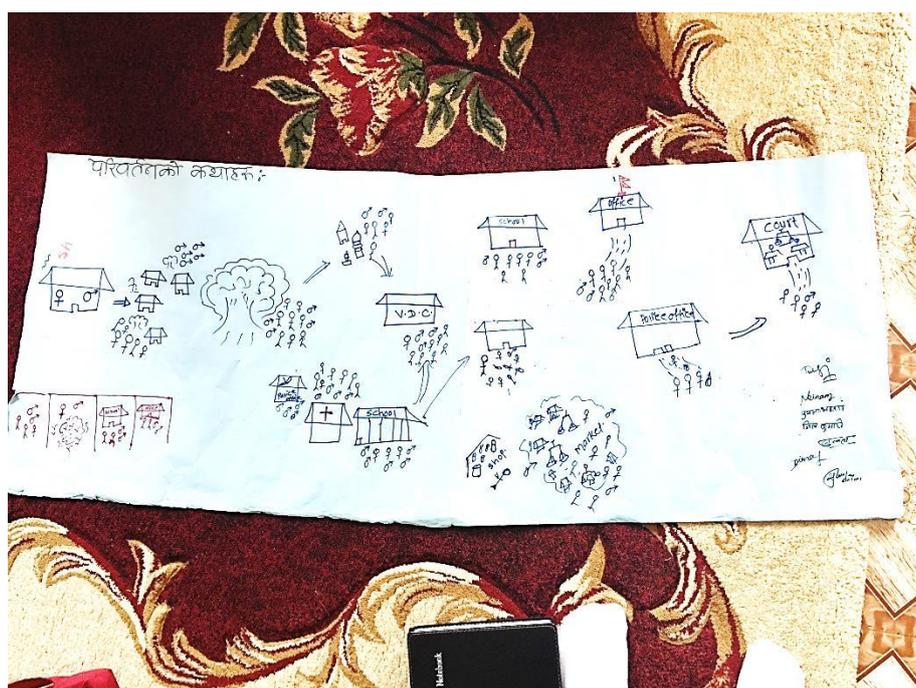


port meadow consulting

# Walking in a woman's shoes

Results and lessons from the Women's Rights Programme 2012-15

Considerations for the final year 2016, and beyond



Evaluation Executive Summary

ActionAid Ireland Multi-country Women's Rights Programme

Implemented in Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, Vietnam, and Ireland

## Evaluation Team

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## Executive Summary

### Headlines

The Women's Rights Programme (WRP) is broadly on track to achieve most of its end of programme targets by Dec 2016. The strongest results have been in the raising of women's awareness about Violence Against Women and Girls (VAW/G) and their growing self-confidence to challenge injustice individually and as part of networks at local levels. There is evidence across the programme that more women are reporting violence to these networks, and using their services to seek government services. There have also been important experiments in working with men both as perpetrators and potential champions of women's rights; and innovations to enable women to participate economically.

Least strong or least consistent results have been in the responsiveness and behaviours of government service providers for women (and children) affected by violence; and in providing the incentives required to motivate men, as husbands, brothers and sons, to support equality and equity such that gains for women and girls can be sustained long-term.

WRP's coherence as an inter-connected programme, evolving from a cluster of country-level projects in 2012, has emerged slowly over the course of the last four years, and has gathered pace over the last 12 months. It is now positioned to communicate more effectively the extent to which WRP is 'greater than the sum of the parts'. This positive trajectory is closely related to ActionAid Ireland's growing capacity for programme leadership, most recently manifested in the launch of the International Programme Accountability Team which provides enhanced oversight of cross programme results, accountability and learning.

The Evaluation Team concludes overall that these results and the enabling platform established by ActionAid Ireland have created a unique foundation of social and human capital for deepening and broadening women's rights in the selected areas and beyond the borders of WRP. With requisite investment in more localised theories of change and increased capability for cross-programme learning, adaptation and strategic communication, a future iteration of WRP has potential to influence a much wider group of actors at country level and across ActionAid federation of countries towards ever more effective women's rights programming.

### Players and Context

ActionAid Ireland's two distinct identities – its Irishness and its membership of the ActionAid International family – are key to the evaluation of its flagship women's rights programme. In effect, the programme is a 'slice' of activity which has given Irish Aid the opportunity to become a shareholder, for a limited period of time, in a much larger range of interventions deployed in a much larger theatre of action and interaction by a much larger organisation than AA Ireland alone. The evaluation has sought to do justice to this 'slice', while ensuring that its intended and unintended results are understood within this wider frame of reference.

Funded by Irish Aid (IA) and running from 2012 to 2016, WRP is aligned with one of ActionAid International's global goals - to ensure that women and girls can break the cycle of poverty and violence, build economic alternatives, and claim control over their bodies. The programme is implemented in Kenya, Malawi, Nepal and Vietnam where, with local partners, ActionAid 'treats' selected communities with specific interventions, alongside advocacy and campaign actions at district and national level. It is also implemented in Ireland from where AA Ireland provides overall management of, and technical support to, performance with participating AA members; AA Ireland leads the International Programme Management Team (IPMT). AA Ireland also raises the profile of global women's rights with the Irish public. At global level, the secretariat of ActionAid International provides additional technical resources to support its members' delivery of the global strategy,

with country level learning used to influence policies and processes of governments, corporations and global institutions.

WRP seeks to mobilise women and girls to challenge and reject gender-based violence in a supportive environment; engage women in influencing policies to improve the equity and responsiveness of public services; support women's greater access to resources, more income control and more time for business; and support the Irish Public to value their role and contribution towards the support of women and girls in target communities to achieve more equality.

Building on work in all five countries in the period prior to 2012 (including that funded by Irish Aid), WRP is primarily a behaviour change programme, seeking to enhance the capability and motivation of women to claim their rights; to create opportunities for them to do so; and to increase the capability and motivation of all relevant actors to change policies and systems in favour of equality between women and men, girls and boys. Over the five years, Irish Aid has made an investment of €4,042,593 through AAIreland with just over 80% spent on direct support to civil society partners and citizens, and just under 20% on programme management across the organisations.

Managed through a collegiate apex model, AAIreland provides leadership of an International Programme Accountability Team (IPAT) which, drawing on reporting provided by the IPMT, ensures oversight, accountability and cross-programme results and learning, AAIreland is also an active participant in the recently formed Women's Rights International Platform (WRIP) designed to provide technical leadership and oversight of the delivery of women's rights programming across the federation. AAIreland brings to this federation structure its experience of providing technical advice to WRP, specifically in the areas of monitoring, evaluation and learning, and the development of programme tools to enhance performance. (This includes, for example, scorecards to monitor progress, gendered political economy analyses and thematic issues which emerge across the portfolio.)

A key element of the logic of WRP is its facility for testing a common Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) to achieving women's rights in contrasting contexts, to see what does and does not work, and what can be adapted or scaled up. The political economies of the five countries provide a diverse range of 'laboratories' for this to take place: emerging multi-party democracies, a mature democracy and one developmental state; local government decentralisation driven by new constitutions in some countries, centralising tendencies in another; resource-stretched governments in relatively peaceful contexts, and in post-disaster contexts where conflict may resurge; and countries anticipating rapid economic growth or post-recession. The primarily rural focus of selected communities also brings to the fore contrasts between customary structures which are still the dominant means by which people survive. Some are being purposefully replaced or undermined by modern institutions or co-opted by government structures which cannot cope without them; others have virtually disappeared except among marginal, migrant groups.

## Methods

The evaluation adapted the Contribution Analysis (CA) approach to compare WRP's postulated theory of change against evidence to draw conclusions about WRP's contribution to observed outcomes. Country level evaluations explored eight specific issues across the countries. Findings were reviewed at an Evaluation Workshop in late November 2015. The evidence-gathering process has yielded rich diversity within the limits of the resources available for the evaluation. The quality has been mixed but of a sufficient standard to enable reasonably reliable conclusions to be drawn against four perspectives: country performance assessed through each Country Evaluation; impact stories on selected issues developed across the countries; overall performance against the WRP Results Frameworks; and finally, overall performance against the DAC evaluation criteria – which provide the structure for the findings which follow.

## Findings

### **Relevance**

The programme, in all its locations, has remained highly relevant to the situation of women and girls in grass roots communities – primarily rural, or recently urbanised. Well aligned with national government policies in all countries, it builds on a history of earlier engagement by ActionAid on policy formulation. There are some questions over the extent to which the programme has adjusted its approaches for more traditional societies, and to the changing wealth status of its target population of women.

### **Impact and results - at country level**

Malawi has delivered pragmatic approaches to working with men as both perpetrators and potential champions of women's rights. Nepal has led innovation, on joint land certification, cooperative development and unpaid (care) work while Vietnam has worked creatively with the Reliable Addresses model, linking this to government through the Women's Union. Kenya's strongest performance appears to be in the WRP outcomes and outputs held in common (awareness-raising and facilitation of civil society support services). Ireland has shown what a small agency can achieve through social media, with potential for building more explicit bridges between cultures in Ireland – male and female, north and south, immigrant and indigenous, modern and traditional.

Kenya, Malawi, Nepal and Vietnam all point to where WRP has influenced, directly or indirectly, the work of other parts of the country ActionAid programme, from the expansion of the Community Child Care model (Nepal), to the widespread application of the UWAMA little book on women's rights (Malawi). Ireland shows the benefits of strategic engagement with other AA federation members, for example, in securing with AAIItaly, an EU grant which will facilitate partnership with the immigrant women's organisation in Ireland (AkiDwa). The focus is on reducing female genital cutting in immigrant communities. The Safe Cities campaign in all five countries has generated important publicity about the issues of violence facing women everywhere.

ActionAid's targeting of the poorest communities appears to be consistently good. It is also the case that many women within those communities are likely to have become better off through their association with Reflect circles, Savings/Loans and business development support, thereby illustrating the success of the model. Nevertheless, the programme appears to have struggled to include consistently the hardest to reach women in all locations, although this seems to be less of an issue in Malawi where there appears to be less diversity in poverty levels between women in selected communities. The 'Reflect' circle mechanism demands a level of time that the poorest women cannot give; the AA model may not yet be sufficiently flexible to adjust its target groups over time.

All countries have struggled with the tension created by promoting the modernising ideology of the Human Rights Based Approach within traditional rural societies and their customary structures, or with 'outsider' sections of society such as migrant workers. In both cases, women and men are likely to respond in ways that are not entirely predictable because such processes of modernisation can be threatening for them for a variety of reasons difficult to understand by elite actors (such as ActionAid staff). This tension may increase with the apparent growing importance of feminism in ActionAid's ideology. ActionAid may need to reflect more on the language it uses to communicate these ideologies to avoid misunderstanding and unintended negative results. It may also help to invest in local political economy analyses to understand better actor-specific drivers of change and to develop theories of change which respond to these. The current absence of this has hampered WRP's ability to design interventions which increase, for example, incentives for local government actors and men to change their behaviours.

WRP is considered important by AA country directors, despite the relatively low percentage of country budgets that WRP represents. It is acknowledged that both country offices and AA Ireland could have done

more to 'spread the word' about WRP within the AA system, about what works, and (just as importantly) what ActionAid has learned in response to failure, and turning around the really difficult issues. This is starting to change with AAIreland's active participation in the Women's Rights International Platform, including a current piece of research commissioned with Dublin University on working with men in Malawi.

### **Impact and results - by issues**

- a) **Functionality and strength of GBV-related referral mechanisms:** results are mixed here, with impressive progress achieved across all four countries in creating a civil society 'bridge' between survivors and formal systems, and in providing first level care and support for women and girls to access further services in the system. A lack of commensurate and sustained behaviour change in government and customary structures risks undermining some of these gains.
- b) **Changes in behaviour (or not) of primary actors in relation to GBV:** significant changes in behaviour of targeted women have been observed across all four countries, reflecting growing individual knowledge and confidence, and greater solidarity and activism achieved in the creation of networks from local to national levels. The programme has underestimated the power of default behaviours – in men especially, but also in most other actors in the system. This has led to asymmetry in the programme by accelerating demand from women without investing sufficiently in the creation of sustained *supply* behaviours. This needs rapid recalibration.
- c) **Changes in policies and implementation of policies which promote rights of women and girls:** the evaluation is unable to assess fairly the contribution of WRP to changes in policies, primarily because of the lack of demand within the WRP Results Frameworks for structured reporting on the linkages between WRP and ActionAid's wider policy work. It is clear that much has been happening in this arena, and that gains have been made; but it is not possible to say the extent to which, or in what ways, WRP has contributed to this systematically.
- d) **Changes in effectiveness of women's networks against violence:** significant progress has been made in the establishment of solidarity networks providing moral and practical support to survivors, and engines of change within local communities. There is no doubt their existence has helped to increase reporting on violence by women to local women's networks. There is, however, no conclusive evidence that the *prevalence* of violence has gone down in target communities. Reported decreases included in WRP reports and country evaluation findings differ. More sensitive survey instruments would be required to establish the actual trend. This lack of clarity, however, is entirely to be expected at this stage of the change process.

Slower than anticipated change in behaviour of key actors in the system makes the task of the networks that much harder and, in some cases, have led activists to stray into areas where they risk injury or worse. There are also questions over the sustainability of volunteer-based networks when women report feeling over-burdened. Signs of accelerating progress in behaviour change in other parts of the referral system are key to reversing this emerging sense of fatigue.

- e) **Changes in access to justice for survivors of violence:** from a very low base, increases in access to justice services for women (through, for example, paralegal advice) have been a commendable achievement for WRP. The support has also included accompanying women and girls affected by violence through the appropriate steps to protect evidence and approach the relevant law enforcement and judicial actors. At the same time, the obstacles in the way of women and girls receiving full justice are many and evident across all countries. There is tension in most countries between the role of formal and traditional judicial systems. WRP has navigated some of these tensions well, and others less so.

- f) **Levels of access to markets and business development by women:** women in all countries reported the benefits of increased economic activity and the achievement of being able to be active in local markets where they were formerly unwelcome. Greater economic power of women appears to have eased marital tensions or led to a sense of pride in men about their wife's contribution to the household. In some cases, men appear to be utilising the spaces created for women – but this may not be an altogether negative behaviour because it indicates levels of acceptance of women's economic activity. There is a desire in women now for 'bigger dreams' and linkages to wider markets than are possible with the local savings groups.
- g) **Extent and impact of services which free women from unpaid labour, and enable joint land ownership:** innovations around unpaid labour are evident in Nepal. Quality standards and sustainability of the Community Child Care Centres are slowly being addressed, important for promoting the model in other contexts. The experience of promoting joint land ownership has been positive for those women able to achieve it; but the campaign has encountered the challenge of more vulnerable women avoiding it because of fear of increased marital strife.

### **Value for Money**

From the available evidence it is very likely that the overall investment of Euro 4.02 million has reached thousands of people directly, and hundreds of thousands of people indirectly through the national campaigns including demonstrations, radio programmes and other mass mobilisations. Against the limited concept of 'reach', the programme represents very good value for money. VfM has also been considered in more detail against considerations of Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Equity.

*Economy & Efficiency:* ActionAid exercises extreme care in its budget management and use of scarce resources – with close budget control by ActionAid Ireland. The main concern here is that in some key areas of work – such as the strengthening of referral mechanisms and cross-programme learning – insufficient resources have been invested to date. The delivery model lacks sufficient personnel to provide adequate support to local, middle and national level linkages, vertical and horizontal. ActionAid may have spread the jam too thinly *within* each country, and this has limited effectiveness in each locality and also limited the resources to 'spread the word' about what is being learned by the programme. On the other hand, the country ActionAids have been fairly efficient at deploying WRP resources into the wider country programmes and this has probably yielded economies of scale across the broader Women's Rights work of each country. Unfortunately, the fact that these linkages are not formally connected to WRP makes it hard to value these as part of this evaluation.

*Equity and Effectiveness:* WRP appears to have started well in terms of equity; targeting of the intervention locations was well-supported by data on the levels of violence and poverty. The extent to which the programme continues to include the hardest to reach women and girls is noted above. On the other hand, building a solid platform of women's activists from slightly better-off households is likely to provide a more sustainable source of support for poorer women once they can be assisted to access the system. Nevertheless, a more targeted, case management approach is required to reach the hardest to reach – and this inevitably involves higher costs.

### **Innovation**

Innovations within each country have inspired others. Malawi is now working on the cooperative model used in Nepal. Malawi has also experimented with working with men and this too has inspired most of the other WRP countries to step up efforts in this area, according to the different contexts. For example, AAVietnam has included men in training on Unpaid Care Work over the last 12 months. Although it is not easy to identify the determinants of innovation, it is possible to conclude that innovation is most likely to be initiated where there is continuity in WRP staff on the ground – because there is time to generate and follow through on ideas. Where there has been more staff turnover, innovation is perhaps less evident.

### **Sustainability**

ActionAid staff and many women representatives themselves believe that the volunteer women's networks at grassroots will remain and continue to provide services to women and girls affected by violence. It seems likely that this will be true in many cases. Nevertheless, there are signs of stress in many of the networks as described above. The sustainability of these networks will require more rather than less investment over the coming three years, and more attention to organisational strengthening and vertical linkages.

By definition the HRBA approach used in WRP is already replicable – in that it is a model which is core to ActionAid's approach globally. What is more interesting to consider is the extent to which this approach has been (or should be) adapted for different socio-political economy conditions, and how the lessons from this adaptation could apply to other similar contexts.

### **Risks**

Two key risks have been covered above: the risks of implementing an un-nuanced HRBA approach in traditional societies and the safety of women's network members when they are not adequately supported or guided to protect themselves and manage conflict. Two further risks are noted here: the unintended impact of inflexible Results Based Management (RBM), and of the impact of staff turnover on multi-country programming.

*RBM:* While the Results Based Management approach brought greater clarity about what the WRP was trying to achieve, the way in which it was implemented has had the effect of narrowing the space for learning within implementing partners and AA staff. This results from the narrow focus on quantitative data and the insufficient incentives for exploratory approaches and learning from failure. Over-complex, inflexible results frameworks were developed together by AA members and then applied to local implementing partners, who struggled to get to grips with them – but in expending so much effort to do so, no longer had the confidence or time to communicate what they actually thought was happening. Once identified as a constraint, corrective action was taken by ActionAid Ireland in 2014/5 through the Monitoring & Evaluation Review. Progress has been made in rebalancing incentives in the final years of the programme. But care will need to be taken to avoid the same pitfalls in any future M&E and learning system.

*Programme management:* Oversight of WRP has been hampered by staff turnover across the programme – not just within AA Ireland. With hindsight, the IPAT mechanism should have been put in place earlier. But the fact that it has been put in place now is a sign of the commitment AA Ireland has made, alongside the country directors of the participating ActionAid members and AA International technical and finance personnel, to provide much stronger oversight of the whole programme. This is a clear sign of the value which ActionAid as a whole places on WRP.

### **Recommendations**

The breadth of WRP has yielded a number of recommendations at different levels. Country-specific recommendations can be found in the main evaluation report in Part Three. The Executive Summary covers those recommendations directly relevant to AA Ireland, and those which are sufficiently generic to inform the closure of WRP and the design of any follow-on programme.

#### **Formative – for the remainder of this phase of WRP**

- Maintain the momentum of IPAT and the country teams to finish the remaining months of WRP with a clear focus on consolidation and 'good exits';
- Consider developing evidence-based 'think pieces' on key issues – such as referral mechanisms, working with men – which expand the knowledge base about WRP learning in the wider federation, and using social media outlets to share more within Ireland;
- Continue developing the WRP 'tools of the trade' which have come from the last year – including the gendered PEA tool and strengthen usage of the qualitative reporting tools;

- Consider an in-depth programme learning seminar in Ireland with other agencies working on gender – in partnership with Irish Aid, and utilising the existing Irish GBV consortium and AAIInternational Women's Rights International Platform;

**Summative – as input to the design of any follow-on programme**

- **Investment in learning facility within each 'theatre' of implementation, and across them.** This is a pre-requisite for future success. This will require AAIreland to increase programme management capability to continue the process of transforming WRP from a cluster of related projects to a coherent over-arching programme delivering effect at different levels. This may seem like a diversion of resources away from direct delivery – but as this evaluation has sought to show, the continued under-investment in key areas may unravel hard won gains. WRP's unique 'offer' to women's rights programming is the learning it can generate from contrasting socio-cultural and political economies which can be utilised in other similar contexts, thereby spreading the 'effect' of WRP far beyond its own borders.
- **HRBA – customising modern approaches, or modernising the customary?** AAIreland may need to look more closely at how the 'modernising' messages of HRBA are being conveyed, and may be understood differently in different rural contexts; this is to avoid unwittingly contributing to a diminishing of the strengths of traditional societies and to be open to the possibility that some traditions can be adapted to *support* the process of women's equality. To do this, AA may wish to increase its knowledge, understanding and skills to work respectfully and creatively with and within customary structures as part of both design and delivery of a next phase WRP. This is likely to require incorporation of ethnographic disciplines – perhaps available in local universities. (The uniqueness of each context's customary structures is likely to require very localised knowledge sources and expertise.)
- **Feminism – a shared understanding and ideology?** ActionAid Ireland may need to invest more in establishing consensus around the extent to which 'feminism' is now the adopted ideology alongside HRBA for a future WRP. The conclusions from this will need to be communicated carefully, both within ActionAid and beyond. It may also help to be more mindful of the ways in which concepts expressed in English translate (or do not) into local languages – and find alternatives which encompass the spirit of the desired content, if not the literal meaning. In many languages, translations of the terms 'feminism' and 'gender equality' struggle to avoid associations with female supremacy.
- **Political Economy – adaptive (politically smart) programming and programme symmetry.** The evaluation process and its explicit inclusion of Ireland as one theatre for women's rights work has renewed realisation in the WRP family that violence against women and girls is not a consequence of poverty or of an absence of democracy, but a persistent reflection of societal imbalance – requiring politically smart responses attuned to different contexts.

AAIreland may wish to consider investing more in processes which lead to the development and updating of theories of change for each context and each of the target actors in any future programme, such that the programme can position itself to increase incentives for behaviour change within those actors. This means going beyond interventions that focus primarily on capability to consider both opportunity *and* motivation for key system actors. This will require much deeper engagement with the political and cultural factors which currently drive their behaviours – for example, policies coming from central government or a woman's fear of being abandoned by her husband.

Investment in an actor-based conceptual framework for the new proposal which is founded on HRBA, but with a much stronger emphasis on customisation to local context may be helpful for maintaining good symmetry across the life of a new programme. Consideration could also be given to inclusion of a much more explicit programmatic link with work on women's rights in Ireland (connecting immigrant and indigenous communities) and the work being done in other WRP contexts.

- **The promise and peril of Results Based Management.** When preparing a results framework and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning System for any future women's rights programme, AAIreland may find it helpful to revisit guidance below to which ActionAid has contributed already through the UK Department for International Development How To Note on M&E for programming on VAW/G. AAIreland may also wish to support Irish Aid in its current exploration of more flexible approaches to results based management and learning, more appropriate for the complexity of women's rights behaviour change programmes. The most relevant guidance includes:
  - *Be realistic. Processes of change are non-linear, complex and long-term and sometimes an apparent step back (e.g. increase in violence in the short term because patriarchal power structures are being challenged) can actually be an important step towards long-term change.*
  - *Be innovative. There are different ways to conceptualise and capture change, and while logframes and results-based management are useful, other tools such as outcome mapping may yield more nuanced understanding of the impact of VAWG interventions.*
  - *Contribution can be more important than attribution, which may be impossible to determine in a complex VAWG intervention.*
- **Deep(ening) Learning – make it 'by design' rather than 'by accident'.** In a future iteration of WRP, there is a need for the WRP participants (existing and new) to be more reflective about themselves, their elite positions – and their impact on others in the implementation of the HRBA modernising agenda. And the programme needs to incentivise observation and openness about what is not working in order to encourage adjustments to be made quickly.

The AA HRBA approach could be strengthened by closer association with other centres of learning – such as the SASA! approach developed by Raising Voices in Uganda, and now being implemented in 60+ countries. There is a potential for 'win-win' here because ActionAid has the reach that Raising Voices does not; while Raising Voices brings a strong academic rigour to its methods which are more diverse and customised than the AA HRBA. (Irish Aid also has close links with Raising Voices and has been instrumental in helping the organisation develop a robust evidence base for others to draw on.) Both approaches are underpinned by an unquestioning commitment to women's rights. The production of much more robust 'Lessons from experience' relevant to other contexts is what will help make WRP greater than the sum of its parts.

ActionAid Ireland will need to give much more emphasis to a learning strategy for any future WRP, and incentivise this within the programme design and results framework so that the staff/members of each participating partner see it as central/essential to their jobs and 'results' – rather than a 'nice to have'; and the leadership of participating members will be accountable for ensuring that staff are supported to fulfil their commitments to learning within the shared programme.