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Learning to Listen

A Review of 4 Regional Platforms in CARE

In 2017, CARE asked, “What will it take to scale our impact by 10 times more than we currently do? What about 100 times?” Part of the answer to that, with significant unrestricted investments from 2017-2020, were CARE’s Impact Growth Strategies. These aim to address the “missing middle” by supporting the skills, staff, and connections needed to bring our work together across regions and partners.

A recent review¹ of these 4 regional platforms—Equal value, equal rights (EVER) in LAC; Women on the move (WoM) in West Africa; Her harvest, our future (HHOF) in Southern Africa; Made by Women in Asia Pacific—shows significant return on the investment. These returns merit continued investment in regional platforms that take creative approaches to partnership, local leadership, and the evolution of CARE’s operating models.

“Impossible is not for us, because we are ingenious women.”
 Nigerian woman from a Women on the Move discussion on their ability to adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Contributing to **impact for 12 million people**, with potential impact for **78 million more people impacted** over the coming years.
- Paving the **scaling pathways** by demonstrating different models of partnership, design, evidence, impact, and fundraising. These experiences provide valuable experience and evidence of what works (and doesn’t) and how to continue our ambition of sustainable impact at scale.
- Demonstrating concrete tools and ability to **center the voices of the people we serve**, in **new partnership models**, feedback systems, power structures, and evidence. This includes crucial lessons on how to live out our strategic goal of **being locally led and globally connected**.
- **Mobilizing resources** by contributing to roughly **\$100 million** in new restricted and flexible funding.

¹ The review draws on a survey with staff which received 32 responses; interviews with 40 people from IGS teams, partner organizations, country and regional teams, CARE USA and other CARE members/ affiliates and CI secretariat; a review of documents, PIIRS data, resource mobilization and cost data; and IGS reflections on their trajectories.

Benefits of Impact Growth Strategies

Impact

Equal value, equal rights

(EVER) in LAC: Focuses on the rights of domestic workers. **Impact:**

- Current: 40,000
- Projected: 10.3 million

Women on the move

(WoM) in West Africa:

Focuses on savings groups and women's leadership and solidarity. **Impact:**

- Current: 2.1 million
- Projected: 5.8 million

Her harvest, our future

(HHOF) in Southern Africa

Focuses on women smallholder farmers and food security. **Impact:**

- Current: 9.2 million
- Projected: 30 million

Made by Women in Asia

Pacific: Focuses on women's rights in the garment sector. **Impact:**

- Current: 217,000
- Projected: 4.1 million

By June 2020, the IGS's had reported in measurable impact in the lives of 12 million across the 4 regional strategies. As the system-wide changes we have influenced continue to take hold, we will likely surpass the initial goal of 31 million in impact to reach 78 million across all four strategies. That's nearly 8% of the impact we achieved in Program 2020, and **39% of our goals for vision 2030**. The very ambitious impact targets forced CARE to think creatively and stretch our work. For example, we found new ways to operate in Brazil even without a country presence because Brazil is home to 7 of 18 million domestic workers in the LAC region).

This impact number is a conservative estimate, and it likely underrepresents the impacts of social norms and cultural shifts. We have captured the impact of advocacy initiatives—in fact, the IGSs were the driving force behind inventing the AIIR tool that CARE now uses across the organization to measure impact of advocacy work. For less formal changes, we have anecdotal evidence such as stakeholders in LAC beginning to view domestic worker representatives as having equal standing in common forums, or reports in West Africa of a surge of women candidates running for office. We do not yet have systematic ways of measuring that impact. We may also be missing critical insight into potential backlash or unintended harm.

Scaling Pathways

These regional strategies provided vital experience and evidence as preliminary testing grounds for several of CARE's identified pathways to scale. These platforms showed that CARE can demonstrate the flexibility and strategic insight required to scale our impact, and that such scale requires focused, long-term investment.

Advocacy was the most common pathway to scale. WoM and HHOF lobbied for government or companies to adapt and scale CARE's VSLA approach. HHOF lobbied for including nutrition in government agriculture budgets.

EVER in LAC **advocated for social movements** to have a seat at the table in policy and policy influencing forums. WoM worked with women-led networks to connect them to local, national, and global policy opportunities.

MbW **shifted social norms** across the garment supply chain to challenge the culture of victim blaming in cases of sexual harassment. WoM worked with women to change their norms around public participation so they could be more active as elected leaders and in community decisions.

The IGS experience building, linking, and leveraging the **power of networks**, especially related to supporting social



movements, shows new opportunities for scale. Networks have been critical to success across all the scaling pathways the IGS used. Operating in networks provides both credibility to operate in the other scaling pathways and may be a scaling pathway on its own.

New Partnership Models for Locally Led, Globally Connected

To achieve their ambitions for scale, all IGS connected with a diverse range of external and internal players across national, regional, global levels to create shared value. Acting in this convening and connecting role—coupled with the power of networks—gave CARE legitimacy, influence, and the ability to contribute impact at significant scale. It allowed CARE to overcome silos and work more coherently across a region—both within and outside CARE.

This emphasis on partnership showed promising avenues for how CARE can become locally led and globally connected in line with Vision 2030. There are several key lessons about decentralizing power and creating more space for local leadership that serve as important guideposts for CARE moving forward. The investments in flexible, adaptive, and strategic regional platforms that focused on a core **impact** goal over several years provide new insights into operational changes we must make. Some of these lessons are:

- **Prioritize participant voices:** to ensure progress across very different perspectives, the IGSs prioritized the voices of the people who should benefit most—**the women themselves**. This provided a stable anchor in shifting, even conflicting, partnerships and goals among different actors.
- **Unlock shared vision:** The IGSs created space where diverse actors—from garment brands to trade unions—around a common goal.
- **Operate with flexibility:** The funding and hierarchies in the IGS were flexible and allowed teams to operate differently with partners than our traditional models. This built trust and helped partners build skills that mattered to them in their long-term success. **Flexible funding** has been instrumental in being able to build the partnerships. We must adapt partnership systems and to ensure longer term funding to grow and invest in these relationships.
- **Focus externally** on understanding how CARE fit into the broader system. This required deep commitments to listening to others, **providing value to partners** and stakeholders, and sharing power rather than controlling the agenda.
- **Vary partnership models.** IGS teams had a core of long-term partners. They also worked with other stakeholders around specific short-term objectives—in consultation with core partners. A variety of collaborations—both formal and informal, and more frequent light-touch connections strengthened and deepened CARE’s networks and made us more credible. As a result of the IGS investments, we are partnering with **more diverse types of organizations** and networks at different levels, in **particular with social movements**, and feminist oriented organizations.
- **Change our role to convener, not contractor:** CARE’s role in partnership is focusing more on linking, convening, accompanying. These partnerships demonstrate agility, flexibility, and innovation. The way partnerships evolved in COVID-19 showed that they are resilient and provide promising results for both impact and scale.
- **Cultivate humility and trust:** Partners interviewed are inspired by these shifts, **especially the flexibility, trust, and humility in CARE’s approach**. Some of these organizations, such as social movement actors and trade unions were reluctant to work with organizations like CARE or to advocate on the same platform. Now they have built the trust to do so.

These innovative partnerships and local leadership provided many benefits. They made it faster and easier for CARE to respond to crisis, especially in COVID-19. They allowed us to support efforts in places where CARE does not have a long-term presence. They also positioned us to work with partners on critical new advocacy opportunities—like advocacy to garment brands during the COVID-19 crisis.

Mobilizing Resources

In partnership with country teams and CARE Members, IGS teams have contributed to **nearly \$100 million in new funding**—both restricted funding, and pooled or flexible funding. The IGS role in this process included writing new proposals and raising the quality and evidence available in proposals from other parts of the organization. The expanded partnerships IGS forged helped us work in more countries, and develop the local, regional, and global credibility that made CARE competitive for funding.

The IGS model proved **it is possible to raise flexible and pooled funds for regional platforms**. Over the past 4 years, HHOF in southern Africa was the most successful, and did not require any unrestricted or endowment funds after the first two years.

Challenges

While the overall experience was positive, some key challenges remain in the IGS model:

- **Expand flexible funding:** The process and interactions around fundraising and allocation of these resources lacked transparency and were confusing for IGS teams. There is more to do to grow this model across regions and teams, and to invest in this flexible funding that allows us to build new partnerships and operating models.
- **Reinforce accountability and value add:** Some participants in the review raised concerns about accountability of the IGS work—especially as it was seen as a CARE US owned and driven process. This often made it hard for other parts of the network to buy into the process. Country teams raised concerns about the added value of the regional structures, and instead sometimes saw them as competing for resources that would otherwise go to the country.
- **Strengthening and adapting partnership systems:** Partners note **challenges in partnership systems** that result in interruptions and delays in funding and the work. This especially relates to financial systems and ways of sharing funding. Procurement systems and regulations also delayed our ability to work quickly and flexibly with partners in the variety of ways they needed us to adapt.

Recommendations

Investments in regional platforms shows high potential for impact at scale, systems transformation, and CARE's organizational evolution toward Vision 2030. There were many quick wins from connecting CARE's work in a region around high priority issues, and the impacts of these investments will continue to pay off throughout Vision 2030. We recommend that **CARE continue to invest in these four regional platforms**, with some evolution of focus, adjustments, and accompanying changes in the wider organization.

This review suggests preserving the creative and experimental space of the IGS, but also putting in place some light learning support, and creating more fit-for purpose learning and influencing products. This support should focus on providing services and connections for learning, rather than being centrally driven. Some key investments for the future are:

1. **Understanding impact** Invest in learning processes and MEL systems to systematically understand outcomes related to shifts in informal structures and norms. Extend global MEL systems to support regional data and analysis contributing to impact at scale toward Vision 2030
2. **Thought leadership for pathways for impact at scale** Engage IGS colleagues and partners in designing, leading and co-facilitating learning and thought leadership around pathways toward impact at scale
3. **Partnering for deep equity** Build from the IGS experience to fulfill the priorities identified in the CI Partnership Paper, especially for more complex relationships that demand joint ownership.
4. **Resource mobilization and cost recovery** Each regional platform should develop a resource mobilization and cost recovery strategy with internal commitment and. Rebuild a pooled funding mechanism with wider organizational buy-in to raise flexible funding for regional platforms.