Knowledge Matters: Knowledge Base Quarterly Publication

Welcome/Bienvenue

This is the inaugural publication of Knowledge Matters. The aim of this publication is to distil and disseminate the best and most relevant learning that is emerging from Concern's ongoing work. It does this by reviewing recent documents deposited on the organisation's key learning portal, the Knowledge Base. In this first issue of Knowledge Matters, Connell Foley, the Director of Strategy, Advocacy and Learning, writes a thought-provoking piece on the role of knowledge in an age of austerity.

This first issue of Knowledge Matters also focuses on a number of recently produced research papers, evaluations, learning papers and academic articles. The papers reflect the complexity and diversity of the work that the organisation undertakes. There is a wealth of learning that readers might find useful. We know people don't have the time to read lengthy publications. So, this publication has been kept as concise and succinct as possible. As this is the first issue of Knowledge Matters, your views and feedback are very welcome. Kai Matturi

Cette publication est la première d'une série de publications autours des questions liées à la gestion des connaissances. Son but est de distiller et diffuser les meilleures pratiques et leçons apprises en provenance des programmes de Concern. Ce travail a été réalisé à travers l'étude des documents récents déposés sur le portail de l'organisation gérant la base de connaissances. Dans ce premier numéro de « Questions de connaissances », Connell Foley, directeur de la stratégie, de plaidoyer et d'apprentissage, propose une réflexion sur le rôle des connaissances à notre époque d'austérité.

Ce premier numéro se concentre également sur un certain nombre de documents de recherche produit récemment, évaluations, documents de capitalisation et publications scientifiques. Ces documents reflètent la complexité et la diversité du travail que l'organisation entreprend à travers ses différents programmes. Elle dénote de la richesse des connaissances acquises et présente un intérêt certain pour les personnes en charges de développer et mettre en œuvre nos programmes. Conscient du temps limité pouvant être accordé à ce type de lecture du fait de l'emploi du temps chargés de la plupart de nos équipes, cette publication a été conçue pour être aussi concise et succincte que possible. Comme il s'agit du premier numéro de cette revue, vos opinions et vos commentaires sont les bienvenues. Kai Matturi

The Role of Knowledge in an Age of Austerity by *Connell Foley*

In these difficult economic times, we are all forced to cut costs and to become as efficient as possible without losing effectiveness. 'Value for Money', and 'getting more for less' are repeatedly regurgitated mantras. NGOs are also challenged to prove that they are making a difference, and to provide evidence of positive results. The nature of evidence is hotly contested (see blog debates at ODI, IDS and others) but it is generally accepted that it encompasses a range from spoken testimony of poor people to the rigour of randomized control trials with high statistical power. It has long been acknowledged that knowledge is both a key capacity and important outcome of the work of an NGO. While NGOs invest hugely in human capital, in terms of the knowledge and capacities of their staff and partners, what has not been debated is just how important knowledge is as a product of our work and where it sits on any priority list.

It is obvious that in our humanitarian work, lives have to be saved and this is the clear priority.

In our development work, where our objective is lasting, positive change in the lives of extremely poor people, the place of knowledge is less clear. We need the rich knowledge of contextual analyses to design strong and appropriate programmes. We need the clarity of thinking in impact pathways to design high quality programmes. But we also need learning or knowledge derived from our own experience and that of the experience and thinking of others to get the necessary high quality in our work. These are the knowledge outputs of others.

People balk at money spent on monitoring and evaluation. It is as if it is a luxury. It is as if any money not spent on providing inputs (so-called 'project goods and services') is taking us from our mission. I understand people's commitment to seeing tangible and quick changes to the lives of extremely poor people. However, if we cannot say what difference we have made to people's lives over a five year period, we have no way of evaluating programme quality and we cannot make important organisational decisions because we do not know what works and what does not work. It is my opinion that we have to invest in improving our evidence and the knowledge emanating out of our programmes if we are to continually improve as an organisation. This is what organisational learning is all about.

I will conclude by saying that knowledge matters!

Delivering Reading Intervention to the Poorest — The Case of Liberia & EGRA

In this paper Jenny Hobbs and Marcia Davidson discuss the implications of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) pilot project in Liberia. The pilot project was an experimental study that sought to demonstrate how effective the EGRA approach can be in a post-conflict setting such as Liberia. The study notes that the success of the EGRA approach depends on a number of critical factors, such as funding and capacity-building of teachers. The study goes on to note that, in many respects, the EGRA approach is a return to the good old tested principles of the use of prescriptive lesson plans and close monitoring and supervision in order to achieve improved literacy rates. From Concern's perspective, this is an interesting study as it demonstrates how challenging it can be to deliver learning outcomes in a "poor-vulnerable" context.

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Learning in Innovation — Early Lessons in Using Mobile Technology to Support Behavior Change

This learning paper by Donna Espeut discusses the use of information technology to support behaviour change within the INNOVATION project in Malawi. The Balaka pilot project in Malawi is testing a package of m-Health interventions aimed at increasing the coverage of high-impact maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) interventions. The study notes how, in order for IT to effectively support behaviour change campaigns it is imperative that the work of others be leveraged. Also, the unintended effects that technology can have in creating inequalities within a vulnerable population should be considered. As Concern seeks to make more use of technology in its programming, this paper adds greatly to our current body of evidence .

Zap It to Me — The Short-Term Impacts of a Mobile Cash Transfer Programme in Niger

Continuing with the theme of technology in programming, Jenny Aker, Rachid Boumnijel, Amanda McClelland and Niall Tierney discuss the first randomized evaluation of a cash transfer programme delivered using mobile technology in the West African state of Niger. The use of mobile phones to deliver cash to remote rural populations was shown to be effective. The authors indicate that the intervention had additional benefits. For example, households used their cash transfer to purchase a more diverse set of goods and had higher diet diversity. Whilst the research has demonstrated the value of using mobile technology in delivering cash to vulnerable and isolated populations, the authors of the study note that more work is needed on the broader "welfare effects" in the short and long-term.

Evaluation of Food, Income and Markets (FIM) Programme in Zimbabwe

During the third quarter of 2011, a team of evaluators led by Martin Whiteside undertook an evaluation of the FIM programme in Zimbabwe.

Continued

Overall, the programme was seen as performing well in terms of improving the livelihoods of 45,000 households. However, one of its short-comings was the collection of data that was not used or analysed. This has been high-lighted by numerous evaluations as a limitation of our M&E systems. One way of correcting this is to ensure that a programme is guided by SMART indicators. Once developed, the indicators should be used to guide the collection of data. This notwithstanding, the evaluators note that there are also innovative aspects to the pro-gramme such as the use of live fencing in some nutrition gardens, experimenting with crop dyers and conserva-tion farming with cotton for young people.

Farming for Impact — A Case Study of Smallholder Agriculture in Rwanda

In keeping with the theme of agriculture, the Policy and Campaigns Team in the UK, working in collaboration with the Concern Rwanda team and the University of Greenwich undertook research during the summer months of 2011. Through the use of qualitative research, the team was able to demonstrate that resource poor farmers with small plots of land can be helped to in-crease their productivity. The research also identified promising practice in terms of supporting poor farmers with an integrated package of interventions. Given the fact that this research was guided by a qualitative re-search framework, the findings have to be interpreted within the context of where the research was carried out.

Evaluation of HIV and AIDS Programme in Zimbabwe

David Crownie of the Social Impact Assessment and Pol-icy Analysis Cooperation led a team of evaluators that undertook the final evaluation of Concern's HIV and AIDS programme in Zimbabwe. Overall, the evaluation found that the strategy of working with partners was the right approach. However, the programme was rather complex and the logframe did not effectively act as a manage-ment tool. One of the key lessons to emerge from the evaluation exercise relates to the need to develop more integrated programming, whereby the needs of pro-gramme participants are considered in an holistic man-ner. The new contextual analysis guidelines aim to drive thinking in this direction. Another key lesson relates to the need for having a culturally sensitive approach to HIV and AIDS interventions. It is essential that actors take the time to understand the dynamics that underpin certain cultural practices. Finally, a carefully designed logframe and M&E framework should be at the centre of any future intervention.

2011 Global Hunger Index Report

Over the last number of years, Concern, in conjunction with Welfhungerhilfe and the International Food Policy Research Institute, has annually produced one of the seminal pieces of research with respect to hunger. The Global Hunger Index Report utilises data with regard to the proportion of undernourished as a percentage of the population, the prevalence of underweight children un-der the age of five, and the under five mortality rate in order to paint a picture of the state of hunger globally. The 2011 report focuses particular attention on the issue of food price spikes and volatility, which have played a major role in recent food crises. The work that Concern does in the Urban slums in Nairobi provided the report with the case study which examined the negative im-pacts of food price volatility on poor and vulnerable people.

Cost-effectiveness of Community-Based Management of Acute Malnutrition in Malawi

Robyn Wilford, Kate Golden and Damian Walker recently published an article in the Health Policy and Planning Journal. Their study assessed the cost-effectiveness of community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM) to prevent deaths due to severe acute malnutri-tion among children under the age of five. Their analysis made use of the decision tree model to compare the costs and effects of two options to treat severe acute malnutrition: existing health services with CMAM vs ex-isting health services without CMAM. The model used outcome and cost data from a CMAM programme in the Dowa district, of Malawi, and a set of key assumptions regarding treatment-seeking behaviour and mortality outcomes. Their results indicate the decision to scale-up CMAM within essential health services in Dowa was a cost-effective one and that scaling up CMAM in similar contexts is also likely to be cost-effective. However, as other actors seek to use this approach, the authors offer one major caveat: contextual and programmatic factors should be considered when considering other contexts.

As readers might be aware, a commitment has been given in the new organisational strategic plan to ensure that, by 2015, all proposals will be based on our Contextual Analysis Guidelines (CAG). A major step was taken to ensure that we remain on track to achieve this result when, in November 2011, a training workshop was held in Uganda. The primary objective of the training was to enhance the skill set of participants with respect to conducting contextual analysis. The training was delivered by Danny Harvey and Dom Hunt. The workshop was attended by staff from 17 programme countries along with staff from Dublin, and a number of consultants who will be involved in carrying out contextual analysis over the coming months. It is imperative that those involved in supporting the CA process familiarise themselves with this report.

Concern Glossary (http://knowledgebase/DC/Concern%20Worldwide%20Glossary/Glossary.aspx)

Research Database (http://intranet/People/SAL/Departmental%20Share/Research%20Mapping%20Project.accdb)

Concern Style Guide (http://intranet/People/PublicAffairs/communications/Concern%20Text%20Style%20Guide/Home.aspx)

Free Resources for Programme Evaluation & Social Research Methods (http://gsociology.icaap.org/methods/)

Knowledge Matters basics

Who is the publication for

All staff involved in implementing , monitoring, evaluating and communicating Concern's work.

What this publication includes

◊ Promising practice
◊ Organisational learning
◊ Promotion of multi-sectoral and integrated approaches to programming

What it doesn't include

◊ Targeted recommendations
◊ Additional evidence not included in the papers cited
◊ Detailed descriptions of interventions or their implementation

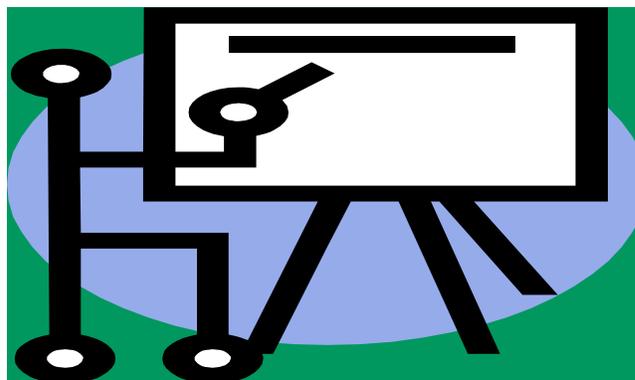### Additional resources

Knowledge Base (http://knowledgebase/Pages/Default.aspx)

Knowledge Base Library(http://knowledgebase/DC/KB/Forms/AllItems.aspx)

Have your say

Your views and feedback are welcomed. Please use the contact details below to get in touch. Kai.matturi@concern.net

Knowledge Matters is a quarterly publication arising out of the organisation's ongoing work that is captured on the Knowledge Base.

Key words

Research, learning, CAG, CMAM, hunger, cash transfers, evaluation