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Individual Learning Journal

Remote Partnering Cohort II

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About this document:

For wrapping up this amazing course and as a requirement for getting the certificate, this document is serving as documentation for the lessons learned during a long journey started in early 2018 and continue till the last quarter of same year to improve and enhance the remote partnerships the CARE is managing in the Syrian context.

All the information documented below are based on personal understanding and reflecting my own point of view of what I learned during the entire course and not necessarily reflect CARE or other colleagues' opinions.

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Self-Reflections:

What is going well? (How do you define 'well'?)

I can say that the dynamo of this course was the willingness to improve partnerships and improve remote partnering. With all the support I got from the training providers, CARE, CARE colleagues and the other participants in the training gave me the believe that regardless of how remote partnering – or any other task - is challenging with enough assertiveness and perseverance it could be improved and done in much better way. That was the biggest lesson learned for me from this course.

The passion and enthusiasm I found in this course helped us in CARE to work out one of the most critical areas in the Syrian response from neighborhood countries and deliver assistance to the affected Syrian people in timely and dignified manner.

The second lesson I learned from this course that resources are always there, and with faith in what we are doing, we can always get the best out of the people and make great achievements with minimal resources.

This training provides an amazing platform for partnership practitioners worldwide to get together, share their experience and lessons learned which is priceless result. Despite the massive investment in developing this course, but the outcome and multiple the effect of sharing experience worth every penny invested, it's exactly like getting an army of experienced consultants for each organization participate in this training. Learning from my colleagues was the most beneficial and exciting part of this training.

Having the opportunity and the support to implement the theoretical part learned in cohort I in real life was stunning and reflect the difference between theory and reality. The main differentiator between this training and other trainings is the varieties of ways of learning and possibilities of seeing real and tangible results from it.

Another great opportunity for me that I was working in a team of three people participated in this training. With time all of us get busy with the daily and routine things we have to do but working in team help all three of us “the three musketeers as we named ourselves 😊” to stay on track and each of us was reminding the others that we have a plan to implement when the rest lost in their daily busy schedule. Working in team had a great impact on the plan implementation and achieving the results.

Last part of what went well is watching the plan developed in the cohort I implemented and CARE partnerships approach improved according to feedback from partners. Receiving the positive feedback from our partners was really emotional and reflecting the great impact of this training.

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What has been more challenging? Why was this?

Working in the biggest emergency after the WWII teach me that things and priorities always changed according to the context and need on ground. The anticipation of a massive spike in the emergency that expected to impact the life of around one million people delayed the implementation of the plan and recruit all the efforts from the country office and some surge support to be prepared for such gigantic response.

Due to that change, and as usual, things on paper looks easier and structured while implementing plans in real life always shows the hidden challenges and give us the ability to tweak and adapt the plan to match the needs in real life. Although this was the biggest challenge for us to apply the plan but at same time, it sharpened the plan to be customized to the emergency context we are working in all days.

The other challenging part was the responsiveness of CARE partners and different understanding of the plan and what are their roles in it and how to do that. In addition, different partners have different capacities and focus during such an emergency, that took some efforts and time from CARE team to have a homogeneous understanding and roles from all of our partners.

Notwithstanding that challenge, it was highly appreciated from them to see CARE investing in partnerships and keep the great job to improve the relations during such huge crisis.

How are things changing over time?

Even though with the emergency preparedness activities, plan implementation evolved in good and reasonable way over the time. At the beginning CARE support and buy in was great, then the focus changed toward the emergency response and it took the team a bit of while to draw the attention back to the plan we have. The main takes out from this part for me was to keep my focus on important things rather than the urgent one and keep pushing and helping people at once to juggle many priorities at same time rather than keep delaying important things till having the time and now I believe in the quote saying *"with good arrangement of priorities, now is always the suitable time to improve"*

The other thing changed over the time was our partners' participation and contribution to the plan. as mentioned previously, partners had different understanding and capacities to participate but with the efforts paid by CARE, it worked much better after a couple of weeks.

What went according to my plan? How have I / will I adapt my plan in the light of what happened?

During the initial phase, all the steps and actions were according to plan and we were cooking according to the recipe we had in the cohort I. Then the difference in partners' contributions start to emerge which require an additional efforts and some unplanned meetings and events to have more harmonized participation which delay the implementation a bit. After that, the anticipation of the emergency hit the table and change the track of the implementation drastically and put the plan on the shelf for quite a while. Later on, with all the faith we had in this plan, we were able to tailor the plan to fit the new situation we are in and use it as a tool contribute to the good preparedness for the emergency.

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I cannot say that the implementation was far away from the written plan but I can say that implementation helped us to improve and sharpen our plan and make it more realistic and fit to context.

What didn't? Do I understand why?

Since the emergency change the entire action plan, many things changed from how it was designed. However, I cannot say that it totally changed or did not worked well but more it was adapted to real situation where a lot of work should be done in parallel.

Another thing, which is the communication and sharing experience with other training participants was below the expectations in the second cohort. I remember we had one session only and then we lost in the overwhelming emergency. That was understood given the low number of participants and the workload we all had during the training. However, it will be amazing if we can have couple of sessions to share our learning experience and discuss this learning journal among ourselves.

Where there any unexpected outcomes/events? What were they?

Despite the delays in the implementation due to the emergency and considering the reality check we faced according to it, I think no unexpected outcomes happened. As mentioned above, the actions on grounds were a bit different/ wider than the designed plan but not far away from the aim or activities. I do believe what we faced was totally normal and happened usually in all projects and programs I managed before due to the differences between theory and reality and these things will keep happened always in Syrian context and other contexts. Moreover, I think the delay we had and the adaptation we did were healthy activities to implement a customized and tailored plan which – I assume – gave better results than the original plan and open our eyes to some critical issues we did not noticed before such as the difference in partners' capacities.

Do I have any other reflections?

In order of not repeating myself again, I can say that the last couple of reflections are:

On personal/professional level, my believes in the ability to do many of developing and improvement works during emergency is increased significantly and this training build the "can do" spirit in my professional attitude.

On organizational level, the importance and criticality of remote partnering including the two main component 1) remote management and 2) the partnerships are now much clearer for me and can say that this type of knowledge will be definitely a take away for my next challenge out of CARE. I do believe that what we did was significant and the knowledge and experience I acquired are worthy to be applied in another organization and context.

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How do I feel about the implementation work so far?

I'm totally satisfied with the implementation done till the moment and I think its reflecting and paying back the investment CARE put in this training.

What have a learned that I can take into my future practice of remote partnering?

As mentioned above, the "can do" spirit is a part of my new professional attitude and will definitely help me out during my future professional career. In addition to that, the adaptation of plans and being more flexible and creative in contextualizing plans and ideas is another skill and learned will be taken.