

Shared Learning: A Working Guide

June 2007

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAI	– Action Aid International
ALPS	– Accountability, Learning and Planning System
CBOs	– Community Based Organisations
CPs	– Country Programmes (a catch-all term that also refers to associates and affiliates)
CSOs	– Civil Society Organisations
DAs	– Development Areas
INGOs	– International Non-Governmental Organisations
IT	– Information Technology
HR/OD	– Human Resources and Organisational Development
M&E	– Monitoring and Evaluation
MISs	– Management Information Systems (for example, the Contract Management Information System, the ALPS Tracker etc.)
NGOs	– Non-Governmental Organisations
PRRPs	– Participatory Review and Reflection Processes
RTEP	– Rights to End Poverty
SL	– Shared Learning

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Introduction - why we have developed this working guide to shared learning

2007 is a year of consolidation in Action Aid International (AAI). Part of this involves consolidating our understanding of shared learning and the various ways in which we facilitate and support learning. Consequently, instead of putting out an organisational strategy on shared learning, as was originally planned, we have decided instead to develop this working guide to shared learning.

The guide proposes a broad approach to shared learning. It aims to help us refine our understanding of shared learning and inspire deepened or new shared learning efforts throughout AAI.

This guide has emerged out of the following AAI processes:

- **May 2006** – The IASL team and the Organisational Effectiveness Head agree upon a plan for the development of a global shared learning strategy.
- **May 2006** – A shared learning strategy development core group is established and starts work.
- **April to September 2006** – A review is undertaken of the previous shared learning strategy, a mapping of learning practices in AAI is conducted, a review of theories and concepts relating to learning and knowledge is compiled, and a light survey is conducted to capture the experiences of other INGOs. At the same time, we continue to implement and support concrete shared learning initiatives in AAI to obtain insights and lessons that can inform the development of the shared learning strategy.
- **September 2006** – AAI's shared learning conceptual framework and learning practice document is drafted to inform the development of the shared learning strategy.
- **October 9 to 13 2006** – A meeting of the shared learning strategy development core group takes place so as to draft the shared learning strategy document.
- **November 2006** – The first draft of the shared learning strategy document is produced.
- **December 2006** – The second draft of the shared learning strategy document is produced.
- **January 2007** – A decision not to pursue the development of a shared learning strategy is formally taken. It is decided that a working guide to shared learning be developed instead.
- **February to April 2007** – The shared learning strategy development core group and other relevant stakeholders draft the working guide to consolidate shared learning in AAI (see the acknowledgements for a list of all those who were involved in this collaborative process).

The purpose of this guide to shared learning

The purpose of this guide is to support all of the different organisational units, over the next eighteen months, to consolidate their understanding of their respective learning efforts; to concretely guide shared learning efforts; and to motivate units to take the opportunity to share and learn more about how learning is happening and its impact on the organisation and its achievement of its mission.

There are no rigid prescriptions in this guide, and some of the interventions and their associated actions are openly defined. This is because our learning practices are shaped by the diverse contexts in which we work. More concrete plans, including detailed shared learning interventions and actions, can emerge through AAI's strategic and annual planning processes. Thus, this guide indicates the ways in which we can seize and open up more space and time for shared learning in the period ahead.

Over the next eighteen months, we will create opportunities to talk, share and reflect on our shared learning work, and your contributions. Part of this sharing process involves finding out what is working and is not working, so as to understand what impact learning is having on our own practice and our work for change.

On the basis of these reflections, we will return to the guide at the end of 2008, and make the necessary changes to our shared learning approach in light of emerging experience.

We hope that this working guide to shared learning will draw us all together and inform our journey of consolidating our understanding of, and work to support learning over the next eighteen months.

What you will find in this guide to shared learning



The guide includes eight sections:

Introduction: Why we have developed this working guide to shared learning clarifies the purpose of this working guide to shared learning.



Shared learning: our questions and key actions shares some of our challenging questions about learning. It also highlights the key actions we can take to deepen shared learning over the next eighteen months.



What we mean by shared learning unpacks the key ideas and elements underpinning AAI's proposed approach to shared learning.



Shared learning: what are the gains? shares some of the potential immediate and transformative benefits of shared learning for AAI.



Shared learning: the vision, objectives and conditions gives more content to our strategic framework for shared learning.



Exploring interventions and actions provides an overview of many of the concrete and practical ways that we can apply our commitment to the vision for shared learning in AAI.



Shared learning: monitoring and review explores some of the concrete ways that we can monitor and evaluate our shared learning efforts in 2007 and 2008.



Shared learning in 2007/2008: how you can get involved invites you to participate in the international shared learning projects and initiatives that are designed to support the consolidation of shared learning in AAI. Please participate actively, get involved and share your ideas.

Glossary provides explanations of some of the key terms used in this guide.

Choosing sections of the guide to read

The feedback we got from earlier drafts of the guide was that people were looking for guidance and inspiration on different things. We decided to develop the guide so that people could interact with it in ways that made sense for them.

We have written the guide so it does not have a hierarchy – you can dip in and choose bits and pieces depending on what you're looking for. This selective reading is assisted by a summary of content at the beginning of each section, with an indication of the sorts of questions or challenges the section might help to address.

Having said all of this, the sections do read together as a whole and we encourage you to read them as and when you are able to.

Terminology Boxes

We have tried to keep the guide as free of jargon as possible. When a term is used that has a specific meaning or carries a bias of interpretation (i.e. could be interpreted in many different ways) a small asterisk (*) appears above the word; and an explanation is given in a "Terminology Box" on the page. The explanation of these words is intended to develop our shared understanding of our organisation's approach to shared learning.

How to use this guide

Above all else this guide is meant to support your shared learning efforts by (i) encouraging you to actively read the content against your own context of work and (ii) to stimulate ongoing reflection on the content by making your own notes.

(i) Active reading strategies

We encourage you to read actively by providing you with “Active Reading Strategies”. These are questions that are posed to you, the reader, to help you make deeper sense of the content of the guide, against your own context of work, as you are reading. These strategies are signposted with the following icon:



Active reading icon

(ii) Making “notes” in response to “Questions for Reflection”:

We also encourage you to write down your reflections on the content by including “Questions for Reflection”. The prompt for note making is signalled using the following icon:



Questions for reflection

The act of writing down your responses to these questions will provide you with a record of your own learning based on the support you have gotten from using this guide in the next eighteen months. You can record your reflections in a notebook, on your PC or in your own online space. For example, some of the IASL online platforms that have been established do provide a personal page that you can use for this purpose. Or you could use your personal page as and when you move onto the new ActionAid International intranet. You could also consider setting up your own online log or diary called a weblog. There are various options that you can look at for this: blogger <https://www2.blogger.com> or blogher, for women bloggers <http://www.blogher.org>, or [wordpress http://wordpress.org](http://wordpress.org).

The insights from our “Notes” can inform the ongoing discussions and reflections we will have on our shared learning work over the next eighteen months, and will also feed into the dialogue on our shared learning approach at the end of 2008.

Your comments and feedback are most welcome

If you have any comments and/or concerns about the guide, or would just like to have a chat about what you have read or what you are experiencing in your shared learning work, please give Samantha Hargreaves, the Shared Learning Coordinator, a call or drop her a mail. Samantha’s telephone number is +27 (11) 731-4500 and her e-mail address is samantha.hargreaves@actionaid.org.

Links and resources:

AAI Shared Learning Conceptual Framework, August 2006: a detailed document setting out our early theorising/thinking about knowledge and learning in AAI, and advocating a particular approach to shared learning on which this guide is built. The document contains a detailed bibliography of resources and materials that were drawn on to define the approach (available on AAI intranet, IASL section, or mail Samantha for a copy). Some of the key articles in the bibliography have been scanned and are also located on the AAI intranet, IASL section.

AAI Learning Practice Mapping, October 2006: a document that synthesises the results of a mapping of learning practice in different units of AAI. The documents details the range of learning methods and tools we came across, highlights examples of innovation and success and sets out the key constraints to shared learning (available on AAI intranet, IASL section, or mail Samantha for a copy).





Shared learning - our questions and key actions

In 2006 we spoke to many different people about their experiences of learning and we found out that lots of exciting learning is happening in all corners of ActionAid International. We also discovered that through our shared learning efforts we are building and sharing knowledge that is helping us to better understand the impact of our work, the effect of our interventions and the ways in which change happens.

We also realised that at the heart of our ability to learn is our willingness and ability to ask questions. Sometimes we can find the answers to our questions, other times the answers are a matter of trial and error and more often than not one question leads to another or to calls for more learning.

We would like to share with you some of the insightful questions that our colleagues have raised about learning in ActionAid International in 2006.



Active reading:

When you read through these questions ask yourself, "Have I asked or heard this question before?" and then record your answer by putting a tick in the "YES" or "NO" box that appears alongside each question.

I have asked/heard this question

What do we mean by learning?

Isn't information the same thing as knowledge?

What is the difference between shared learning and knowledge management?

What sort of learning will assist us to deepen our work and to change unequal relations of power in the communities and contexts in which we work?

Does learning really add much value to my/our work? It takes time and I/we cannot 'see' the impact that learning is having.

What's in it for me to go out there to share what I'm learning, answer and pose questions, work with others to make sense of our work and the change it's supporting or not supporting?

We don't have a good idea how learning is currently happening in our unit. How can we find out?

Yes, we see the value in learning, but what are some of the interventions and actions that might take us forward? How do we decide where to best invest our energy?

What are we working towards? What are we concretely trying to achieve through our learning work?

We agree that learning is important, but we're under a lot of pressure from leadership and donors to provide evidence of impact. What can we do?

Some people say that IASL staff should be doing the reflections and the write-up of our lessons, or should facilitate the reviews and reflections, or should go out to find the answers to our questions. How do we deal with this?

We're trying to develop a plan or a strategy for shared learning but we need a bit of guidance. How can you help?

Yes	No

All of these questions are useful and have helped us to develop this guide. The guide will explore some of these questions, while other questions (including new questions you will raise) will be revisited again throughout and at the end of the next eighteen months.

In a concrete effort to try to answer some of these questions, we issue a challenge to all of us to take on some of the following in the next eighteen months:

FIRST, identify one or two learning methods and processes (some are outlined in the interventions section of this guide), which you feel your unit has implemented in an innovative or creative way. And spend a bit of time this year reflecting on, reviewing the impact of, and documenting and sharing what you have learnt.

SECOND, if you feel inspired why not try to deepen or transform an existing learning space, method or process in your unit? (See the interventions section for a description of some of these). You might kick start this with a review of this practice which feeds into an effort to change the space, method or process. You could look at improving the way organisational meetings are facilitated, or you might work with a team in your unit to bring critical learning on practice closer to the centre of their work.

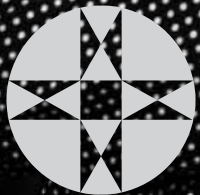
THIRD, why don't you pilot a method or process you've read about in this guide? And design a small-scale monitoring and review system to track how this process goes and what impact it has on the participants and the unit's/organisation's work. And write up and share your experiences and your lessons with the rest of ActionAid International so we can be learning from you. You can read more about this in the Section "Shared Learning: Monitoring and Review".



? Questions for reflection

- Which of the questions raised by our colleagues are 'burning' priorities in your unit? Please record these questions in your notes.
- What are some of the other questions I/we have raised or heard that you would like to note down?
- What do you think about the suggestions for work over the next eighteen months in the three areas that have been proposed above?

* Please do send your ideas and suggestions to the regional IASL coordinators and Samantha. We'd love to hear from you.





What we mean by **Shared Learning**

This section describes a broad approach to shared learning (SL) in ActionAid International. It defines key terms like information, learning and knowledge. It also sets out the four elements or parts of the proposed ActionAid International approach to shared learning and shows how they fit together. This section is extremely important as it provides the reader with the concepts or ideas that inform how we approach SL organisationally – how we envisage it, the objectives we set for ourselves and the interventions and actions we choose to undertake. It also offers a framework or a way of thinking about what we're trying to do or change through learning processes and activities.

If you're asking questions like 'what is learning?', 'what is knowledge?', 'what is the difference between shared learning and knowledge management?' or if you feel a strong need to ground your actions in a theory or an approach, then you will find this section very useful.

This section explains what we understand to be an approach to shared learning. The ActionAid International team who worked on developing this guide have tried to unpack the key ideas that underpin this approach. The approach to shared learning that we propose challenges us to think about how we can learn to support changes in unequal power. The approach can also assist us to advance our global organisational strategy, *Rights to End Poverty*.

In short the key ideas informing this approach to shared learning are:

LEARNING*

- Learning takes place in relationships between people.
- Learning is a process involving people and cannot be reduced to a product.
- Learning takes place in groups or communities that share a common work interest or practice associated with change.
- Learning takes place through ongoing dialogues between people.
- Learning needs an open, supportive and trusting environment or context.
- Learning happens through the asking of difficult and sometimes uncomfortable questions.
- and beliefs about the world.
- Knowledge is never neutral – i.e. all knowledge is tied to existing relations of power.
- Knowledge is tied to action – i.e. knowing what we know and what we need to know to work effectively for change in the world.
- Knowledge grows into wisdom when it allows us to make sensible decisions and create plans for action.
- Action is tied to cycles of critical reflection in which we plan-act-observe-reflect. This cycle of learning is called praxis.

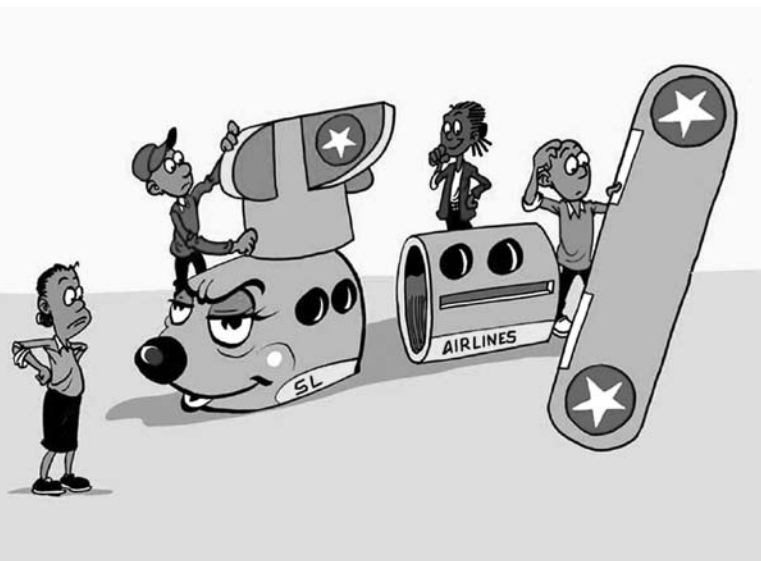
INFORMATION*

- Information is a resource for knowledge.
- Information is drawn from data and/or facts about a particular subject.
- Information is processed data/facts that does carry meaning because it has been formatted, filtered and summarised.
- The information we choose influences the decisions or choices we make.
- Information is easy to quantify and write down.
- Information can be exchanged and compared across different contexts.

KNOWLEDGE*

- Knowledge is something we all use, test, question and create.
- Knowledge is derived from information but is more than information – it carries our experiences, values, attitudes

Learning is the process (the how) through which ideas, information, beliefs, values and attitudes are created. The ways in which we learn shape the information we need and the knowledge that we form. It is, therefore, important that we look critically at the ways in which we learn. Critical learning leads to the meaningful selection of information, the creation of new ideas and to critical knowledge. Many of the ways in which we learn confirms existing knowledge that maintains unequal relations of power that include some people and exclude others. This guide, therefore, emphasises the need to deepen and create learning processes, and the skills and capacity needed to facilitate them, which will enable us to critically engage existing ideas, and construct new knowledge for change. We prefer the terms critical and/or creative learning.



Information is the more tangible facts, figures, and in the context of an organisation, the organisational know how, policies and systems that help people to work effectively. Information can be more easily quantified, captured and exchanged, while knowledge exists more in people's heads and experiences and is often very difficult to record. While information may inform the creation of knowledge, it does not constitute knowledge.

Knowledge includes our idea-sets, the things we know and believe, including the attitudes and values we hold, which influence and shape how we behave and work. Knowledge also includes knowing what we don't know or what we may need to know. We don't define knowledge as neutral and objective. We see that knowledge is created in the material and social contexts in which we live and work. Knowledge may either serve to reinforce existing unequal relations of power, or, if approached critically can help to challenge these relations. Thus, certain kinds of knowledge have great potential to bring about deep kinds of social change. This is why we are challenged to constantly question the sources and effects of our ideas, values, attitudes and beliefs. Critical knowledge is, in part, derived from critical reflections on our practice and in turn influences our ongoing practice. We prefer the term critical and/or creative knowledge.

We have presented a number of key ideas about learning, information and knowledge! But how do these ideas make-up our approach to shared learning? The approach to shared learning is organised according to four elements.

The four elements in the approach to shared learning

ActionAid International's approach to shared learning unpacks the ideas above by organising them according to four elements. There is no hierarchy of importance between the elements. We read and understand them like the pieces of a puzzle that fit together and make up a whole picture. The four elements are, therefore, mutually supportive and interdependent. If we achieve success in holding these four elements together in our shared learning efforts then we have the greatest chance of transformative action through critical learning (a successful take off as depicted in the cartoon strip on the left).

An overview of the four elements to shared learning

The first element - emphasises that learning is a social process. That is, it happens in relationships between people and the ongoing dialogues that they have with others.

The second element - focuses on practice (how we work for change), especially the practices which we share in our different groups or communities within ActionAid International, and with our partners and allies. We, therefore, locate learning beyond the boundaries of ActionAid International in our relationships with communities of poor people, our partners and peer civil society organisations (CSOs).

The third element - challenges us to deepen our efforts to grow knowledge through critical reflection on our change actions, leading to new ideas and perspectives, which inspire new plans and new actions for change. The cyclical process of reflecting, planning, acting, observing and reflecting again... is called praxis.

The fourth element - emphasises that learning flourishes in an open and supportive learning environment or context.

Understanding each of the four elements that make-up this approach to shared learning

Element one

1

We believe that *learning is a process* that takes place in *relationships between people*. This is a social and collective understanding of learning, and it relies on people sustaining dialogues* and exchanges about challenging issues relevant to their work.

* **Dialogue:** At the heart of the theory of social learning lies the idea of learning as a dialogue. Dialogues include the exchange of different viewpoints and experiences between people. By being open to challenge through these interactions we are better able to understand, change and think/act creatively. Thus, dialogue prompts us to critically examine what we know and how we think. Dialogue is, therefore, oriented to uncovering the historical, material and social origins of our knowledge (what we know) and thinking critically about our actions and practices for change.

Comparing two different approaches to learning

The shared learning approach is very different from an individualistic approach to learning. An individualistic approach to learning is what Paulo Freire, in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, calls the 'banking' concept of education, in which the learner is passive. The role of the learner is reduced to receiving, filing, and storing the information and knowledge that is deposited in them. The cartoon below aptly captures this passive approach to learning...



To understand the differences between these two approaches to learning, let us briefly compare them.

Learning as a social and collective process – the ‘shared learning’ approach

Learning is a partnership where both the learner and educator/learner engage in a dialogue and negotiate information to make meaning and develop contextually relevant knowledge. Everyone is always learning and everyone has something to teach (villagers, colleagues, our partners* etc).

Learning is a process in which people dialogue, question, create and critique information; and creatively try to solve real world problems based on knowledge that is constantly being evaluated through ongoing cycles of praxis.

You can learn by actively, creatively and critically engaging with what you hear, read and write. Your capacity to know how to change is arrived at through reflecting as a group on what works and what does not work.

Learning as an individualistic and product driven practice – the ‘banking’ approach

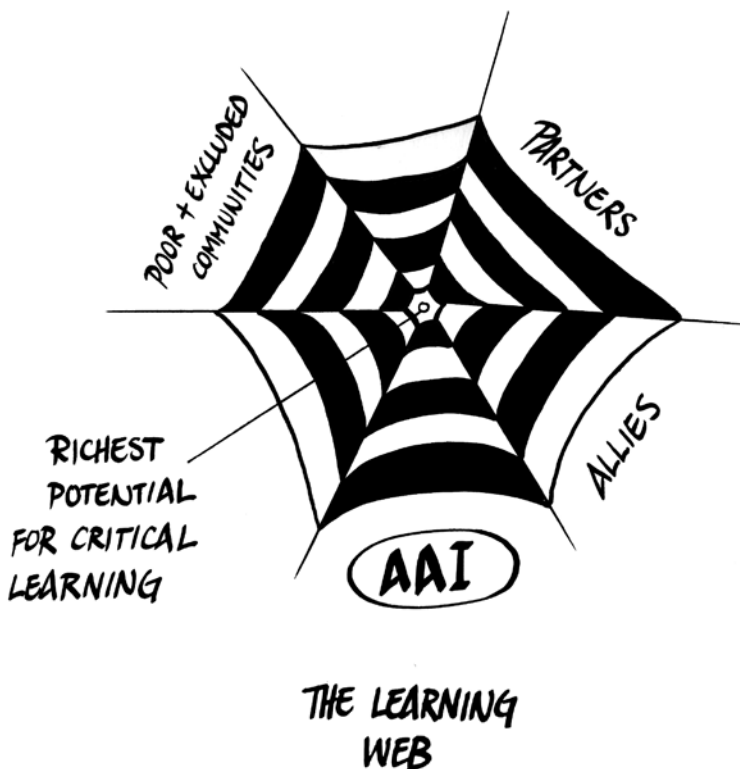
Learning is something that happens to you or is ‘done’ to you by educators, facilitators and now by knowledge management tools.

Information is pre-packaged and meaning making is closed. There is a preferred meaning or interpretation that one must accept.

Learning is associated with the belief that knowledge is a product we can acquire, or a commodity, or product that can be simply bought and sold. It assumes that certain kinds of knowledge are superior to other kinds of knowledge.

You can learn by passively absorbing what you hear, read or write. Your capacity to know how to change is arrived at by passively observing or listening to an educator or facilitator in a traditional training session.

* **Partners:** include village groups, CBOs, other NGOs, grassroots formations, social movements etc. We work with our partners to achieve a shared vision and mission. The nature of partnership varies from one context to another, and may or may not be characterised by a funding relationship.



We reject the “banking” approach to learning and in particular the ideas that learning is passive and that some forms of knowledge are superior. We also reject the idea that we can take knowledge from one person and implant or pour it into another.

In contrast, the shared learning approach sees learning as an active process and knowledge as something that we *all* use, test, question and create in and through a learning web of relationships.

The drive to learn and create knowledge is fuelled by our curiosity, questions, worries and uncertainties. This needs us to make an effort to develop and support dialogues and exchanges between people who share a common practice for change, as illustrated in the adjacent diagram.

? Questions for reflection

- How do you learn best?
- Do you value the input of others when trying to understand a problem?
- In what situations do you feel free to say what you really think?
- In what situations do you not feel free to speak your mind?

Element two

2

In line with element one above, we believe that *social learning* should be focused on our *practice** (i.e. our shared interest in WHAT we do and HOW we work for change). Our practice in ActionAid International encompasses our work, which is oriented internally* and externally.*

Practice/s: these terms refer to areas of work, subjects or interests, which are characterised by particular activities, ways of working, procedures, a required set of skills and knowledge etc. People who work on fundraising, for example, will share a practice or set of practices with other fundraisers. Activists working for change within institutions, within their communities, or within wider society may hold a shared practice with other activists. Within an area of practice, practitioners require certain skills, abilities, information and knowledge to work effectively. They also have questions, problems and needs that arise in their area of practice, and may often seek out other practitioners to talk about their practice. A group that forms for such a purpose may be called a 'community of practice'.

By **internal** we mean ActionAid International, the organisation, which comprises ActionAid International staff and volunteers, has distinct boundaries, its own identity, systems and procedures for work etc. Internal does not refer to the organisations and institutions with whom we work – these are considered separate organisational entities though we might pursue our objectives with, through, and in alliance with them. Our internal organisational practices include fundraising, organisational change, gender integration/ women's rights, management practices and so on.

By **external** we mean our mission or programme related work, which addresses our multiple interventions and efforts to change unequal power relations in the wider world. Our external mission-related areas of practice include all of our efforts at multiple levels of the organisation to advance a range of rights through organising and mobilising, building awareness, support for networks and alliances, evolving alternatives and so on.

Element two draws actively on the model of situated learning. Situated learning specifically talks about learning as the process of social participation in a *community of practice**

Community of Practice - A group of people who come together around a shared practice to exchange information, insight and advice. They may also help each other, work to solve problems collectively, discuss their situation and their needs. They may explore and create specific instruments or artefacts like tools, manuals, guides, collections of stories and other documents. The value they find in this community might extend beyond what the members need to perform their work. Members may stay together because they obtain a great deal of satisfaction from 'belonging' to a community of peers who share similar perspectives and experiences. From "*Cultivating Communities of Practice: a Guide to Managing Knowledge*" by Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and William Snyder. To be published by Harvard Business School Press.

A shared practice is the basis on which a learning relationship or set of relationships is formed. In learning communities or relationships we can generate (and also transform) the resources that characterise our practice. Some of the resources that we can use include: the tools, documents, ways of speaking and thinking, the values we share etc.

There are already many examples in ActionAid International of people that share a common practice. For example, you may already be organised in one of our existing teams and

"Powerful learning arises from ongoing sharing and critical reflection together with peers, colleagues and fellow activists on how we are working for change"



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working groups concerned with: food rights, fundraising, policy, education and so on. However, there are other dimensions of a shared practice that may *cut across* how we are already organised. For example, all staff members who work directly with partners and communities are likely to share a common practice even though they may not as yet be formally recognised as a learning group. Another example of a cross cutting community of practice in ActionAid International includes ‘feminist activists’ who are found across the organisation. Even if they are not specifically employed as ‘women’s rights coordinators’, these activists share a common commitment to and practice of work that tries to challenge and change unequal relations of power that exist between men and women in various social contexts.

The emphasis to learning based on our practice connects well with current efforts in ActionAid International to deepen the ‘quality’ of our work together in our efforts to realise Rights to End Poverty.

However, an exclusive focus on *communities of practice* per se, may be too limiting. As a result we may well decide that the value of a social and situated orientation to learning based on practice is its emphasis on relationships. There are numerous ways in which we can strengthen and deepen relationships for learning based on practice – for example, mentorship*, peer-support, people-to-people exchanges etc. This guide makes a point to emphasise these relationship-oriented learning methods and tools.

Mentorship/mentoring: An arrangement in which a more experienced person advises and helps someone else with less experience over an agreed period of time. This may be a formal arrangement (in which the relationship is brokered and the mentor is paid) or less formal (may not involve a third party and could involve payment in kind or no payment at all).

? Questions for reflection

- Do you feel that a focus to our practice (what and how we work for change) lies at the centre of much of our existing learning work (our meetings, our teams, our exchanges etc.)?
- Are you already part of an existing team, group or network that could strengthen its focus on learning based on practice? How would you go about doing this?
- Which people would you like to group together so that they could work on building a group learning relationship?
- Which people in ActionAid International would you personally like to group with to learn more about an aspect of shared practice?
- What can you do to get a learning group started? What obstacles prevent you from starting such a group right now?

Element three

3

In line with element one and element two above, we believe that social learning should be focused on our practice that involves *questioning what we know*.

The third element of our shared learning approach focuses on our knowledge (what we know). We are challenged to constantly *question, test, interrogate, create and grow the knowledge* that we use to develop our practice for change.

Being able to construct knowledge involves three key ideas:

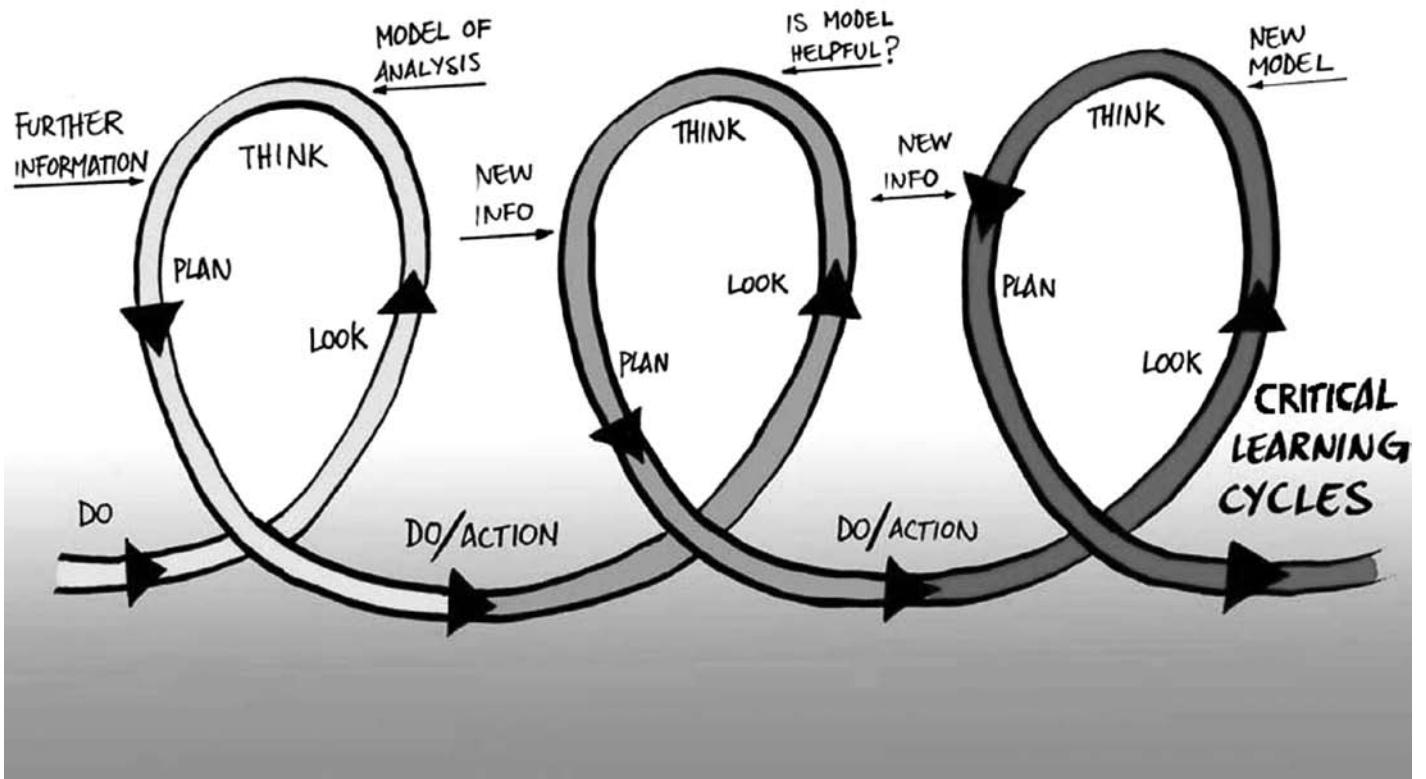
- Knowing what we know;
- Knowing what we do not know;
- Knowing what we might need to know to know more.

The first idea – **“knowing what we know”** – assumes that all knowledge is constructed and represents the interests of particular groups in our society. The knowledge sets of these various groups constantly compete to be superior or to claim the status of ‘dominant knowledge’. For example, we already know that the knowledge of ‘the rich’ claims to be more superior to the knowledge of ‘the poor’. And that ‘dominant social groups’ work hard to control the production and distribution of their ideas, through the media, schools, religious institutions, government etc.

This is because the so-called superior ideas often prop up injustices, mask inequalities and oppress particular groups based on differences in class, race, sex, ability etc. We are all subjected to the effects of ‘dominant knowledge systems’ because they inevitably impact on the contexts in which we live and work. Hence the link between knowledge – power – and practice cannot be avoided. We therefore need to be constantly critical of what we know. And to ask “Does what we know work in the interests of the groups we are affiliated with?”

The second idea – **“knowing what we do not know”** – requires that we be willing to sustain doubt and uncertainty in order to learn. In this state we question what we take for granted and try to see what we have not been able to see, know or learn. The ability to be open enough to see gaps in our own expertise or contradictions in our ideas and beliefs is deeply challenging and requires courage. The process demands praxis i.e. an approach to practice that requires repeated cycles of planning - acting - observing - and reflecting, as is illustrated in the diagram on the right hand page.

The third idea – **“knowing what we might need to know to know more”** – means that we are willing to take risks and try out new ideas; and are open to challenging what we know based on new and relevant information. It is at this point of learning that we are willing to try out new ways of acting, doing, speaking, learning, thinking, reflecting and creating.



Cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting in the process of critical learning

In a world saturated with information it is often hard to find and select the information that we need. A key skill is our ability to know which chunk of information is the chunk that will make all the difference to what we are doing, thinking and creating. Information literacy is thus a key part of the shared learning approach and needs to be built into our plans on how best to learn together. Knowing what information we need is a collective process of selecting, understanding and scrutinising the sources of information at our disposal.

The three ideas described above are helpful because they can guide us towards understanding what knowledge is and what it means to know.

The process of knowledge-making relies on certain attitudes and behaviours such as:

- Your commitment to learning through reflection
- A willingness to give of your time
- An openness to relationship building in a group with a shared practice, interest or commitment
- The courage to dialogue, especially when this may make you feel challenged and/or uncomfortable
- A willingness to explore the relationship between knowledge and action through cycles of praxis.

? Questions for reflection

- Make a list of some of the ideas you are attached to and/or feel strongly about. Then ask yourself whose interests do these ideas serve and why; whose interests do these ideas not serve and why?
- Make a list of what you think are the gaps or contradictions in your 'knowledge'. Then ask yourself what you might need to do to address one or more of the gaps or contradictions you have listed.
- How do you respond when your ideas are challenged by someone else?
- Where in the demands of your daily schedule do you think you would be able to prise open some space and time to engage with what it is you think you may need to be learning?

WOMEN, EDUCATION, FOOD, SECURITY, HIV & AID, GOVERNANCE

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION FOR EVERYONE

MARCHA GLOBAL

Contra el Trabajo Infantil "de la Explotación a la Educación"

"Contra la explotación económica de los niños y niñas y cualquier trabajo que pueda ser perjudicial a su desarrollo físico, espiritual, mental, moral o social"

COORDINACIÓN PARA AMÉRICA DEL SUR: SPTVS 781 - Conjunto D - Centro Empresarial Brasil - Bloco A - Sala 815 Ciep 70340-807 - Brasília/DF - Brasil - Tel./Fax: 55 61 214 1219

actionaid COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL

JUSTICE RIGHTS RECONCILIATION ET PAIX

Du 24 au 26 Novembre 2004 Kinam 2, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

IMED NCHR FOKAL

WOMEN, EDUCATION, FOOD, SECURITY, HIV & AID, GOVERNANCE

THE RIGHT OF WOMEN TO BE FREE FROM ABUSE, SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

GLOBAL CALL TO ACTION AGAINST POVERTY

TOGETHER FOR EQUALITY

— I CAN ONLY BENEFIT FROM QUALITY EDUCATION IF THERE IS NO VIOLENCE AT OR ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL.

— EDUCATION IS MY BASIC RIGHT. I SHOULD NOT HAVE TO TRY TO GO TO SCHOOL.

— IN SCHOOLS, I SHOULD BE TREATED WITH THE SAME RESPECT AS THE BOYS.

— IF I AM FEARED OR ABUSED, THERE MUST BE SOMEONE TO DEFEND MY RIGHTS. THEY MUST NOT BE ALLOWED TO TOUCH ME.

— MY TEACHERS SHOULD BE TRAINED TO STOP DISCRIMINATION AND TO CHALLENGE THIS WHENEVER IT HAPPENS.

STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS IN SCHOOL

— I SHOULD HAVE ISOLATED, CLEAN AND SAFE TOILET FACILITIES AT SCHOOL.

— SCHOOLS SHOULD NOT PRESENT ME WITH TRADITIONAL STEREOTYPES. I SHOULD SHOW MY MANY POSSIBILITIES.

— I NEED EDUCATION ABOUT HOW TO PROTECT MYSELF.

— I HAVE THE RIGHT TO SAY NO TO SEX. BOYS AND OLDER MEN MUST NOT TAKE ME OR FORCE ME TO HAVE SEX.

— MY PARENTS CANNOT TAKE ME OUT OF SCHOOL, AND I CANNOT BE THROWN OUT OF MY PRESENCE.

Some of the images and slogans we see in our organisation. Do you think we are living the ideas we express and the commitments we make to the outside world?

“ELA SÓ TINHA 3 ANOS. E DISSE QUE DETESTAVA PRETO”

“Levamos nosso afilhado de três anos numa festa e uma criança, da mesma idade, disse pra ele: minha mãe detesta gente preta e eu também.”

Onde você guarda o seu racismo?

DIÁLOGOS contra o racismo

MY STRENGTH IS NOT FOR HURTING.

So when I didn't know how she felt, **RAPED**.

Men can stop rape.

PROHIBIT ALL FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR

MAKE RIGHT TO EDUCATION A REALITY

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO AMEND THE CHILD LABOUR (PROHIBITION AND REGULATION) ACT 1986

আমার বউ MY WIFE

কাজ করে না DOES NOT WORK

BANCHTE SHEKHA BANGLADESH

HOMELESS. NOT HOPELESS.

Angera Bibi does not sleep on city streets out of choice. She has nowhere else to go. Nowhere to live. And yet, she hopes and dreams of a better life... for her family and for her children.

Kolkata 4 Change is working to change the lives of the homeless. Please join this effort. Call Sunjit Neog at 91-33-2465 7017.

actionaid india KOLKATA 4 CHANGE

being HIV positive does not make us less normal or less human. we love life, just like you.

actionaid

Live & Let Live.

People Living with HIV/AIDS need Support. Not Stigma.

Element four

4

In line with element one, two and three above, we believe that social learning focused on our practice, which questions how we construct knowledge, through cycles of reflective praxis, flourishes best in *open learning environments*.

The fourth element in this approach to shared learning emphasises the environment or context for learning. This requires that we pay attention to the nature of the environments* in which we are learning.

Learning environments: Here we are referring to systems and procedures, as well as styles of work and leadership, and values and attitudes that are either supportive of, or constrain learning. We can talk about learning environments at an organisational level – that is ActionAid International units or partner organisations. But, because we conceive of learning as something that reaches well beyond the traditional boundaries of the organisation to encompass multiple actors – organised through partnerships, in networks and alliances for example – we can talk about learning environments in these spaces we create to work and act together.

The social or organisational factors that **promote an open environment or context for learning** include:

Open, supportive leadership

Learning flourishes best in organisational units and spaces that have an open, supportive leadership. These leaders typically have an open door policy. They invite staff to discuss and engage with them about the organisation and its work. They also model a critical reflective practice – they ask critical questions about their own work, they seek out staff for advice and guidance, they spend time in the field talking with staff and partners etc.

Supportive HR/OD and Management Systems

Leaders and staff are supported by HR/OD systems that have been developed to support learning and other ALPS principles. Examples here include recruitment processes, which emphasise a commitment to and an existing practice of critical reflection as a key recruitment factor. Or induction procedures, which are built upon action learning principles and are shaped according to the learning styles of new recruits. Performance management systems that balance an emphasis to critical assessment, reflection and learning on practice and the impact of work, against a strict focus to outputs and actions underpin a supportive learning environment.

Organisational processes focus on learning from practice

Organisational processes (like meetings and workshops) that ordinarily focus on activities, tasks, planning and reporting also make time for reflection on and learning about our practice. Space for such reflection and learning may include some time in the field and can involve our partners and allied organisations. We can ask people to bring specific examples of their practice to meetings in the form of stories or cases – these could be about external work (like a field intervention or an effort to establish a lobbying platform etc.); or they could also be about our internal work (an example of an internal management challenge, or a fundraising innovation etc).

Breaking down organisational and geographical silos

Organisational networks, structures and forms of working and organising that connect people (staff, partners and allied organisations) across geographies and thematic areas foster an open learning environment. Examples of success in ActionAid International include cross-thematic learning forums; thematic horizontal working groups that bring staff together from all regions and DAs; support to regional or national organised formations or movements of poor people etc.

Deepening facilitation of teams, groups and alliances

An approach to team, group and alliance facilitation that places more emphasis on the needs of practitioners to dialogue about WHAT and HOW they are working for change is an important feature of an open learning environment. Leaders see themselves as facilitators or enablers of learning. Leaders exchange and balance this role against that of coordination of outputs, activities and communications from the centre.

Practically, this means getting people talking to one another directly and not just through the team leader. It means opening up space for critical discussion on common issues or problems that team/alliance members are experiencing in their practice. It involves linking people to one another for support etc. The success of this kind of intervention relies on capacity (person power and time), as well as on the use of appropriate facilitation methods, and supportive tools.

Promoting accessibility of learning opportunities

Accessibility is mainly promoted through adequate planning and resourcing of shared learning work. The resources needed to support our shared learning are person-power, time and money. Our performance management system can help staff to identify their learning needs, and budget for the time and resources needed to meet these needs. We invite you to commit 5% of your working time to shared learning. Annual planning and budgeting processes can assist to identify the range of learning activities over a cycle, and budget for these at an organisational level. Budgets should be reserved for the translation of learning processes, as well as the translation of core learning documents. This last point is absolutely critical, as language has been identified as one of the major barriers to our ability to share and exchange resources across geographies.

ActionAid International has a strong commitment to organisational transformation, and a strategy for change management. The success of the shared learning work hinges in great measure on our ability to move this organisational change agenda; and create and embed the necessary systems, procedures, guidelines and incentives that are needed to support learning. Looking beyond ActionAid International, the work that has started to deepen partnerships for change and open spaces for dialogue amongst ourselves and with social movements, is absolutely essential to creating relationships of cooperation, solidarity and openness to build critical knowledge for a change in power relations.

? Questions for reflection

- Reflect on the spaces for learning that you currently have access to. What do you like about these spaces? What would you like to change about these spaces?
- Think about your leadership style (in a few areas of your life: at home, in your community, at work etc.), how can you be more open and supportive of others; and what would you like to change? Why? And how?
- Think about your own capacity and time. What would you need to change to prise open more space for your own shared learning?
- Think about your piece of the organisation's budget. Where could you save to allow for more resources to be directed towards shared learning efforts (your own and those that would support the objectives of your unit/organisation)?

In closing this section

This section has presented the four elements of a proposed approach to shared learning in ActionAid International. We believe that the pursuit of such an approach to shared learning will assist us to grow the knowledge and skills of ActionAid International staff and partners to contribute to the achievement of RTEP.

? Questions for reflection

- What other insights, questions and concerns would you like to raise and record about this approach to shared learning?

Links and resources:

ActionAid International shared learning conceptual framework, August 2006: a detailed document setting out our early theorising/thinking about knowledge and learning in ActionAid International, and advocating a particular approach to shared learning on which this guide is built. The document contains a detailed bibliography of resources and materials that were drawn on to define the approach (available on

ActionAid International intranet, IASL section or mail Samantha for a copy). Some of the key articles in the bibliography have been scanned and are also located on the ActionAid International intranet, IASL section.

Critical Webs of Power and Change, 2005: an ActionAid International resource pack for planning, reflection and learning in people-centred advocacy, and covers many of the key concepts and ideas around which the shared learning approach is built. See <http://www.actionaid.org/main.aspx?PageId=278>

infed (the informal education site): was established in 1995 as an open, independent and not-for-profit site. Their aim is to provide a space for people to explore the theory and practice of informal education and lifelong learning. In particular, they want to encourage educators to develop ways of working and being that foster association, conversation and relationship. See http://www.infed.org/about_us.htm

'Knowledge Garden', 1998: a very nice introductory piece talking about Communities of Practice – what they are, their place in organisations, and how we can nurture them. Author: Wenger, E. See <http://www.co-il.com/coil/knowledge-garden/cop/lss.shtml>

'Knowledge Management and Organisational Learning for Development', 2006: background paper written for the KM4Dev July 2006 workshop. KM4Dev is a global community of practitioners working on organisational learning and knowledge management, with a shared on-line platform. Authors: Pasteur, K., Pettit, J. and van Schaagen, B. See www.ids.ac.uk/ids/aboutids/docs/KM4Dev

Organisational learning and learning organisation resource: for bibliography, resources and links to other websites on this subject. See <http://www.knowledgeandlearning.org.uk/orglearnlinks.html>

'Organisational Learning in NGOs: Creating the Motive, Means and Opportunity', 2005: a paper which explores very practical examples of how NGOs are creating the motive, means and opportunity for organisational learning. Author: Britton, B. See <http://www.intrac.org/publications.php?id=92>

Pedagogy of the Oppressed: this book examines the struggle for justice and equity within the educational system and proposes a new pedagogy (or theory) of educating. Freire talked about 'critical pedagogy' which can be described as an approach to teaching that enables students to recognise and challenge domination through the achievement of critical consciousness. Three of the four chapters of this book are reproduced on the Marxists internet archive (Marxists.org). See <http://www.marxists.org/subject/education/freire/pedagogy/index.htm>





Shared Learning - What are the gains?

This section describes some of the immediate and long-term transformation gains that shared learning potentially offers. It links closely to another Section: *Shared Learning: monitoring and review* where we discuss the different ways in which we can review and assess the impact of our shared learning efforts.

This Section: *Shared Learning – what are the gains?* is helpful if you're asking or confronting difficult questions about the value and contribution of our shared learning work. We hope that our monitoring and review work over the next eighteen months, will assist us to illustrate (or not?) the potential gains of our shared learning work.

The ActionAid International approach to shared learning is described in the Section: *What we mean by shared learning*. If we put our effort into realising the full potential of this approach to shared learning the gains are so encouraging you will no longer ask, "What's in it for me?" but rather, "How can I get involved and make it happen!"

Shared learning – what are some of the most immediate potential gains?

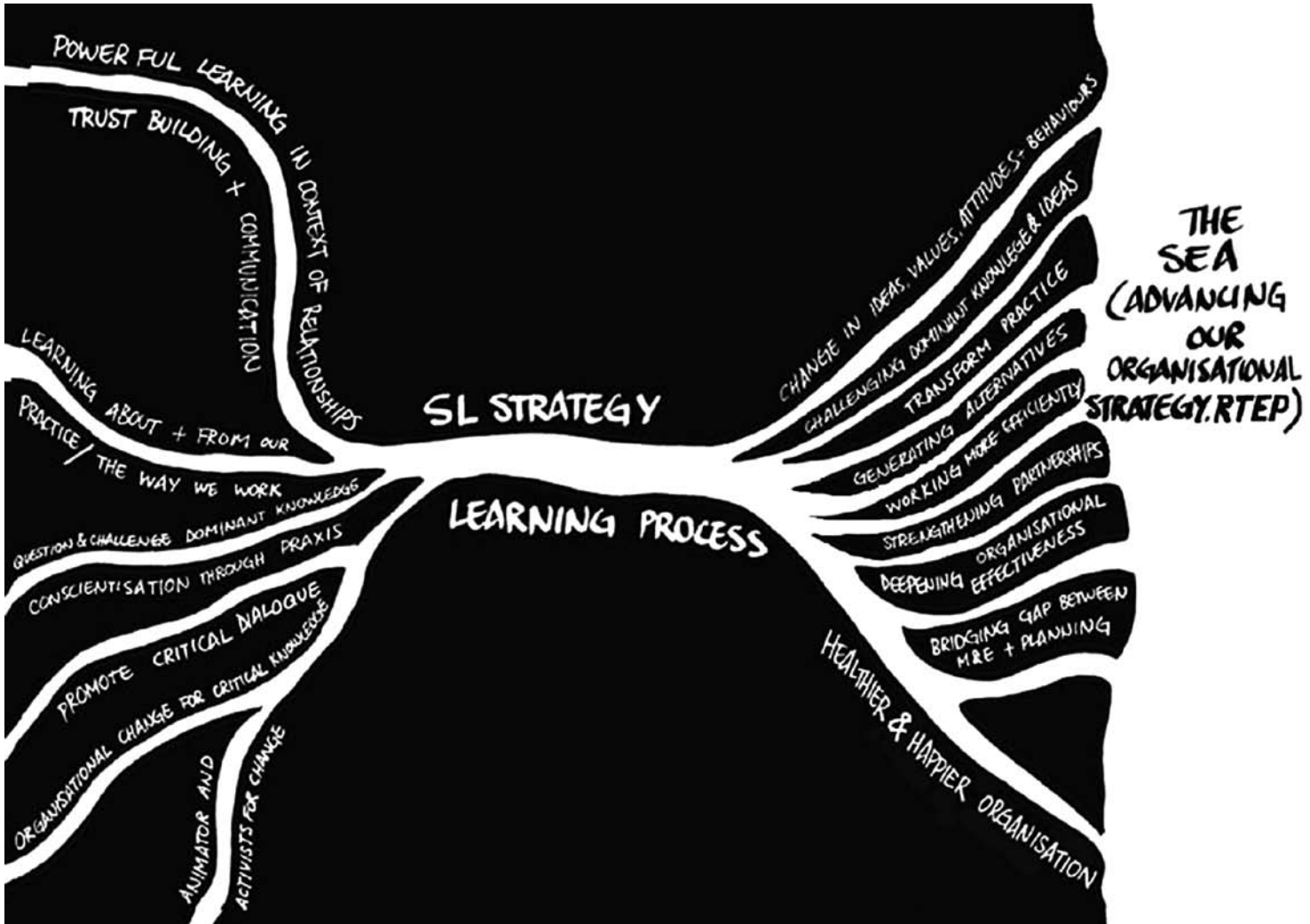
The uptake of shared learning can:

- Improve *organisational effectiveness* by deepening learning from our experience
- Increase *efficiency* (less reinventing of the wheel) leading to better use of our limited resources and a higher level of impact
- *Strengthen* relations of trust, accountability, transparency, respect and openness in our partnerships
- *Bridge the disjuncture between monitoring and evaluation and planning* by deepening the learning potential in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems
- Contribute towards a *healthier organisation* that recognises, values and builds on the skills and abilities of its staff and stakeholders
- Deepens organisational impact as we develop a richer understanding about how change happens in the different contexts we work in.

Shared learning – what are some of the potential transformative gains?

In addition to the gains mentioned in the adjacent column, RTEP and ALPS suggest more 'transformative' motivations for an organisational commitment to and investment in shared learning. These include:

- *Supporting change in the ideas, behaviours, values and attitudes* of ActionAid International staff, the organisation as a whole and the partnerships through which we work
- *Challenging dominant knowledge* within and outside of ActionAid International by helping us (ActionAid International staff and the partnerships in and through which we work) make better sense of how unequal power is shaped and maintained in the different contexts within which we work, and assisting us develop deeper theories of and actions for change
- *Transforming our practice or ways of working* within and outside of the organisation through critical reflections on and learning from practice
- *Generating new knowledge (creating and deepening alternatives)* for how we can support change in the different contexts in which we work.



These gains have been visually captured in the above diagram, which uses the metaphor of many common streams making a river that flows into the sea.

The metaphor of a river illustrated above suggests that by applying the proposed shared learning approach through our learning interventions and actions (the streams) we can build and deepen our practices for change (the river) and contribute towards realising our vision and mission for change in the wider world (the sea).

? Questions for reflection

- Which of these gains (arguments) do you agree with?
- Which of these gains (arguments) might raise questions or be difficult to defend or support?
- Can you think of any other gains (arguments) we can put forward in support of shared learning?
- How would you go about exploring these potential gains and presenting evidence for them?

WE ARE
KNOWLEDGEABLE.

INORGANIC
FERTILIZER
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MANURE





Shared Learning - The Vision, Goal, Objectives and Conditions

This section takes us a little deeper into defining a framework for shared learning in ActionAid International. It talks about a potential vision, goal and objectives for shared learning. It, therefore, offers a framework for how to bring to life the suggested ActionAid International approach to shared learning. This framework offers a guide to the shared learning interventions and actions we undertake. This section also discusses the minimum enabling conditions that are necessary for shared learning to succeed.

You will find this section useful if you are in the process of developing a unit-level strategy or plan for shared learning; or if you are asking questions about what we are trying, quite concretely, to achieve through shared learning.

If we are going to focus and take forward our shared learning approach, described in the Section - *What we mean by shared learning*, it is necessary that we work out more clearly and specifically where we are going to and what we hope to achieve. We also need to think about the minimum conditions that we will need to meet if we are to travel towards our destination.

The shared learning core group proposed a broad guiding vision, a goal and a set of objectives for our shared learning work that we would like to share with you here.

The guiding vision statement for shared learning

By 2016 shared learning will have *contributed to a change in power relations* in favour of the *poor and excluded*.

? Questions for reflection

- What do you like about this vision statement?
- What would you like to add to or subtract from this vision statement?

The goal of shared learning

By 2010 shared learning will have *contributed to a more effective and productive organisation*, and to the *growth and exchange of critical knowledge for change* primarily within and amongst *ActionAid International staff*, as well as *partners*, allied *civil society organisations* and organisations and *movements* of poor and excluded people.

? Questions for reflection

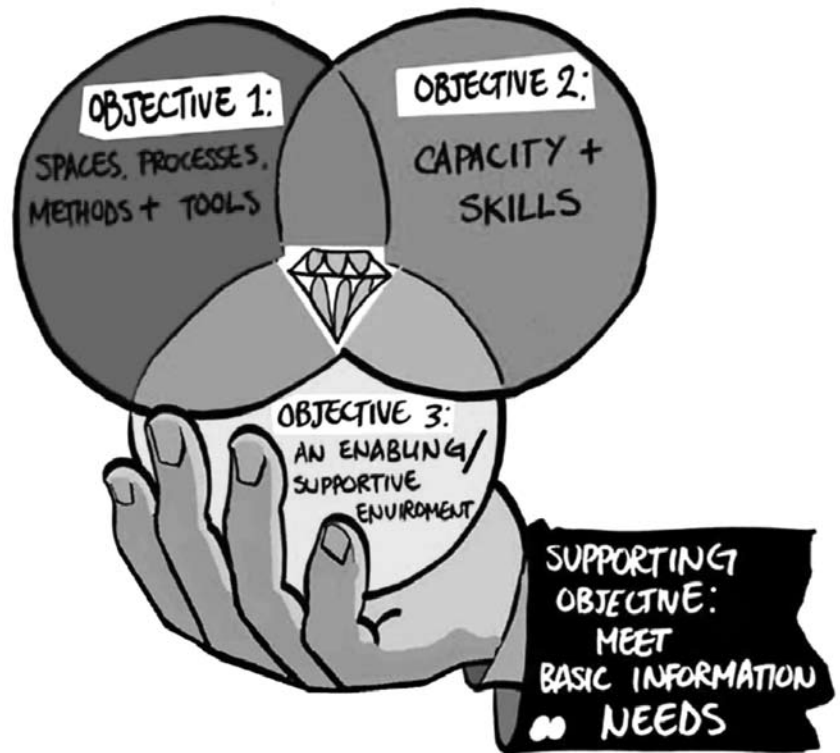
- What do you like about this goal?
- What would you like to add or subtract from the goal?

The objectives of shared learning

Our primary objectives are:

1. To deepen, transform and promote existing, and introduce new *spaces, processes, methods and tools* that enable critical learning;
2. To build and deepen *capacity and skills* to promote critical dialogue and learning for new knowledge; and
3. To build a *supportive/enabling environment* which ensures that learning opportunities are available, accessible and appropriate to ActionAid International staff, as well as partners, communities and other critical change agents.

A supporting objective is to ensure that the *basic information needs* of ActionAid International staff and partners are met.



Relating the objectives

The three primary objectives support one another and are inseparable. The supporting objective 'holds' the other objectives and provides the foundation for them to be achieved.

The diagram to the right shows how the objectives work together.

It is at the intersection of the three primary objectives (the diamond in the illustration) that the most powerful and change oriented learning interventions and actions are possible. Therefore, our interventions and actions should always seek, where possible, to address all three of these primary objectives.

The shared learning core group has found the trio of primary objectives to offer a very useful framework against which to test and prioritise the interventions (and associated actions) we were thinking about. We created a checklist of the three objectives. For each intervention, we asked ourselves:

- "Does (or can) this intervention help to deepen or create a new space, process, method or tool for shared learning?"
- Does (or can) this intervention help build the skill or the ability we need for shared learning?"
- Does (or can) this intervention assist us build a supportive environment for shared learning?"

Where we found that a proposed intervention was lacking, the objectives helped guide us to new actions that were needed to strengthen the intervention and its contribution to each of the objectives. Where we could find no way to strengthen the intervention's contribution to each of the three

objectives, we discarded the intervention. In this way we were able to prioritise the interventions that would have the deepest organisational impact.

We also see the value of the three objectives as a guide to how we design and facilitate our interventions and actions. When we're designing a meeting, let's ask ourselves: "How can we deepen this meeting as a learning space?" When we're looking to evaluate and document an intervention, let's ask ourselves: "How we can use this process to deepen skill for critical reflection, thinking and writing?" When we're designing an exchange process, let us ask ourselves: "How can we do this so that it is not just one or two individuals who benefit, but how can it help to change the way we might be working organisationally?"

? Questions for reflection

- What do you see as the strengths and weakness of the proposed objectives?
- What objectives would you like to add or remove?
- Would the objectives assist us design and evaluate shared learning interventions and actions in our organisation? Why/why not?



Satisfying basic enabling conditions will create a more supportive climate for shared learning

The enabling conditions

If we are to achieve the vision, goal and objectives we have set for ourselves, there are a number of key enabling conditions that will need to be fostered.

Some of the enablers will be built as we start to deepen the spaces and processes for critical learning, which in turn shape and influence the organisational learning environment or climate.

However, there are essential conditions that other actors and units of the organisation will need to work to create. *The organisational benefits of deeper shared learning are at risk* if the responsible actors identified do not work to create and support these necessary conditions.

Some of the conditions for success

Below we present four sets of conditions that will enable shared learning. Under each of the conditions is a list of bulleted actions. These actions are intended to give concrete expression to what it means to grow an environment that is supportive of shared learning.

When you work through each of the four conditions ask yourself: *“Do I see this condition in my unit?”* and tick one of the icons that appears there:



Yes

To some extent

No

Condition 1

An organisational environment that is supportive of critical learning

Active reading

Do I see this condition?



- Leadership in all units tries to model ALPS principles.
- Organisational leadership dedicates a minimum of 5% of their time to key interventions and actions for shared learning.
- Leadership is thinking, reading and writing reflectively and encouraging staff to do the same.
- There are supportive HR/OD policies, systems and procedures for shared learning and they are being implemented.
- Leadership is actively leading and supporting organisational change management.
- Leadership and staff are open to learning from other actors.
- Partnership agreements and relations are founded on and reflect ALPS principles.

Condition 2

ActionAid International staff members have sufficient time and the skills needed to deepen critical learning

Active reading

Do I see this condition?



- Staff members are supported by their managers to dedicate a minimum of 5% of their time to interventions and actions for shared learning.
- Learning interventions and actions are reflected in plans, and are monitored and evaluated for achievement.
- Training and skills development is available for the design and facilitation of critical reflection, learning and writing processes, not just for IASL staff members, but also for a broader cross-section of staff.
- The international and regional level staff offer more support to country level strategies and impose fewer demands.
- Unit leadership ensures that information is coordinated and available, reducing multiple and overlapping requests for information.

Condition 3

Social relationships for learning are characterised by trust and safety

Active reading

Do I see this condition?



- Leadership models a more reflective, open and dialogue-oriented approach to working together.
- ActionAid International staff members who raise difficult issues and questions, that are beneficial to the organisation and its work, are rewarded and held up as role models.
- Team/unit leaders commit at least 5% of their time to supporting team development and relationship building.

Condition 4

Learning opportunities are available and accessible to all interested staff members (and partners)

Active reading

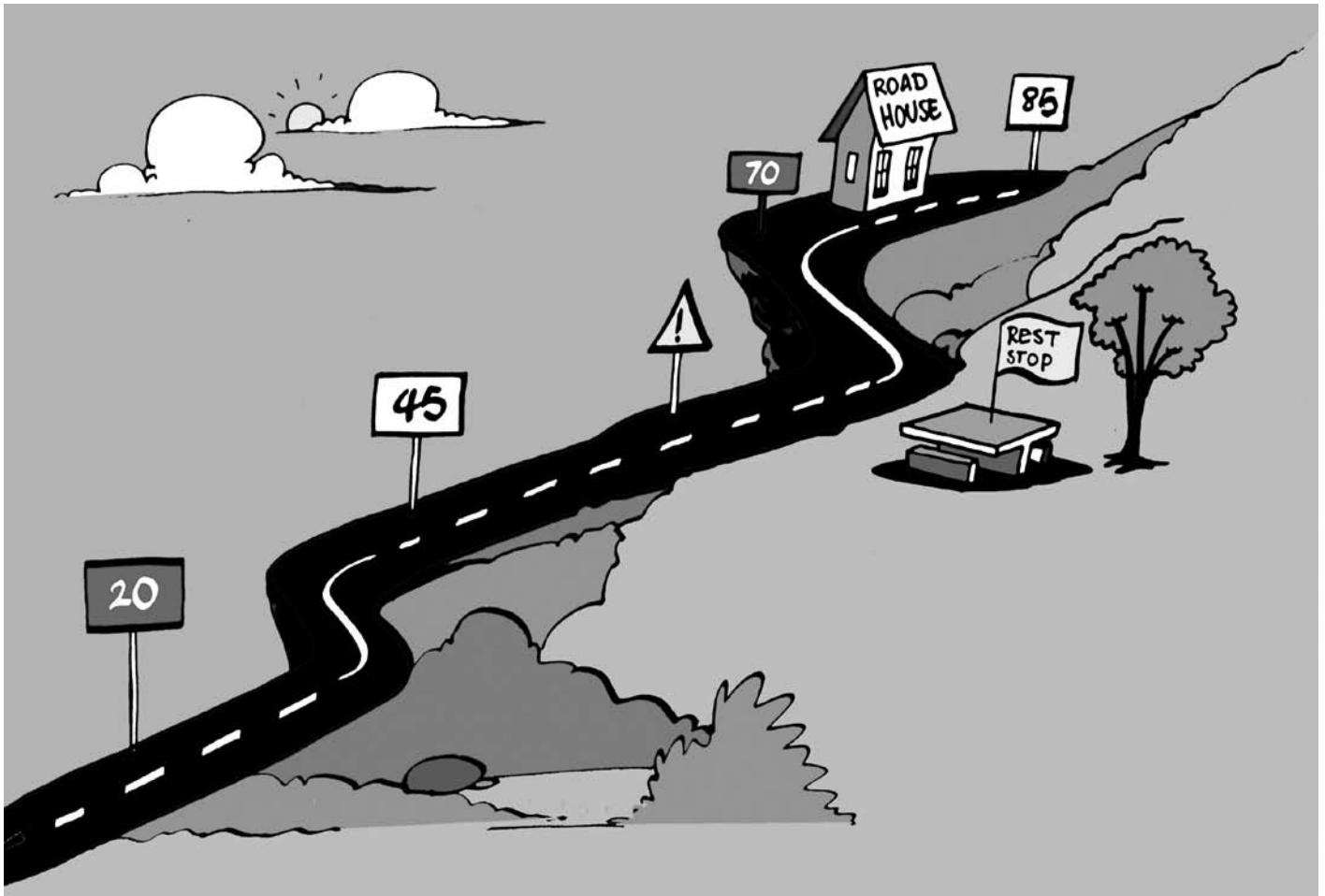
Do I see this condition?



- Organisational plans and budgets are adequate to support critical learning processes involving ActionAid International staff and partners.
- Unit leaders ensure that budgets are reserved for translation where required.
- Recruitment strategies and staff development plans reflect our commitment to promote a multilingual organisational culture.
- International themes and functions budget for learning support to CPs, especially smaller programmes.

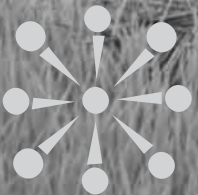
Questions for reflection

- Reflect on the indicators under each of the conditions where you have put a tick on the 'to some extent' icon. In each instance, say what is needed to turn this 'to some extent' response into a resounding 'yes'!
- Reflect on the indicators under each of the conditions where you have put a tick on the 'no' icon. In each instance, say what you see as the barriers to acting and suggest how these barriers could be overcome.



In closing this section

The proposed vision, goal and objectives tell us where we want to go with our shared learning work. The conditions tell us a little bit about what we need to put in place so that we have a safe and successful journey to our destination.





Shared Learning - Exploring Interventions and Actions

This section talks about some of the key interventions and actions you can take to deepen and promote shared learning in and through your unit. The suggestions build on much of our existing shared learning practice in ActionAid International and offer simple guidance, which you can modify and adapt to your context.

The suggestions in this section aim to help us achieve the strategic framework outlined in the Section - *Shared learning: the vision, goal, objectives and conditions*. You can, however, read this section independently.

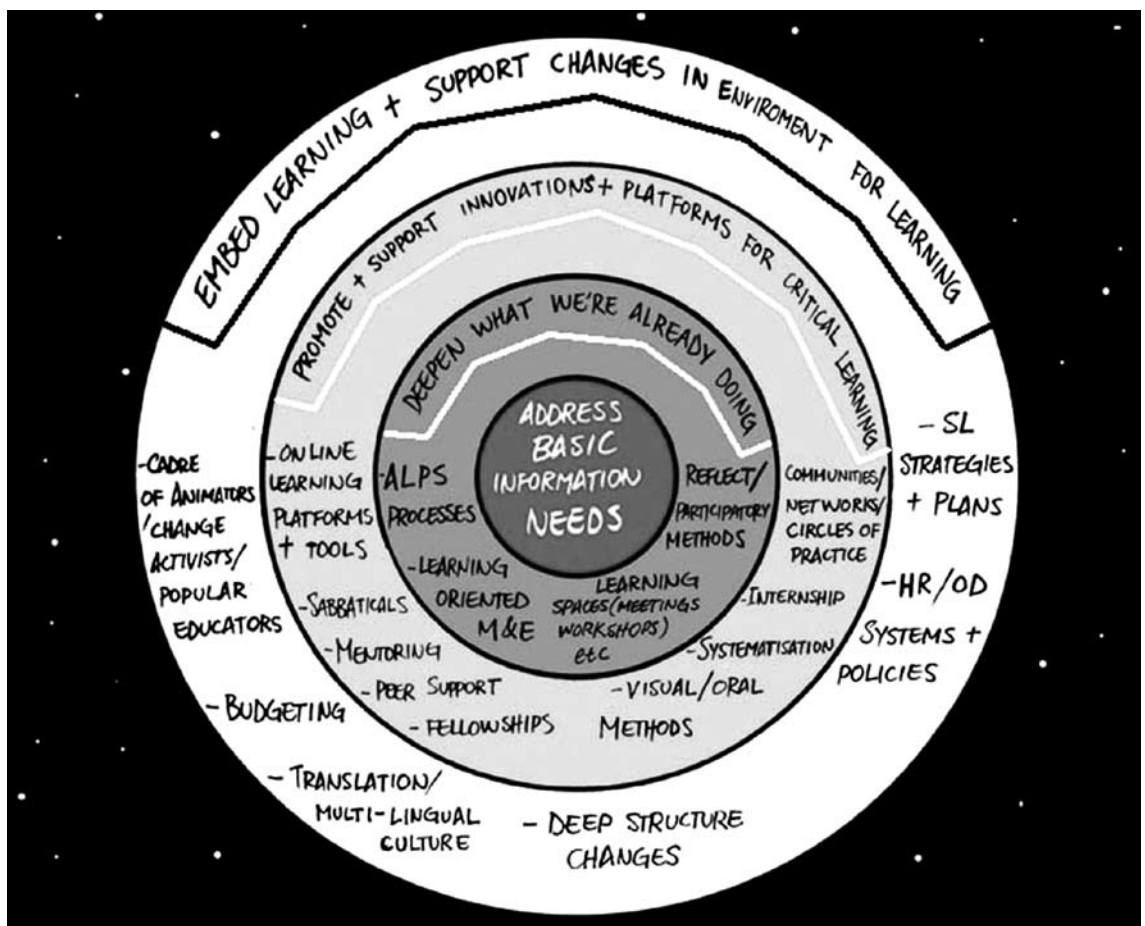
You will find this section of the guide relevant if you are keen to move straight into action; and if you want some ideas or references for what you could be doing to deepen existing or introduce new interventions and actions for shared learning.

Thinking a little bit more about interventions and actions

It is useful to think of the interventions and actions presented in this section as a layering of circles much like in an asteroid. Each of these circles builds one upon the other in a supportive and reinforcing way. Thus, all of the intervention circles shown in the diagram below are equally significant.

Most of the proposed interventions are not new, but rather build on and seek to deepen many of our existing learning practices.

The principle of starting where there is some interest and commitment in your unit, showing some progress and impact, and then building from there is a sound one. Thus, as you read it is worth thinking about your own organisational environment for shared learning and asking yourself: "Which types of interventions and actions are likely or are not likely to be well received by leadership and staff?"



Active reading

When you work your way through the list of interventions and their associated actions, use a highlighter pen to **highlight the interventions and actions that you are currently using, or have experienced.**

Your highlights will allow you to easily see what you are already doing (i.e. what actions leadership and staff members are already committed to). At the end, the actions that are **not highlighted** will give you an indication of the actions you could consider doing in the future.

Intervention Area 1: Addressing basic information needs

1

We believe that access to information is a vital building block for knowledge creation and it is addressed as a 'supporting or foundational intervention' in this guide to shared learning.



All ActionAid International staff and partners have basic information needs, which include access to the following:

- Organisational and unit-level strategies, strategic plans, annual plans and budgets, reports etc.
- Relevant people inside and outside of ActionAid International with whom they can share information, ideas and ask for/give support to.
- Relevant policies, laws and other instruments; guides and toolkits; stories and case studies; links to external resources etc.
- Significant organisational developments that impact on or are relevant to their work, including the space to influence and give feedback.
- Organisational policies, procedures, leave and finance forms etc.
- Work that is happening in different parts of the organisation, and in other relevant external organisations.

We believe that fulfilling ActionAid International staff members' and partners' basic information needs is the function of every unit in the organisation.

Actions for Intervention Area 1

Ensure that **ActionAid International staff members** (*our primary emphasis here*), as well as our partners have access to the basic information they need to fulfil their roles, their work responsibilities and undertake actions for change in their organisations and in the outside world by:

- Building commitment to and incentives for the use of the intranet as the most foremost electronic platform for information storage and exchange within and across ActionAid International organisational units.

Suggestions here are to have leadership and senior staff members play an active role in leading on the creation of intranet spaces; to publicly acknowledge staff members' contributions to intranet spaces; and to acknowledge people who support information management and exchange as valuable organisational support roles etc.

- Assisting units, teams and working groups identify their priority information needs and build system/s for storing, managing and maintaining information.
- Encouraging leadership to model a commitment to the intranet through their day-to-day practice.

Leadership should be encouraged to talk about what they are doing/learning/exchanging through the intranet (informally and in staff forums); leadership can 'give leadership' through intranet tools (like online letters, bulletins to staff and so on); and, where there is need, leadership should receive technical and social support to play this 'modelling' role etc.

- Building/deepening and implementing systems and procedures to ensure the effective management of information through e-mails, shared drives and data bases in ways that compliment and support the intranet.

For example, give guidance on e-mail usage, offer links to the intranet through e-mails and e-newsletters, store essential documents on the intranet etc.

- Offering training, mentoring and support for the effective use of the intranet and other complimentary management information systems (MISs), like the Contract Management Information System (CMIS) and the Alps Tracker.
- Ensuring that there are people at all levels of ActionAid International with dedicated responsibility for supporting information storage and cross-geography knowledge creation and exchange through the intranet.

Aspects that could be attended to here are building these responsibilities into job descriptions and performance management systems so they are formalised; and assigning people within teams to support team members (who are in the field or who have low levels of connectivity in their CPs) etc.

- Building systems and supports to team, theme and function leaders to encourage innovation and a focus on learning in the design and facilitation of meetings and workshops.

How about developing sign-off procedures for meetings that place a limit on the amount of time given to reporting and planning? Or why not put in place a system for mentoring or peer support to team leaders for the design and facilitation of more learning-oriented meetings?

Intervention Area 2: 2

In ActionAid International we have many existing organisational *spaces* (meetings, workshops, seminars etc.), *structures* (teams, sub-teams, working groups etc.), and *processes* (like Alps and Monitoring and Evaluation Systems) that can be deepened for learning purposes.



- Encouraging organisational leadership to lead by example in the design and facilitation of learning oriented management meetings, board meetings and international thematic and function meetings etc.

(ii) Deepen critical learning within existing organisational structures (teams, sub-teams, working groups etc.) by:

- Deepening the capacity and skill of team leaders to facilitate and support teamwork and development, as well as face-to-face and on-line learning and exchange.
- Identifying and promoting methods, tools and practices that can enable teams to deepen their learning and exchanges.

How about encouraging participation in an intranet workspace that meets team needs? Or have team leaders publicly acknowledge the contributions of team members to group work? Or link team members to one another where there is a need for peer support around a common work challenge etc.

Rather than working to create a whole new layer of activities, let us start first with what we have and build from there.

Actions for Intervention Area 2

(i) Deepen learning within existing meetings, seminars, conferences and workshop spaces by:

- Make them places where people can share, critically analyse and dialogue about our practice (ways) of working for change.

How about holding management meetings in the field and have certain sessions open to DA staff and partners as the Ghana programme has done? Or instead of staff members just presenting activity reports at programme meetings, why not have these circulated in short form beforehand and use the meeting space to explore and discuss stories/cases about the successes or challenges staff members are facing in their own practice? Or link a workshop or conference to a grassroots action? Or have a learning fair, where people bring examples of their work, captured as far as possible in visual format, to a meeting (as was undertaken in the last International Food Rights theme meeting)?

- Encouraging organisational leadership to lead by example in the development and facilitation of learning oriented teams.
- Ensuring that team leaders and team members have dedicated capacity and time to perform their roles in learning-oriented teams.

(iii) Deepen learning orientation within our ALPS, and Monitoring and Evaluation processes and practices by:

- Push our comfort zones with our existing Alps processes.

Why not experiment with a different approach to PRRPs to shift them away from a focus on what we did, to what impact we had and what we learnt? Why not experiment with video or oral recordings to promote exchange and learning across geographies through your PRRPs? Why

not get in contact with a CP that you know has undertaken an innovative strategy development process, and have them second a staff person to walk with you?

- Deepen the relevance of and learning potential in our monitoring and evaluation systems.

Why not undertake a small review of one of your programmes to see whether the M & E systems are yielding information and lessons that are of use to the programme? Then use this review as a basis for adjusting the systems. Why not undertake a reflection on your last external and peer review with a view to understanding how the learnings have or have not been translated into practice, what the successes and obstacles have been, and drawing out lessons to strengthen the link between M & E and planning?

- Encouraging leadership 'to lead the way' in innovating and learning from and through ALPS and M & E systems.
- Deepening the capacity of staff to design, facilitate and implement more learning-oriented ALPS and M & E processes.

Why not look at twinning staff members with more experienced facilitators? Why not organise an exchange with another unit of the organisation to learn from them? Why not invite an external facilitator or creative M & E specialist to assist us 'hold the mirror to our work'?

(iv) Deepen our participatory and popular education approaches and work by:

- Conducting learning reviews, involving communities and other relevant stakeholders, to explore the impact of and derive lessons about one or more of our participatory and popular education approaches and practices.

This could be done through action research, through anecdote and story telling (orally or by video), through life or grassroots organisation histories etc. By example, ActionAid International Nepal is currently working to critically review and document (through three case studies) their Reflect and Popular Education work and its contributions to strengthening social movements, with a view to drawing out lessons for future work.

- Establishing appropriate platforms for sharing and learning, both face-to-face and online, about our approaches and methods for building awareness and critical consciousness.

These platforms could include: a community of practice, or a learning exchange, or a secondment to another organisational unit, or a peer support process etc.

(v) Deepen our efforts to document our work by:

- Placing documentation efforts very squarely in the hands of practitioners in our existing teams, sub-teams and working groups.

Some of the relevant questions here include: What are the burning questions they face in their practice? What do they need to be learning about? What stories do they want to tell and hear about from their members? What are the written artefacts, products or tools they would like to create together?

- Looking critically at what we are currently documenting.

For example, you could do a light review over the past year – who have we written for, what did people learn from the documentation, how has the documentation influenced follow on actions etc.? This may help us to learn more about the usefulness of different types of documentation for learning about practice and identify gaps and opportunities.

- Building capacity and skill for documentation among interested ActionAid International staff members and partner staff.

Some options include: writing workshops or retreats, accompanied writing (a mentor working with a writer), peer support through a writing project etc.

- Dedicating time to writing.

Encourage staff to try and assign at least 5% of their time to shared learning that includes writing. This could be built into annual or quarterly work plans. Or we could hold annual mini-retreats where staff members in a team have an opportunity for critical reflection, sharing and focused time for writing on some aspects of their work.

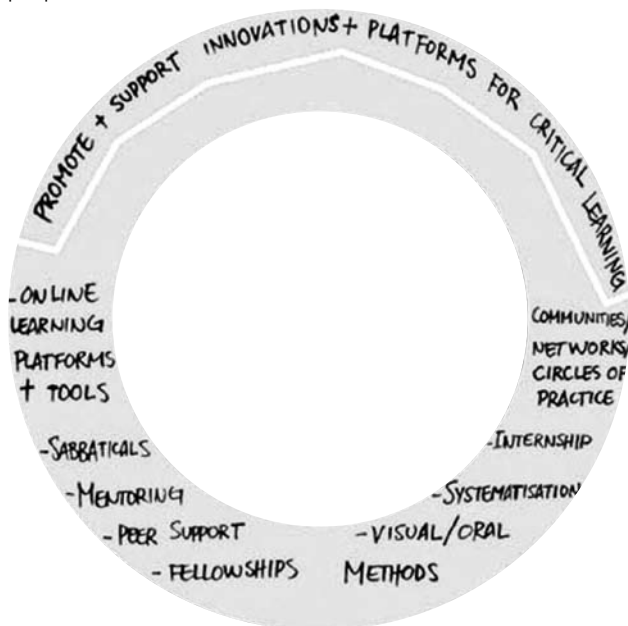
- Building on or trying out alternative documentation methods.

Examples include: photo-journeys, videos directed by practitioners or community members, oral storytelling, the Latin American approach to systematization* of experience etc. Internationally, we will support the exchange and promotion of methods and practices for documentation in 2007/2008.

* **Systematization (Sistematizacion in Spanish)** is “the critical interpretation of one or more experiences through which, by organizing and reconstructing the experience, explains the logic of the experience, the factors that intervened in that process, how those factors related to each other and why”(Oscar Jara). It is “an alternative to the difficulties that we find in social research to analyze processes of change” (Sergio Martinic).

Intervention Area 3: 3 Support and promote innovative platforms and processes for critical learning

This area of intervention includes some of the methods and tools for learning that are used in some of the units in our organisation. They are, however, not generally widely used, especially for learning and exchange purposes.



We felt that all of these methods and tools for learning could be powerfully employed to advance our shared learning approach. Our great challenge in the next eighteen months is to experiment with these methods, learn from our efforts, assess and review their impact, as well as be in a position to share our learning about these methods, tools and processes with others in the organisation.

Actions for Intervention Area 3

- (i) **Promote Communities of Practice (CoPs) by:**
- Piloting diverse types of Communities of Practice (CoPs), monitoring them, documenting their development and publicising these efforts.
 - Building facilitation and support capacity for CoPs.

This can include training, mentorship, facilitation guidelines and face-to-face and on-line communities of learning for facilitators of CoPs. The international IASL team will provide support on this front in 2007/2008.

- Ensuring formal organisational space for CoPs and building leadership commitment over time.
- Reviewing and evaluating CoPs at two-year intervals.

- (ii) **Deepen sabbaticals*, mentoring, secondments*, peer support, fellowships* and internships* by:**
- Revising existing policy (on for example: sabbaticals, secondments and mentoring) and building new policy where it is absent. The objective here is to bring a learning orientation to all of these policies and ensure that the benefits are enjoyed beyond the individual participant.

For example, sabbaticals could be reoriented to encourage long-standing staff members to tie their retreat time to mentoring and supporting another organisational unit, i.e. to teaching time in-organisation, or to leading on efforts to document ground-breaking work across the organisation.

- Piloting implementation of new tools, for example peer support, fellowships and learning internships.
- Mobilising resources and building good guidance on how to best undertake these processes.
- Encouraging leadership to take-up opportunities provided for in policy, as well as assist staff members to explore and enjoy the same.

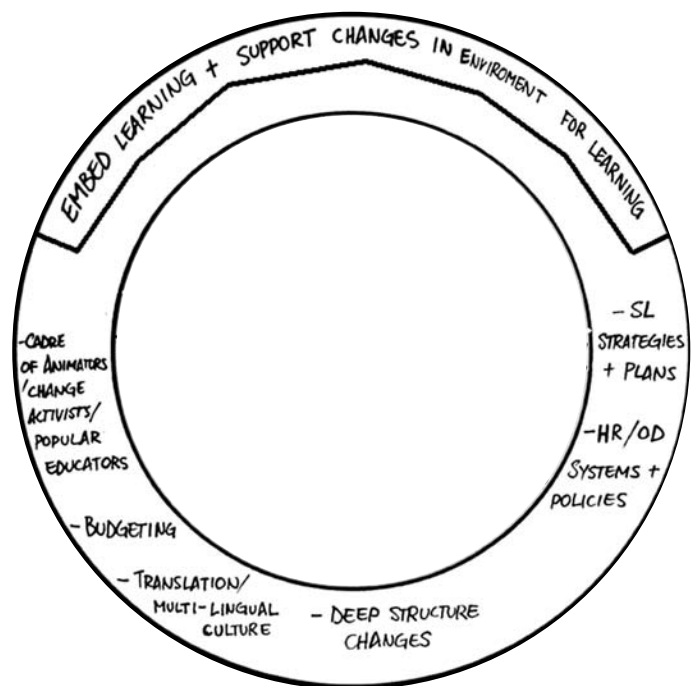
Sabbatical: A period of time when a longstanding member of staff is able to stop their normal work in order to undertake focused study, writing or travel.

Intervention Area 4: 4

Additional interventions to embed learning and support changes in learning environments

Although many of the interventions and actions listed above, if sensitively designed and carefully implemented, can contribute to building a supportive climate for learning, we felt that a few additional key interventions were needed on this front.

Most of the major organisational interventions to create a supportive environment lie in the realm of management, human resources and organisational development, and are addressed in relevant unit-level strategies and plans. As we mentioned in the Section - Shared learning: vision, goal, objectives and conditions, the success of our shared learning work relies on the extent to which we can create a supportive and open learning environment.



Actions for Intervention Area 4

- (i) Work to embed learning in all organizational units by:
- Promoting the development of learning strategies in organizational units and/or clear planning and budgeting for learning processes in annual plans.
 - Building multi-language capacities through recruitment and training, and dedicating budgets for translation.
 - Seeking, where possible, to provide dedicated capacity for IASL in organizational units.
 - Building learning into the performance management system so that this aspect is reflected in staff performance and staff development plans and is monitored and assessed for achievement.

Secondment: The detachment of a person from their regular organization for temporary assignment elsewhere.

Fellowship: An award of money to someone to enable them to undertake research or investigations with other people with whom they share a common interest or 'fellowship'.

Internship: Any official or formal program to provide practical experience for beginners in an occupation or profession.

(iii) Promote people-to-people exchanges that foster learning and change beyond the individual by:

- Reviewing the impact of people-to-people exchanges, highlighting reasons for success and/or failure, and deriving lessons.
- Sharing, learning and building capacity for 'value-adding' exchanges.

We could document and share exchange experiences that have added value and resulted in changed practices of work at an individual and/or organisational level; we could bring in skilled facilitators to accompany (assist with the design and implementation of) exchange processes etc.

- Building systems and practices for systematizing/ documenting and sharing learning beyond the individual participant/s to an exchange.

(iv) Promote effective online learning across units and organizations by:

- Piloting new and deepening existing online platforms for learning and exchange.
- Developing capacity and skill amongst users and facilitators of on-line learning platforms.

This can be implemented through formal training, mentorship, and the intranet community of practice for facilitators of online learning teams and groups.

- Ensuring that on-line learning facilitators are formally designated these responsibilities by their organisation, are adequately supported and rewarded for their efforts, despite the seemingly 'invisible' nature of much of this work.
- Building commitment to and incentives for on-line learning. Leadership should be actively encouraged and supported to model this commitment through their own day-to-day practices.

Note: This set of actions builds on and extends the proposed actions under Intervention Area 1.

(ii) **Build a cadre or network of ActionAid change activists, animators and popular educators by:**

- Building linked sub-regional, regional and global networks of activists and animators of critical learning. This network includes the IASL community and other ActionAid staff with an interest in learning.
- Deepening the capacity of this network.

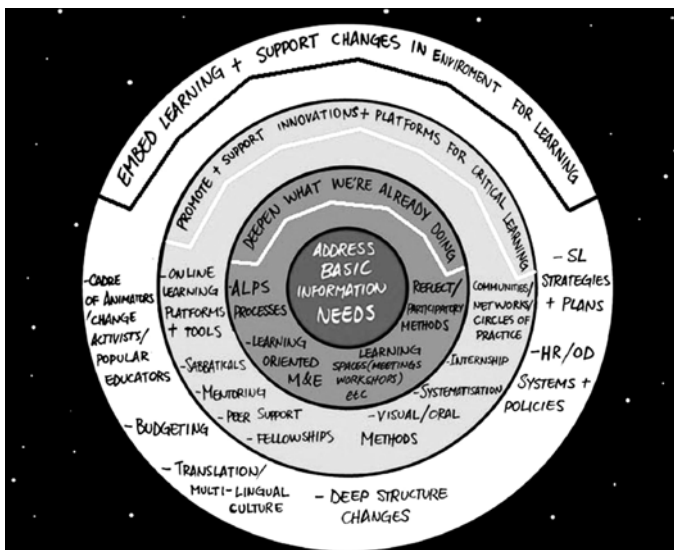
This can be implemented through reading and learning circles, online community platform/s, reflective writing projects, peer support, people-to-people exchange processes, formal training, mentorship etc.

Active reading

- You have highlighted those interventions and actions you are already taking action on. Which of these would you say might need some additional work and attention in the coming year? And what support would you need for this work (from inside and outside of your unit)?
- Which interventions and actions that you have not highlighted would you say are relevant to your unit? Which of these interventions would be well received for piloting/introduction over the next eighteen months? What support would you need for this work (from inside and outside of your unit)?
- What in the list of interventions above do you think is missing?

In closing this section

The interventions and actions for shared learning proposed in this section are suggestions. There are many other key interventions that could be made to help take forward the shared learning approach outlined in this guide. We encourage you to be bold and innovative.



Over the next eighteen months, as you seek to deepen what you are already doing and try out new things, please do document and share what you are doing, how you are doing it and what impact you are seeing. We are all interested and keen to learn and be inspired by you too!

Links and resources:

There are many other methods and tools for learning, some very innovative and exciting, that we do not discuss in the guide. Here are some toolkits and other resources that you might find useful:

Knowledge-sharing toolkit wiki page: a fairly complete listing of the various knowledge/learning toolkits that are currently available. See http://www.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/Knowledge_Sharing_Toolkits#Related_FAQs.2FCommunity_Knowledge

Learning and Change (ILAC) Initiative: a wonderful series of briefs looking at approaches for fostering learning. These include facilitating participatory decision-making, preparing innovation histories, knowledge sharing approaches, establishing and managing learning alliances, appreciative inquiry and outcome mapping. See <http://www.cgiar-ilac.org/index.php?section=8>

Tools for knowledge and learning - a guide for development and humanitarian organisations: covers thirty methods and tools including peer assists, mind maps, action learning sets, stories and many others. Author: Ben Ramalingam, Overseas Development Institute. See http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/publications/Documents/KM_toolkit_toolkit_web.pdf

The Change Handbook: The Definitive Resource on Today's Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems, 2007: a selection of 61 processes and methods that can be applied to support planning, reflection, learning and exchange. They are referred to as 'whole system' methods and aim to support 'high-leverage' change within organisations and communities. Authors: Peggy Holman, Tom Devane and Steven Cady with over 90 International Contributors. A website with one page summaries of the various methods can be found at http://thechangehandbook.com/component/option.com_frontpage/Itemid,1/



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This section of the guide addresses the ways in which we can monitor and review our shared learning work over the next eighteen months. It also discusses, in brief, some of the motivations for the monitoring and review of shared learning.

You will be interested in this section if you and/or your unit have specific questions about whether shared learning is or can make a difference to our work, or if you have an interest in understanding better how we can learn critically

In this section we explore some of the reasons for assessing the impact of our shared learning efforts and make some suggestions for monitoring and review over the next eighteen months.

Why should we be concerned about assessing impact?

Our shared learning approach is built on the assumption (shared by many of us) that shared learning is important and does add value. But does it and how?

The major reason we want to monitor and review then is to understand better the impact of learning processes : “Are they making a difference to individuals, to our organisations and importantly to our work for a change, and if so how?” We also aim to actively reflect, learn and share more about how we are learning in the different units of ActionAid International.

Our monitoring and review work is important if we are to learn more about how we learn and are able to motivate for deeper organisational investments in shared learning.



Monitoring and review helps to support and strengthen our work for change

? Questions for reflection

- Can you think of other reasons why we would need to assess the impact of shared learning?
- How can you use your existing monitoring and review processes to explore the impact of shared learning?

Where should we focus our attention?

For the next eighteen months, we propose to focus our attention to monitoring and reviewing a selection of our learning methods, processes and spaces. The aim here is for us to formulate more concrete responses to the questions that we ask about shared learning in the Section - *Shared learning: our questions and key actions*.

We propose simple systems that build on the work we are already doing.

The review and pilot work we are planning internationally includes the following:

1. Assisting the Women's Rights team to track distribution and assess impact of the new Gender Equality and RBA Resource Kit. This will also inform an organisational framework for assessing the impact of toolkits and guides.
2. Piloting a mentoring system for field staff in select countries in the Africa Region.
3. Working with the international Food Rights theme to review, document and draw lessons from the Food Rights Fair (a daily presentation of case studies from the field) at their last annual meeting. We aim to establish guidance and support for similar initiatives in other themes and functions.
4. Supporting pilot teams and working groups on the ActionAid International intranet to deepen their learning potential.
5. Working with the LAC team to review and assess the impact of a sample of cross-country people-to-people exchanges, and from this evolve a framework to inform future exchange work.
6. Piloting a community of practice for people that are facilitating learning groups, communities or networks.

These reviews/pilot efforts will be written up and shared with the rest of the organisation.

Here are a few ideas for some of the things you could think of doing over the next eighteen months. We encourage you to be creative and bold in further developing and adding to these broad guiding ideas.

(i) Reflection and sharing about our learning innovations

Identify one or two learning methods, processes or spaces (see interventions section of this guide) that you feel your unit has implemented in an innovative or creative way. Why not reflect on, review the impact of, and write up this experience? *For example*, maybe your unit has made an effort to change the way your programme meetings happen. You meet in the field, partners participate, and you bring concrete stories or examples about how you've been working in the field, according to themes, to meetings.

Some of the questions that would be useful to explore are:

- What or who prompted this change?
- What are you doing differently from the past?
- What have been the 'fruits' (the positive impact) of the change?
- Have there been any negative or unintended effects as a result of the change?
- What do you see as the lessons for others, so that they might also try such a change?
- What are the gaps that we must still address?

(ii) Reviews to deepen our learning work

If you feel inspired why not try to deepen or transform an existing learning space, method or process in your unit? You might kick start this with a review which feeds into an effort to change the space, method or process.

For example, maybe you see the potential in one of your teams to deepen learning. Some of the questions that may be useful to explore with the team are:

- What are the major burning challenges or questions that team members have about their work, i.e. what are their learning needs?
- What are the team activities that help them to address their learning needs and how could these be built on?
- What other team activities could be added to address their burning questions?
- How would they characterise relations between team members, and how could these be further developed to support learning?
- What are people's suggestions for change?

(iii) Monitor and review a new learning method or process

You can pilot a method or process you've read about in this guide or in a toolkit and design a small-scale monitoring and review system to track this process, and what impact it has on the participants and the unit's/organisation's work.

For example, it may be that your unit decides to support a cross regional exchange involving members of grassroots organisations struggling around government support for small-scale farming. The process could be designed as follows:

- At the outset, support the participating organisations and the individual participants to clearly outline their learning needs and set learning objectives for the exchange. This helps to inform the design.
- Put in place tools for regular review and reflection during the exchange. People could keep a learning journal. Weblogs, podcasts, video journals etc. can also be considered where appropriate and feasible.
- Facilitate an in-depth review of the exchange as soon as it is completed. Include plans (and the support that might be needed) to translate learning into practice in the local context.
- Institute quarterly or six-monthly reviews and reflections, culminating in an in-depth review of impact twelve to eighteen months after the exchange.

(iv) Year-end review

At the end of the year ask some people in your unit what the most powerful learning for the year was, how they learnt this, and what impact it has had on their work. Use an existing meeting or two, ask these questions in a PRRP, make it a part of your performance review form, or conduct a small survey.

? Questions for reflection

- What are the key reviews and pilots of shared learning work that could be undertaken over the next eighteen months? Which do you see as the priorities?
- What support, if any, would you like from inside or outside of the organisation to implement this work?

Please alert Samantha and your IASL regional coordinator to what review/s or pilots you decide to undertake. We're keen to support you, and link you to peers that are doing similar work.

And please write up and share with us your review and/or pilot experience. Tell us what you found out, and share with us as well HOW you went about the review/pilot process.

We aim to consolidate our learning about our learning processes, methods and tools into an online platform, and also make available our lessons and insights in other appropriate formats.

We know that this type of resource will be very valuable to all units trying to deepen their shared learning work, and will also highlight the sort of impact we're having through some of our learning methods and processes.

Links and resources:

Critical Webs of Power and Change, 2005: an ActionAid International resource pack for planning, reflection and learning on people-centred advocacy, which covers many of the key concepts and ideas around which the shared learning approach is built. See <http://www.actionaid.org/main.aspx?PageId=278>

'Measuring while you manage', 2001: a review of a range of methodologies for evaluating networks, and the presentation of a framework for network planning, monitoring and evaluation. Author: Creech, H for the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). See http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2001/networks_evaluation.pdf

Mapping of approaches towards M&E of Capacity and Capacity Development, 2006: a review of eighteen approaches for M and E. Developed by: European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM). See http://www.dgroups.org/groups/pelican/docs/Mapping_M&E_capacity_080606.pdf

The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique: a guide to its use, 2005: a great little guide to a participatory monitoring and evaluation technique that is founded on the collection and systematic selection of significant stories of change. Authors: Davies, R and Dart, J. See <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.htm>

End The
EVIL of
Poverty

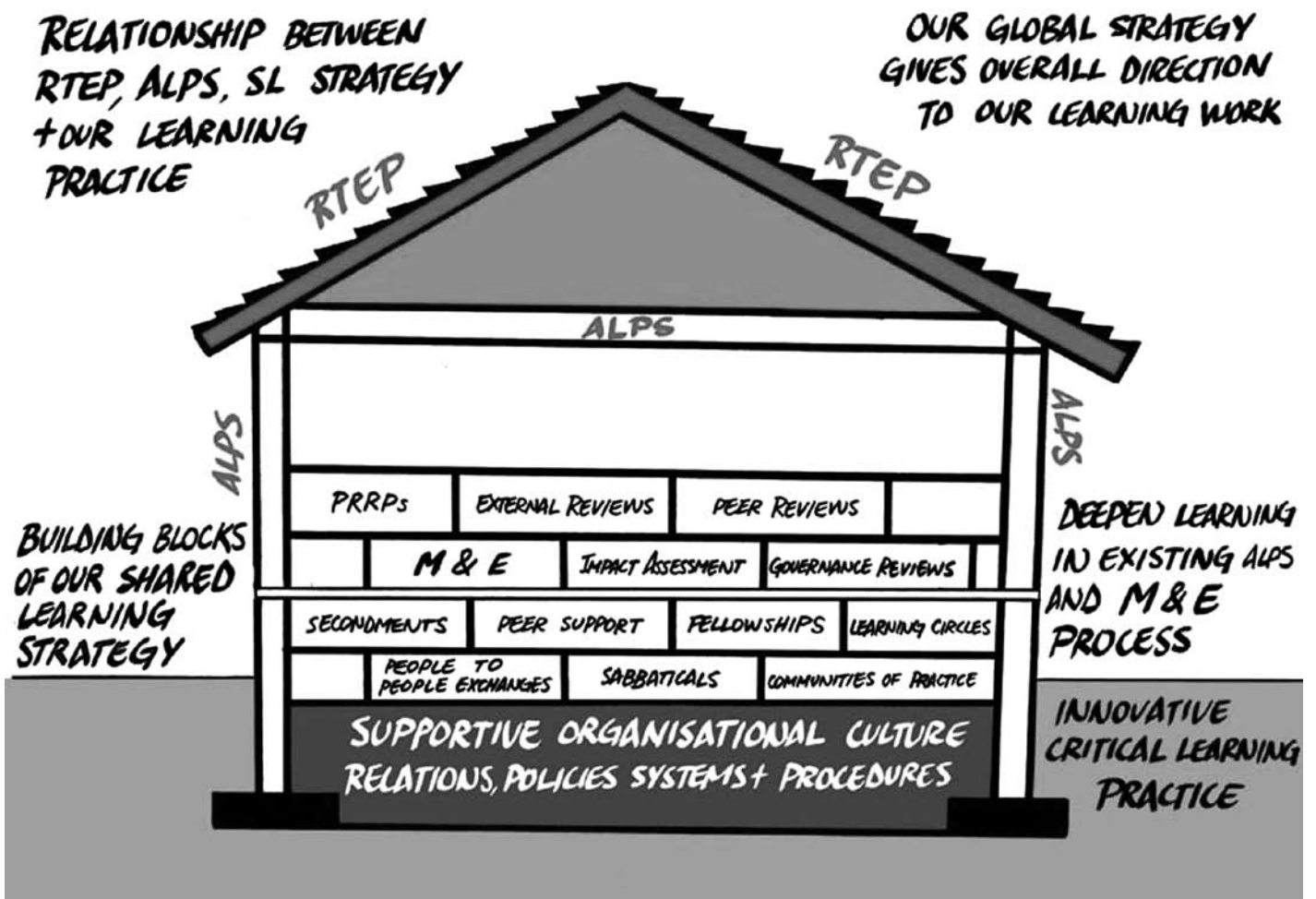




Shared learning in 2007/2008 - how you can get involved

This guide to shared learning is intended to motivate and inspire our learning efforts over the next eighteen months. Our approach emphasises that learning takes place in relationships, is informed by a shared practice and requires dialogue and critical reflection in cycles of praxis.

We encourage you to take advantage of all of the learning opportunities that are embedded in all of the work of our organisation, as illustrated in the diagram below.



Action you can take in 2007/2008

Learn learn learn

In the rest of 2007 and 2008 we propose that you invest time and energy in deepening your existing spaces, methods and tools for learning by innovating, exploring and creating; and by reflecting on the processes, the outcomes and the impact of our shared learning work. We encourage you to record your reflections in writing. We will create moments in 2007 and 2008 for critically reflecting on and sharing our learning work to deepen our own insights and work out the next phase of action. In this way we hope to be able to develop new ways of thinking about learning.

Use the guide to shared learning

We hope that organisational units will use this working guide to shared learning as a source of some inspiration and ideas for our learning work. We encourage you to be daring, to be innovative, and to push open more organisational space and time for shared learning. We encourage you to seek out others to support you on your own learning journey, to talk, and to ask more of the hard questions that underlie our practices and our learning efforts.

Make your own notes in response to this working guide to shared learning

We encourage you, over the next eighteen months, to keep making your notes that record your responses to the questions in the guide, your reflections and your ideas about learning. These notes will inform our moments of coming together – face-to-face and online – over the next eighteen months.

Your collated notes will also be an input to a review of and learning about the approach to shared learning that is proposed in this guide. At the end of 2008 we will translate your ideas into a revised version of this guide. We want to build on your ideas and suggestions and we want to be directed by your critical insights.

Put up your hand to join some global shared learning projects planned for 2007/2008!

We encourage you to get involved in global shared learning activities and initiatives planned for 2007/2008. Below is a list of initiatives you can get involved in.

Let's talk about how we're learning

We've talked a lot in this guide about the need for us to pilot, review, document and share more about how we are learning and the impact it is having. This is a major piece of work for all of us over the next eighteen months.

Internationally we plan to support these efforts by:

- Working with you directly on your reviews and pilots.
- Connecting you to one another in peer support groups, so you can be talking to each other and supporting one another as peers.

- Supporting the creation of various support resources for learning. For example, simple guidance notes on different learning methods, an annual publication that highlights our learning work and its impact, a document library of resources on our learning methods and processes etc.
- In 2007 we will pilot a few learning fellowships so people can visit another unit to work on pilots, reviews and documentation of learning efforts...

Stories and case study writing

Get involved in regional and international initiatives to support story and case study writing and sharing. You can speak to Ashish Shah and Eric Mgende (Communications) on the Africa Region initiative, and Samantha Hargreaves has more information on the international effort. If you're keen to get involved in the Stories of Change process then speak to Kate Carroll in the Knowledge Initiative.

The Newsletter

Make a contribution to EXCHANGES, the IASL community newsletter! The global newsletter aims to foster sharing and learning between IASL practitioners and ALPS champions in ActionAid International. The next edition is due in October 2007 and will focus on the Global Monitoring Framework.

Quality Check in Asia

Get involved in and learn more about ALPS' quality checks in Asia. This methodology, which is evolving out of programme quality work in Asia, will be further developed during 2007. IASL staff will participate in the health checks, and a sharing forum will be established. Speak to Vera Razon (the IASL Asia Regional Coordinator) if you're interested to hear more about this initiative.

Online Learning opportunities

In 2007 we're doing a whole lot of work related to online learning. Firstly, IASL and IT are working very closely to pilot (it's well underway!) and undertake a wider organisational rollout of the redeveloped ActionAid International intranet. The intranet is a really powerful tool for our shared learning work within and across organisational units. The route we are going is very exciting! You can also get involved in an online learning community for people who are facilitating learning networks, teams and communities of practice. Please contact Samantha Hargreaves or Susan Joseph, the intranet coordinator, for more information.

Stay connected – keep in touch

We are very keen to hear your ideas about other initiatives and projects that may be needed to support our critical learning work in ActionAid International. Please mail or phone Samantha Hargreaves with your suggestions and ideas. Samantha's telephone number is +27 (11) 731-4500 and her e-mail address is samantha.hargreaves@actionaid.org.

Glossary of terms for Shared Learning

Community of Practice - a group of people who come together around a shared practice to exchange information, insight, and advice. They may also help each other, work to solve problems collectively, discuss their situation and their needs. They may explore and create specific instruments or artefacts like tools, manuals, guides, collections of stories and other documents. The value they find in this community might extend beyond what the members need to perform their work. Members may stay together because they obtain a great deal of satisfaction from 'belonging' to a community of peers who share similar perspectives and experiences. From *"Cultivating Communities of Practice: a Guide to Managing Knowledge"* by Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and William Snyder. To be published by Harvard Business School Press.

Dialogue - At the heart of the theory of social learning lies the idea of learning as a dialogue. Dialogues include the exchange of different viewpoints and experiences between people. By being open to challenge through these interactions we are better able to understand, change and think/act creatively. Thus, dialogue prompts us to critically examine what we know and how we think. Dialogue is, therefore, oriented to uncovering the historical, material and social origins of our knowledge (what we know) and thinking critically about our actions and practices for change.

External - our mission or programme related work, which addresses our multiple interventions and efforts to change unequal power relations in the wider world. Our external mission-related areas of practice include all of our efforts at multiple levels of the organisation to advance a range of rights through organising and mobilising, building awareness, support for networks and alliances, evolving alternatives and so on.

Fellowship - An award of money to someone to enable them to undertake research or investigation with other people with whom they share a common interest or 'fellowship'.

Information - the more tangible facts, figures, and in the context of an organisation, the organisational know how, policies and systems that help people to

work effectively. Information can be more easily quantified, captured and exchanged, while knowledge exists more in people's heads and experiences and is often very difficult to record. While information may inform the creation of knowledge, it does not constitute knowledge.

Internal - ActionAid International, the organisation, which comprises ActionAid International staff and volunteers, has distinct boundaries, its own identity, systems and procedures for work etc. Internal does not refer to the organisations and institutions with whom we work – these are considered separate organisational entities though we might pursue our objectives with, through, and in alliance with them. Our internal organisational practices include fundraising, organisational change, gender integration, management practices and so on.

Internship - Any official or formal program to provide practical experience for beginners in an occupation or profession.

Knowledge - includes our idea-sets, the things we know and believe, including the attitudes and values we hold, which influence and shape how we behave and work. Knowledge also includes knowing what we don't know or what we may need to know. We do not define knowledge as neutral and objective. We see that knowledge is created in the material and social contexts in which we live and work. Knowledge may either serve to reinforce existing unequal relations of power, or, if approached critically can help to challenge these relations. Thus, certain kinds of knowledge have great potential to bring about deep kinds of social change. This is why we are challenged to constantly question the sources and effects of our ideas, values, attitudes and beliefs. Critical knowledge is, in part, derived from critical reflections on our practice and in turn influences our ongoing practice. We prefer the terms critical or creative knowledge.

Learning - the process (the how) through which ideas, information, beliefs, values and attitudes are created. The ways in which we learn shape the information we need and the knowledge that we form. It is, therefore, important that we look critically at the ways in which we learn. Critical learning leads to the meaningful selection of information, the creation of new ideas and to critical knowledge. Many

of the ways in which we learn confirm existing knowledge that maintains unequal relations of power that include some people and exclude others. This guide, therefore, emphasises the need to deepen and create learning processes, and the skills and capacity needed to facilitate them, which will enable us to critically engage existing ideas, and construct new knowledge for change. We prefer the terms critical and creative learning.

Mentorship/mentoring - an arrangement in which a more experienced person advises and helps someone else with less experience over an agreed period of time. This may be a formal arrangement (in which the relationship is brokered and the mentor is paid) or less formal (may not involve a third party and could involve payment in kind or no payment at all).

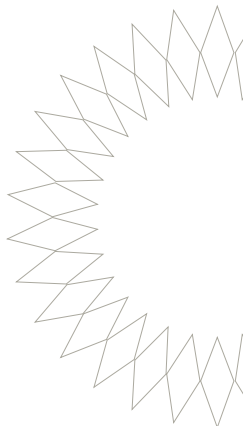
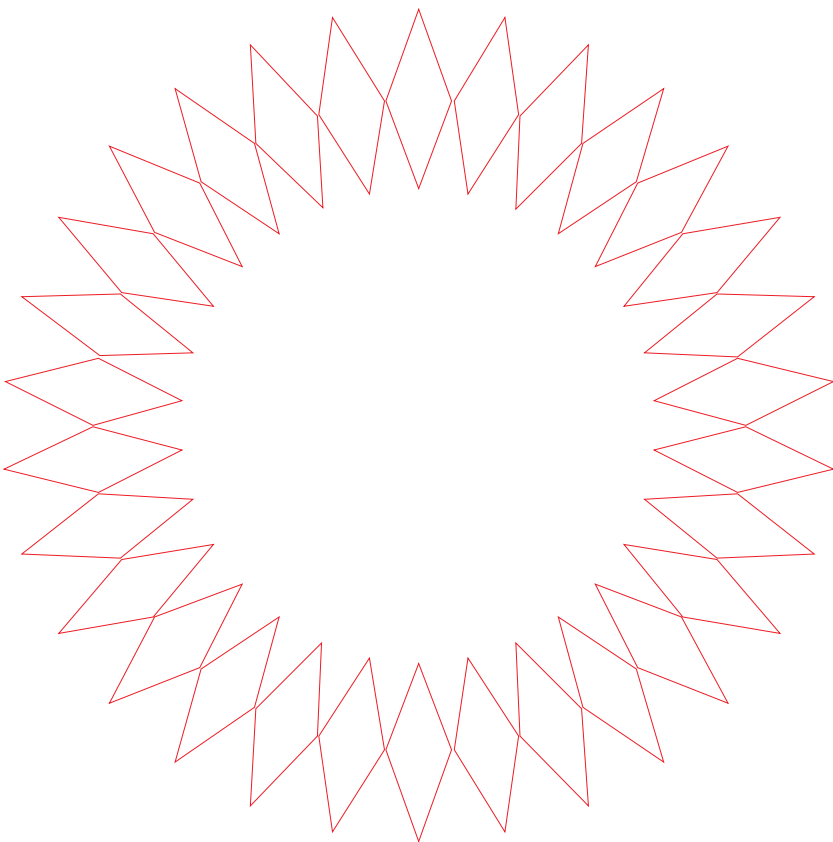
Partners - include village groups, CBOs, other NGOs, grassroots formations, social movements etc. that we work with to achieve a shared vision and mission. The nature of partnership varies from one context to another, and may or may not be characterised by a funding relationship.

Practice/s - these terms refer to areas of work, subjects or interests, which are characterised by particular activities, ways of working, procedures, a required set of skills and knowledge etc. People who work on fundraising, for example, will share a practice or set of practices with other fundraisers. Activists working for change within institutions, within their communities or within wider society may hold a shared practice with other activists. Within an area of practice, practitioners require certain skills, abilities, information and knowledge to work effectively. They also have questions, problems and needs that arise in their area of practice, and may often seek out other practitioners to talk about their practice. The group that forms for such purpose may be called a 'community of practice'.

Praxis - The cyclical process of reflecting, planning, acting and reflecting again.

Sabbatical - A period of time when a longstanding member of staff is able to stop their normal work in order to undertake focused study, writing or travel.

Secondment - The detachment of a person from their regular organization for temporary assignment elsewhere.



Actionaid is an international anti-poverty agency working in over 40 countries, taking sides with poor people to end poverty and injustice together.

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