;
- *Dream* – Synthesizing individual narratives into a community story around joint purpose and mutual engagement;
- *Design* – Developing processes for the ongoing operations of the community;
- *Document* – Engaging in learning and documenting knowledge; and
- *Disseminate* – Dissemination of the community’s learning.



**Figure 1: 5 D Model for designing and managing sustainable communities**

The first three steps of the model refer to the design of communities and the last two steps to their ongoing management.

## **Discovering and dreaming through telling stories**

The first three steps of the 5D model are implemented in a three day community building workshop, similar to the one we recently held in Bangkok. At this workshop, we create opportunities for the participants to develop deep personal connections with each other. As we described earlier, the mode of interaction is through telling stories, and the participants' progress through the workshop by telling stories to each other about themselves and their relationship to a CoP. The sessions progress from the personal to organizational to allow the participants to explore personal themes before they get into the content areas of their practice. Through a sequence of four sessions, participants tell each other stories reflecting on the following questions:

- What is the journey that brought me here and what is my reason for being here?
- What does being in a community mean for me?
- What role do I play within my community and how do I connect my community to the outside world?
- What is my practice, and what is my dream for a CoP?

All storytelling activities in the workshop are conducted in groups of three, or triads. We call these triads 'story circles' or 'inquiry groups'. The first title refers explicitly to the element of storytelling or performance. The second title is used to emphasize the exploratory nature of telling stories. Stories are not - unless told in a professional theatre context - readymade pieces but come into being in the interaction between speaker and listener. Therefore, if our purpose is to learn to elicit stories from others, as well as tell them in the context of a community of practice, it is important to have an understanding of what attitude and listening skills help the storyteller to tell a story in a way that is personal and alive.

In keeping with this idea, we emphasize the difference that Steve Denning (2000) makes between stories with an 'S' and stories with an 's'. The former are grand epics that require heroes and villains and themes of deep societal importance; the latter could be narratives describing single anecdotes that have personal significance. Throughout the workshop, we emphasize the small stories. The participants are first required to ask themselves: 'what interests you about this story?' By reflecting on this question, the story teller is encouraged to first reflect on his or her own passion, and then to tell the story by being present with that passion. The idea is that if the story is of deep interest to the storyteller, then this interest will manifest itself in the story, no matter how small the story is, and will enable the story teller to connect with the listener.

On the other hand, a story that is not interesting to the storyteller will need to be 'performed' to keep the listener connected. Analogous to the idea of the 'S' and 's', we



introduce the participants to the idea of performance with a 'P' and performance with a 'p'. 'P' stories are those that are intended to impress the listener with the talent and capability of the storyteller; 'p' stories are those that focus on the connection between the listener and the storyteller. Participants are encouraged to focus on telling 'p' and 's' stories.

## **Grounding the story in community: the role of the witness**

The objective of the storytelling sessions is to create a web of stories that connect the members of the community to each other. The telling of the story is just one part of the picture. In order for the story to be received into the community, there has to be a listener who witnesses the story. Witnessing is a complementary activity to story telling. All storytelling requires a witness but, in common practice, the witness is focused on the usefulness of the story, on having opinions and on articulating them. Our approach to witnessing helps cut through these tendencies by asking participants to suspend judgment and create a space in which people will feel heard and appreciated, rather than engaging in performance assessment.

Each storytelling triad involves a structured interaction between the three members. One member of the triad is the storyteller. The other two members are witnesses who honour and receive the story being told. For each storytelling session in the workshop, the witnesses receive specific instructions about how to give feedback. The feedback focuses on the impact of the story and of the speaker on the witness. The participants take turns at playing each of these roles.

At the end of each storytelling session, participants are asked to produce an output that captures the essence of core themes of the session. Since the objective of this stage of the workshop is to be non-analytical, participants are asked to document these themes in the form of a 'mnemonic drawing', using multiple media of expression: art, music, drama, photography in addition to just words. In the initial sessions, each participant is encouraged to produce their output. In later sections of the workshop, each triad produces a group drawing that reflects their combined views on the stories told in the circle.

## **Expanding the role of the witness: the story facilitator and the re-teller**

In the initial sessions of the workshop, the witnesses are asked to refrain from providing explicit feedback about the content of the story, and to concentrate only on the process, and on the qualities of the storyteller. This is because people are typically good at asking questions and engaging in dialogue with the storyteller, but are not practiced in silently receiving a story. The witnessing practice creates a space within which the story can first be told without distortion or influence.

However, in order to elicit the key points of a story told in a CoP, it may be necessary to ask questions to elaborate or enhance the story, without influencing its outcome. Moreover, the stories told in a community may not be the narrator's own. As the workshop progresses, the witnesses in the triads begin to play different roles that develop their questioning and re-telling skills.

In one of the triadic sessions, one of the witnesses is asked to take on the role of a 'story facilitator'. The role of this person is to ask questions that support the elaboration of the story but that do not modify the story in any way. The facilitator asks questions only after the narrator has completed the story. The third person in the triad remains a silent witness throughout, and is a respectful observer to both the storytelling and the questioning process.

In the session that explores the re-telling of a story, the triad is asked to select a story that will be shared with another triad. The triad also selects a story teller for the selected story. The storyteller should not be the owner of the story. The selected storyteller first retells the story in the original triad as though it was his or her own. This allows her/him to internalize the story and to explore its rhythm. The owner of the story provides feedback on how it feels to receive a re-told story and gives permission for the story to be told outside the circle. The storyteller then moves to another triad, and retells the story, but now on behalf of the original owner. Stories that get told in a community belong to everyone, and being able to tell another member's story as though it were one's own, with passion and authenticity, helps to strengthen the bonds that exist within the community.

## **Bringing it all together – dreaming the community story**

In the last two sessions of the storytelling workshop, the participants bring their learning and skills from the previous sessions to create a joint story about their CoP which is a vision, expressed in narrative language, of the organizational transformation the community can bring about through its activities and through the strength of the members' relationships to each other. This story is constructed in two steps.

### **Step one**

In the first step, participants are again asked to assemble in triads. In each triad, the participants are asked to take some reflective personal time and are given the following instructions:

- *We will give you a list of values. We would like you to circle three values on that list that resonate with you.*
- *Invent or imagine a change that you would like to bring about in your work situation in your home country, with which your (as yet imaginary) CoP could help you or support you.*
- *Let a story form around that in your head – a resistance that you might encounter, and how it might be overcome.*



- *We ask, for the sake of documenting, that you write the key points of your story on a piece of paper that you can hand over to us later.*
- *Cut out a piece of fabric and, on that fabric, draw or paint something like a logo or image that is meaningful to you, or that represents something symbolic in for you relationship to CoP.*
- *When you are finished, come back together in your triads. Take 15 minutes each in which you show the others your little flag or logo, and in which you tell the story of the change you would like to make happen in the future with the help of the CoP as if it had already happened*

In the instructions for this step, we begin to prepare the participants to move from the space of small groups to the world of the larger CoP. In this larger world, the personal identities of the community members, reflected by the individual stories (the 'I' stories), get enhanced and reinforced by the community identity, which is reflected in the created community story (the 'We' story). The core values that each individual assumes and the icon that he or she creates represent the unique and personal contribution that the individual makes to the community. The list of core values is shown below in Figure 5. Figures 6 and 7 show some examples of icons created by the participants.

<i>Creativity</i>	<i>integrity</i>	<i>belonging</i>	
<i>Compassion</i>	<i>connection</i>	<i>sensitivity</i>	
<i>Honesty</i>	<i>courage</i>	<i>strength</i>	
<i>Clarity</i>	<i>efficiency</i>	<i>truth</i>	
<i>Depth</i>	<i>joy</i>	<i>sexuality</i>	
<i>Vitality</i>	<i>effectiveness</i>	<i>openness</i>	
<i>Passion</i>	<i>warmth</i>	<i>accountability</i>	
<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>simplicity</i>	<i>obedience</i>	
<i>Spontaneity</i>	<i>flexibility</i>	<i>balance</i>	
<i>Initiative</i>	<i>faith</i>	<i>sisterhood/brotherhood</i>	
<i>Peace</i>	<i>non-violence</i>	<i>respect</i>	
<i>Enthusiasm</i>	<i>delight</i>	<i>adventure</i>	
<i>Purity</i>	<i>tenderness</i>	<i>gratitude</i>	
<i>Purposefulness</i>	<i>willingness</i>	<i>communication</i>	
<i>Synthesis</i>	<i>intelligence</i>	<i>sharing</i>	
<i>Power</i>	<i>beauty</i>	<i>harmony</i>	
<i>Trust</i>	<i>directness</i>	<i>play</i>	
<i>Abundance</i>	<i>alleviation of suffering</i>	<i>forgiveness</i>	<i>pleasure</i>
<i>Lightness</i>	<i>humour</i>	<i>freedom</i>	<i>fun</i>
<i>Health</i>	<i>understanding</i>	<i>healing</i>	
<i>Inspiration</i>	<i>education</i>	<i>patience</i>	
<i>Presence</i>	<i>wholeheartedness</i>	<i>commitment</i>	
<i>Love</i>	<i>spirituality</i>	<i>hope</i>	

## Step two

The second and final step is then to synthesize the individual stories into a single story of the community. This is an un-facilitated session and the participants are given the following instructions:

*...you will create the story or stories of your CoP. You will first be presenting it to each other, and later to the broader organization. In your story, we want you to talk about the future CoP as though we are living a year from now – in April 2006. We want you to tell us what has been achieved in your workplace and the changes that have been brought about in 2005 as a result of the existence of the CoP. Tell us how the community came to be, what role the CoP has played in influencing the organizational change, how key stakeholders in the organization have interacted with the community and how a resistance or difficulty was overcome.*

The community story is the culmination of the dream step of the 5-D model. The process of creating the story allows the community members to make choices about the options available to them in the future, and provides a medium through which to express these choices. As stated earlier, there is no organizational mandate to create a CoP; this is a decision that is left to the participants. Through the community story, the members can explore whether and the extent to which they wish to commit to the joint enterprise of a CoP.

## **From dreams to reality – designing the CoP**

The completion of the individual and community stories takes us to the end of the dream step of the 5-D model. In the third step, design, the participants are brought back to earth with a change in the operational paradigm from a narrative, people-centred mode to an analytical, process-centred one. In this step, the community creates the operational processes that are needed to make the dream a reality. The operational processes support the ongoing activities of the community and describe the work activities, organizational roles and technologies that are needed to ensure that knowledge gets created, shared, documented and disseminated. The outputs of this step are, for example, guidelines on how knowledge gets documented, frequency and content of meetings, the media used for sharing and displaying knowledge, the appointment of knowledge managers or champions, and the development of intranets, websites and knowledge management systems.

The design step is planned for the last day of the community building workshop. The community members bring their community story into a planning session. According to Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002), CoPs consist of three components: a *domain* that defines the topics that the communities will focus on; the *community* that defines the members and criteria for membership, and the *practice* which reflects the language, protocols and procedures used by the community to capture and share knowledge. In the planning session, the community members are asked to create a vision for the community from the key themes captured in the community story. They are then asked to define the domain, the community and the practice that are needed to achieve this vision. The output of this step is a *90-day project plan* that outlines how knowledge will be created and shared in one or more knowledge areas of critical importance to the organization.

The planning session is an un-facilitated exercise, but guiding questions are provided to the communities. Some typical questions are:

**Strategy overview:**

- What change(s) in the work that you do in your country offices will take place in the next 3-6 months because of your CoP?
- Why is the CoP the best way of bringing about this change?
- What is the one thing that I need to do next week to facilitate the CoP?

**Sample domain related questions:**

- What specific topics do we want to address in our CoP in the next 3-6 months?
- Why are these topics relevant to our organization?
- What kind of influence do we want to have on the organization?
- Who will take leadership in promoting our domain?

**Sample community related questions:**

- Who will be the members of our CoP in the next 3-6 months?
- How often will the community meet? How will the members connect?
- How can the community balance the needs of various members?
- How will members deal with conflict?
- How will newcomers be introduced into the community?

**Sample practice related questions:**

- How should we create and document knowledge?
- How should we evaluate the effectiveness of our community in the next 3-6 months?
- How should we ensure on-going connection between the members?
- How should we deal with conflicts between our own work and CoP work?

**Sample support related question:** What support do we need from our organization to be successful in achieving the changes to our work through our CoP?

## **Next steps – documentation and dissemination**

These steps of the 5-D model are still evolving at CARE. The hypothesis is that if the community building workshop is successful, the community should have the social connections and the operational processes to move forward with its real job of learning.

### **Documentation**

In the documentation step, we monitor the community as it grows and learns. Depending on the nature of the operational processes designed in Step 3, the community members may engage in online discussions, regular conference calls, documentation and publishing of ‘knowledge nuggets’, mini-conferences and other events that sustain and further learning. During this step, there may not be much oversight of the community, but if a community ‘champion’ has been designated in Step 3, this person may check in from

time to time to address any issues. Peripheral members may join at the community at this time and grow the community. If the community is mature and stable, it may explore opening up membership to other Regional Management Units or to the outside development community.

In this step, the community also documents its knowledge. Depending on the nature of the knowledge and the audience, the documentation can take multiple forms; documents, CDs, digital story boards, audio, video, poster sessions, stories or skits. We give considerable emphasis to non-text based documentation. Resources permitting, we also provide technical support for documentation. Additionally, the knowledge documented by the community should not be restricted only to content: the community building workshop, the process of community building, the discussions during telephone meetings and presentations at face-to-face events are all important pieces of documentation.

### **Dissemination**

The dissemination step has multiple components. Routinely, the activities of this step involve the processes that are needed to ensure that the documented knowledge is shared within and outside CARE. But one of the critical activities of this step is to create face-to-face events such as a community meeting or knowledge fairs at regular intervals of time. At these sessions, community members can share what they have accomplished, assess progress made, re-establish social connections and plan for the future of the community. This face-to-face session should be an open event that anyone can attend. We have planned such a session in CARE for the communities from the Bangkok workshop in spring of 2006.

### **Where the road leads – thoughts about the future**

This paper has described an approach that we have piloted at CARE to build a culture of sustainable organizational learning by developing communities of practice that are connected, motivated and engaged. We believe that our approach has been successful in achieving this goal, based on a sample of comments made by the workshop participants during a debriefing session with senior management:

*...understanding each other allowed us to bring the individual stories into a collective story. [This] will allow us to reach out to communities and really understand their stories...*

*...we will have to demonstrate that this work is sustainable – that will be the acid test for the organization ...and use the skills we have gained about the process to weave story telling into existing forums ...not something extra, but integrated into our work...*

(Participants of the Bangkok seminar 2005)

Since the workshop, the communities have generated plans to connect regularly and to create and share knowledge on topics of strategic relevance to the country offices. For

example, the community on Gender and Sexuality has planned the following activities over the next 6 months:

- Create an open forum of discussion for topics related to gender and sexuality, such as violence against women, mainstreaming gender and sexuality in CARE programmes, and documenting best practices in the field;
- Create knowledge that is of relevance and value to the projects that currently address gender and sexuality issues in the CARE programme; and
- Create knowledge that furthers thinking about topics of programmatic relevance to CARE country offices.

As the communities grow and evolve over time, we need to guide them through the last two steps of the 5-D model. We do not have enough data yet to say whether these communities will thrive, or whether organizational pressures and priorities will slowly erode the close bonds we have created among the members. At the time of writing this paper, however, our approach shows promise, and we have come to firmly believe that before we embark on any knowledge sharing initiative, we must take the time to build the social connections between the key protagonists in the knowledge sharing effort. We believe that we have given these communities a strong foundation that will enable their success, despite their geographical distribution. As mentioned earlier in this paper, this project is one knowledge management pilot at CARE. Over the next year, we will observe the progress of these two communities, and evaluate their ability to make a strategic contribution to CARE's programme goals and to transform the way that CARE country offices work together.

In their paper on building sustainable communities, Stuckey and Smith (2004) state that effective community building strategies should focus primarily on personal contact and the development of social capital, and less on technology. This has been our hypothesis as well in designing the approach we have presented in this paper. We believe that this approach has the potential to become a key part of CARE's knowledge management strategy in the years to come.

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### **Abstract**

This paper describes an approach using story telling developed by CARE to build connections between potential members of distributed communities who do not have the opportunity to meet socially on a regular basis. This approach, based on a 5-step model for community formation and knowledge sharing, called the 5-D model, was recently implemented in a workshop sponsored by CARE's Asian Regional Management Unit in Bangkok, Thailand. This paper presents the details of the workshop and the outcomes, and discusses the viability of this approach for creating vibrant communities that sustain, thrive and function effectively over time.

### **About the authors**

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