



Localisation in Practice

A Pacific Case Study

What CARE and local partner Live & Learn have learned from jointly responding to Cyclone Winston in Fiji

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LIVE & LEARN
Environmental Education



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This paper aims to contribute to learning on partnership for localised emergency responses. It expresses the views of CARE and Live & Learn.

Cover page photo: CARE and Live & Learn plan their emergency response

Image: Dylan Quinnell



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1. Background

On 20 and 21 February 2016, Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Winston (TCW) hit the Fiji islands. TCW was the strongest cyclone to ever make landfall in the Pacific. Whole villages were destroyed on the hardest hit outer islands: 350,000 people (or 40 per cent of the population) were affected; 31,200 houses were damaged or destroyed; and 250,000 people were left without access to safe water. CARE and Live & Learn, its local partner in Fiji, decided to mount a joint response. This was a first for both organisations in Fiji. While challenging, the joint response made important contributions to relief and recovery efforts.

In the first three months¹, the partnership reached **5054 households** from **231 villages and settlements**, representing a **total population of 25,904**, equivalent to **7.4% of the total affected population**.

7,397, 6,864 women, 6,099 boys and 5,544 girls were reached with:

4037 Hygiene Kits	2583 Shelter Kits
709 Toolkits	4108 start-up Seed Packs

This case study brings to light lessons learned from the CARE/Live & Learn partnership to deliver a locally-led response in Fiji. It also seeks to contribute to wider debates within the Pacific around localisation of aid. A signatory to the Charter for Change¹ and a supporter of NEAR², CARE's intent is clear: for local actors to play a more prominent role in humanitarian response and for international agencies to support this shift. CARE's approach globally aims to develop long standing partnerships with local actors, with a focus on building the organisational and technical capacity of these partners. It is underpinned by a recognition that joined up response efforts need to link back to risk reduction and preparedness, particularly in a region like the Pacific with high disaster risk and vulnerability to climate change. Localisation during emergency response is a challenging endeavour. As partners, we seek to learn from our joint experience and share this knowledge more widely to inform continued efforts to localise aid.

1.1 A Partnership built on strong ties and complementary vision

The partnership between CARE and Live & Learn had been struck five years prior based on a shared vision and complementary strengths. Live & Learn wanted to extend its physical presence and reach in the South Pacific region while CARE sought to remain 'light on the ground' while delivering on its humanitarian and disaster resilience mandate. The partnership was formalised in November 2014 through a high-level Partnership Agreement for a period of 5 years. The two partners have since engaged in capacity development and joint work in the form of preparedness, risk reduction and response activities (the latter in 2015 in Vanuatu as part of the response to Cyclone Pam).

¹ The Charter for Change is an initiative led by both national and international NGOs to make changes to the way the humanitarian system works with a view to supporting local actors to lead the response to their own emergencies. <https://charter4change.org/>

² NEAR, the Network for Empowered Aid Response is a movement of civil society organisations with a bold ambition: to reshape the top-down humanitarian system to one that is locally-driven and owned, and built around equitable, dignified, and accountable partnerships. <http://www.near.ngo/>

CARE International is a development and humanitarian aid organisation fighting global poverty, with a special focus on empowering women and girls to provide lasting change to their communities. **CARE Australia** is one of 14 national members that make up the CARE International Confederation. CARE's programmes seek to address the most significant development and humanitarian needs of a community, and to enhance local capacities towards achieving lasting social and economic improvement and environmental sustainability. CARE Australia implements long-term development projects in 21 countries, and responds to humanitarian emergencies around the world.

'The purpose of the partnership is to draw on the mutual programming strengths and experience of both agencies; and the comparative advantage of CARE in integrated DRR/Climate Change, Gender and Emergency Preparedness/Response, and of L&L's extensive networks and community-based experience in the Pacific.'

CARE Australia
and Live &
Learn
Partnership
Agreement

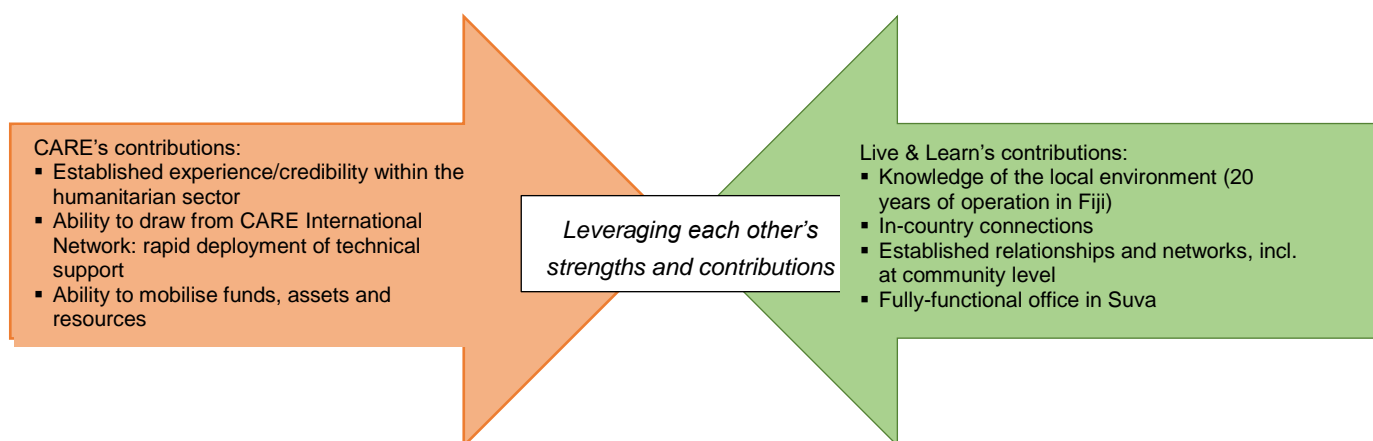
Live & Learn is a dynamic learning network of locally registered organisations operating in nine countries across South-East Asia, the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific. Live & Learn country offices are registered as local NGOs. Each office is locally managed and staffed and has its own set of country-specific partnership relations, including those with government agencies. A Live & Learn International office (in Melbourne, Australia) provides strategic and technical support to the Network, and ensures effectiveness and transparency as per the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Code of Conduct. Live & Learn works with communities throughout Asia and the Pacific to design, implement and learn from context-specific, community-based development projects. Building local capacity, confidence, skills and partnership networks is a cornerstone of the organisation's identity.

2. Success factors

2.1 Leveraging each other's strengths in the immediate aftermath of the disaster: Jointly developing the response

CARE and Live & Learn (L&L) were quick to decide that they would respond jointly to Cyclone Winston in Fiji. The close ties between the executive leadership of both organisations facilitated timely communication and decision-making. The Partnership Agreement was activated within 24 hours. An experienced CARE Australia Team Leader, based in neighbouring Vanuatu, was immediately deployed to Fiji. *'My role could make or break the partnership-led response,'* she explains, recounting her first days working from the L&L office. Keeping the centrality of the partnership in mind, she worked closely with L&L's leadership and programme team to develop a response strategy that was appropriate and relevant while bearing L&L's signature trademark. The response was designed to target the needs of the most affected communities in the Western and Northern Provinces (where L&L has strong local relationships), to use L&L's tested community-led approach (based on gender and social inclusion), and to respond in its core sectors of WASH and livelihoods (this was later extended to shelter). It is at this initial stage, with the contribution of the L&L core programmatic team, that local ownership of the response emerged. The CARE Team Leader's proactive engagement of local partner staff proved a key success factor, as she sought their knowledge, expertise and influence to design a response that leveraged CARE and L&L's respective comparative advantage, while relevant and appropriate to meeting humanitarian needs. The Team Leader also reports how she *'acted as a buffer between CARE head office and L&L,'* as some CARE head office crisis protocols and requirements were not always fit for purpose for a joint response model³.

³ These CARE HQ protocols are being revised based on learning from the joint Cyclone Fiji response during the annual CARE Australia Emergency Preparedness Planning process.



Reflecting on this experience, both partners feel the need to be more thoughtful about capacity gaps but also clarifying what they each bring to the partnership. They plan to conduct a thorough capacity assessment to define more clearly assets, skills and approach (e.g., gender and inclusion). This will complement existing annual joint preparedness planning and simulations with a view to leverage their respective strengths, address gaps and be better prepared 'together' for the next emergency.

2.2 No time to waste: Switching to emergency response mode

If the first 24 hours were decisive, a number of challenges quickly emerged and tested the partnership. *'Right from the beginning, we acknowledged that this partnership was going to present L&L Fiji with some challenges especially since we had limited experience as emergency responders but we had faith in the partnership,'* recounts the Head of L&L Fiji. Being in emergency mode means switching gears, taking on a much larger load, working long hours, putting regular programming 'on hold,' taking on additional responsibilities beyond assigned job descriptions and managing surge support. This was a new way of operating for L&L Fiji, and it took time for the local partner to adjust its modus operandi. This proved to be a delicate phase for the partnership, as the CARE Team Leader had to gently coax the local partner to step up and act quickly, yet being mindful not to push or lead without taking the team along.

2.3 Not our Country Office: Operating from within the local partner organisation

Responding within the structure of the partner organisation also proved challenging. *'A partnership where we have actually opened our doors to welcome another organisation to operate from within our physical space – for L&L Fiji, this was a new experience. We suddenly had a partner in the house and had to deal with the important aspects of partnership – critical at the initial stages is relationship building,'* recalls the Head of L&L Fiji. The ability of the CARE Team Leader to operate within this space with sensitivity, respect and openness paved the way for the productive relationship that ensued. L&L Fiji staff emphasised the importance of working through the existing organisational and leadership structures, not around them. While the CARE surge staff came with good intentions, the potential to undermine local structures and capacity is high at this stage, an aspect that requires careful attention and monitoring.

Programme support turned to be an area where many challenges arose. As a development organisation without prior humanitarian experience, L&L Fiji's systems and processes needed to be reoriented towards the pace of emergencies. The organisation's centralised management structure and insufficient delegations of authority saw financial management, procurement and logistics systems tested during the rapid response. As an example, it was the first time that L&L sought work authorisation for expatriate surge staff. With limited experience and no pre-established protocols with Fiji immigration, it proved challenging to secure quick entry; this hampered arrival of the first wave of

surge personnel. To adapt L&L systems and make them 'fit-for-purpose,' an operations manual outlining policies and processes to be activated in an emergency response, has now been developed and shared across the L&L Network.

From a local organisation perspective, the landscape looks quite different than for surge staff arriving from 'safe' locations. As recounted by the Head of L&L Fiji: *'We had a lot happening in a short time: we were faced as a nation with massive destruction brought on by a category 5 cyclone; we had some staff and families going through a turbulent time post TC Winston; there were project teams trying to make contact with communities we serve who were in the path of the cyclone to find out if they were ok; we had to get ourselves positioned at both national and international-led meetings to get as much information as possible; as well as participating in the way forward for the partnership.'* Being mindful of L&L's experience, showing compassion and empathy to their situation was essential for the partnership to thrive. The CARE Team Leader had recently lived through Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu where she was personally and professionally affected; her empathy was noted by several members of the L&L team.

2.4 As local as possible, as international as necessary: A different kind of surge support

The first wave of surge recruitment was conducted mainly by CARE, using its global network of experts as well as drawing on outside resources. While most placements were effective within the joint response context, some aspects proved challenging. There was an initial tendency for surge support to operate in a traditional 'direct delivery' mode, where leadership, decision-making, autonomy and quick action are prized. The joint response required a radically different way of operating, where success is defined by transferring skills, by helping the local team to 'learn by doing,' by mentoring, supporting, advising, accompanying, by showing respect, humility and trust, yet being firm about what is required of a life-saving intervention.

Operating within the structure and policies of the partner organisation also proved novel and challenging for some surge staff, as they were supporting programmatic decisions, not directly implementing them. *'Once funding was transferred from CARE Australia to L&L under sub-contracting arrangements, it was 'their' money and to be spent and accounted for based on their policies with CARE supporting to ensure quality, donor compliance and effective implementation,'* recounts the first phase Team Leader. *'If volunteers were hired, they were to be compensated on L&L terms, not necessarily with new rates negotiated by surge staff,'* adds the second phase Team Leader. CARE Australia's finance unit reviewed the accounting and compliance procedures of the partner at the outset of the emergency and continuously ensured they provided adequate control and were consistent with donor requirements. Embedding surge staff within the L&L structure and pairing local L&L staff with surge advisors for key functions (team leadership, technical leads, operations) proved successful strategies in making the locally-led response work.

Eventually, CARE and L&L started being more explicit about the nature of surge positions: expectations and success factors for deployment were clearly outlined in the selection process, from job descriptions to interviews – making it clear that the goal was not direct delivery of aid but supporting the local partner to deliver. For the second wave of surge staff, L&L took part in the recruitment of key positions to ensure that successful candidates appealed to both partners. In the medium to long term, the two partners have decided to invest in national surge capacity, to collectively pool Pacific regional staff capacity from both agencies, and to further develop the CARE-led Pacific roster. L&L also plans to review its HR policies to ensure they facilitate rapid deployment and job rotation during emergencies, particularly when the Pacific pool is activated.

2.5 Making it work: Pairing advisors and local counterparts

The joint response brought to light that the most impactful surge staff shared similar attributes. Of primary importance were their soft skills – coaching and mentoring local counterparts, actively transferring key skills, allow them to learn ‘by doing’, giving them the space to speak and act (in team or cluster meetings), taking a back seat and elevating the local counterpart, being sensitive to the nature of the local partner (in this case, a primarily development organisation with limited emergency experience) and showing empathy for their situation (as some of the staff were personally affected by the disaster). Yet, surge advisors also report that drawing clear bottom lines and being firm on the non-negotiables (including humanitarian principles and standards, gender and social inclusion, timeliness of the response) was essential. They felt the need to balance between nurturing new skills and delivering timely assistance. Walking this fine line without ‘taking over’ or eroding trust, was a challenge for many advisors.

What worked best, they report, was using very practical and applied tools, immediately immersing local counterparts in field work, and allowing them to build the necessary confidence to eventually do it on their own. When conducting assessments for example, the advisor would initially take the lead responding to any probing questions from communities or local authorities until the local counterpart felt confident enough to do so him/herself. This would be followed by an internal debriefing session where good practice was praised and areas for improvement identified. *‘This led to creating increased confidence, moving into a virtuous circle of more practice, more ease, more trust in one’s capacity,’* reports one advisor.

Reflecting on capacity building, the joint partners recommend that every opportunity should be exploited for strengthening skills. They mention the many entry points for learning: from designing the joint response to defining targeting criteria, from attending cluster meetings to leading assessments, from planning relief distributions to monitoring the intervention, from adapting internal systems to jointly reflecting on the overall response. In particular, monitoring, evaluation and programme quality is seen as an area requiring further improvement by L&L. As the response enters the recovery phase, CARE and L&L emphasised the importance of local ownership of the data collected, with the need for increased capacity to analyse, consolidate and make sense of the data. Efforts are currently focused on building the skills and confidence of the L&L MEAL⁴ team to generate and analyse data, design key research questions, and assess the quality of the response. This is yet another entry point for building on local capacities and increasing confidence.

In this response, the most useful ‘pairings’ were the longer deployments, where relationships between local and surge staff were strong, trust was established, key capacity gaps were filled, and responsibilities were handed over. Reflecting on their experience, advisors also urged CARE to make its rapid response team more fit-for-partnering, where staff are recruited and deployed on the basis of their commitment and aptitude to work in partnership and respect local norms, not solely on their technical skills. An After-Action Review emphasised the importance of ensuring surge advisors are fully focused on the values that underpin the partnership and have the mindset, experience and commitment to support local team members. More broadly, successful approaches included managerial and technical accompaniment, clear division of responsibilities between CARE and L&L for key functions (e.g. CARE leading on fundraising, L&L on representing the partnership locally and delivering the response) and phased hand-overs of responsibilities as capacities and confidence increased.

⁴ Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning

3. Opportunities and challenges

3.1 From individual/project capacity strengthening to organisation-wide learning

Skills transfer and capacity building occurred at individual and project level. However, without converting these gains into higher-level, agency-wide capacity strengthening, the approach will not be sustainable as the emergency response programme is phased out and the response team is disbanded.

Both agencies report many gains at organizational level:

CARE Australia	Both agencies	Live & Learn
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrated ability to undertake humanitarian operations in Fiji under a 'light' presence model ▪ Increased know-how to strike equitable partnerships and 'make aid more local' ▪ Lessons learned to benefit wider CARE Confederation and humanitarian sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better positioned to operate locally-led responses in the future, particularly in the South Pacific ▪ Expansion of Fiji-based networks, incl. Fiji Red Cross, institutional donors, UN agencies, community organisations, INGOs, private sector ▪ Reputational gains ▪ Learning gains and contributing to the practice of localisation of aid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased confidence and capacity to engage in humanitarian work (incl. in the cluster system) ▪ All-staff training in inclusion and disability, gender, child protection and the Core Humanitarian Standard ▪ Increased capacity to deliver emergency shelter (a new sector for L&L) ▪ Enhanced capacity in emergency WASH and livelihoods (core sectors of L&L development programme) ▪ Improved financial, procurement and security systems and processes adapted to emergency response ▪ Learning to benefit the whole L&L Pacific network, not just its Fiji office

CARE / L&L further drew on the wider civil society network in-country, which included private sector organisations like Virgin Australia, Vodafone and Vinaka Fiji as well as academic links to USP and other civil society organisations such as the Fiji Red Cross. Linking with local, regional and international networks was essential to leveraging the response to have greater impact and has built networks that support greater organisational capacity to undertake future responses.

Success will be defined by long-term capacity-building at organisational level to enable L&L, when the next emergency strikes, to quickly scale up its work and ensure it has systems in place to cope with the rapid expansion of personnel and budget. To be effective, the partnership must be mindful that investment and support to L&L must go beyond operational or project-level capacity building towards long-term, organisation-wide, strategic strengthening.

3.2 Managing organisational growth: Moving to a dual-mandate organisation

The emergency response tested the unity of the L&L team. Early on, L&L's development team played a key role in designing the response. Their expertise and experience were invaluable and shaped the response strategy. As surge capacity was brought in and a new emergency team was formed, regular programme staff eventually turned their attention back to the core L&L development programme. This

decision was taken by the L&L executive management and motivated by the expressed need to be accountable to donors and communities served by the long-term development programme.

Given numerous overlaps between L&L's development and emergency programmes, including a number of common target communities and technical sectors, synergies were evident. Yet, over time, divisions emerged between the emergency programme staff and the core development team. Often, CARE was equated with the emergency programme even though the response was firmly L&L-led. The recent relocation of the emergency team to a new location away from the congested L&L office may add to this divide. This threatens the programmatic coherence and organisational cohesiveness of L&L. This experience highlights the need to create opportunities to bridge emergency response and development programming and enable learning across teams. L&L is exploring the potential to bring development staff into emergency response teams, during and beyond the initial rush, recognising that placements into the emergency response early on (while backfilling these positions) would have assisted in preventing silos. Also, collaboration and cross-learning between the teams needs to be encouraged; opportunities such as all staff meetings, sectoral retreats, joint strategy sessions, joint training, programmatic evaluations, can all serve as entry points to bring the teams closer and bridge emerging silos in the organisation. This should also serve to support L&L in adopting a dual emergency/development mandate, an evolution supported by L&L's leadership and management.

Another issue that L&L had to contend with was the rapid expansion of the organisation – in terms of increased funding, personnel, assets, responsibilities, accountabilities, and mandate. The emergency response effectively doubled L&L's programme in Fiji. This stretched the capacity of the organisation and was felt at all levels – from leadership downwards. Business systems, processes, policies, office space, vehicles, computers, internet capacity, patience and capacities were all strained by the magnitude of the disaster and the need to respond quickly and at scale. *'Part of the game is chaos... we need to better understand how to navigate the chaos... what are the key areas to watch? What have we learned about needing to put aside certain priorities in the short-term, so as to address the immediate needs of the emergency response?'* pondered the Head of L&L. CARE was mindful of the risks and challenges faced by its local partner and sought to provide support while resisting the urge to 'take over.' *'They were a number of points where CARE had to remind itself that this was a partnership ... not a typical CARE-led approach. We had to consider how we could best support L&L to come to terms with the scope, scale and speed required of the response... in ways that were not overwhelming,'* reports a CARE manager.

The other challenge likely to be faced by local partners like L&L is the inevitable contraction that will occur once the response phases out and the emergency team disbands. How to capitalise on the institutional knowledge, capacities and assets gained and how to retain emergency experience amongst staff to support future responses in Fiji and elsewhere in the Pacific? How to adapt internal systems, strategies and human resources to this new phase for L&L? How to incorporate humanitarian response into the L&L's mandate in a coherent and non-disruptive manner? How to stay engaged with national humanitarian actors and invest in disaster preparedness while delivering on the core development programme? These are key issues that L&L is grappling with, and that CARE must remain aware and supportive of.

3.3 The delicate issue of representing the partnership in the media

Starting with the appeal for funds launched in Australia, branding and communication proved to be tricky for the CARE/L&L partnership. CARE's model, highly effective for securing funds rapidly, relies on sharing real-time, compelling stories of communities and people affected by the disaster. L&L was not used to the pace required to capitalise on the short window of media attention. This reflects a need for clear communication protocols, which are currently being drawn up.

Similarly, portraying the partnership in the media was not as straightforward as expected. CARE was conscious of presenting the partnership as a ‘hand-in-hand’ operation, mindful to portray the partnership as one of equals. This was felt mostly in the media release process, where accurate and consistent portrayal of the partnership was required as well as prior consultations and approval of L&L.

Both partners agree that issues linked to media, visibility and branding of the partnership must be discussed and agreed to pre-emergency. Terms of Reference should establish how the partnership will be portrayed including the appropriate use of the CARE and L&L’s logos and brands. Preparedness activities between CARE and L&L should include the development of media protocols for gathering survival stories for fundraising, communication or advocacy purposes. Importantly, both partners should invest in supporting the domestic team to engage and interact with local and international media, providing staff training and advice.

4. Emerging conclusions

4.1 Evolving and nurturing the partnership

‘I personally believe that the way forward for L&L Fiji and L&L Pacific is through establishing strategic partnerships, partnerships which are mutually beneficial, encourage a strength-based approach and based on values, such as respect for each other, honesty, commitment to name a few. We had faith in the partnership, that through the challenges, we will find opportunities for growth – growth at an individual and personal level, at programming level as well as at an organizational level.... Build on each of our understanding of processes and best approaches... shape the partnership for the future here in Fiji and potentially the Pacific, and more importantly, contribute to strengthening the partnership by building on the relationships we have to date... Thank you for believing in us. Thank you for being part of our journey and like any good relationship, [we] will commit to ensuring that we only grow together from strength to strength.’ Head of L&L Fiji

The inspirational words from the Head of L&L Fiji reflect the very nature of a partnership – ‘a dance, a marriage, with its highs and lows, ebbs and flows; one that needs to be nurtured, its health monitored, its rhythm to the beat, where keeping the “romance alive” is essential (instilling some excitement along the way), where there is a shared vision and purpose, where underlying values – mutual respect, open communication, trust, commitment – are strong, where the strengths and attributes of each partner unite to deliver greater value’.

4.2 Better positioned for the future

CARE and L&L are clear that the joint response – with all its challenges and frustrations – has reinforced their partnership. Both agencies have learned a great deal from working together in jointly responding to Cyclone Winston in Fiji. They are convinced that the partnership has brought added value not only to their respective organisations but most importantly, to meeting the needs of cyclone-affected Fijians in an effective, sustainable and efficient manner. In other words: that they are achieving together what neither of them could have done alone.

The partners are continuing to consolidate this learning and broadening their reach to the wider Pacific region. Leveraging each other’s respective strengths and comparative advantage, will benefit both organisations joint operations in Vanuatu, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Niue and the Marshall Islands (focusing on disaster preparedness, risk reduction and resilience). This experience shows that when national responders take the lead – with appropriate support from international actors – the effectiveness and sustainability of the disaster response is enhanced.

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About CARE

CARE works with poor communities in developing countries to end extreme poverty and injustice.

Our long-term aid programs provide food, clean water, basic healthcare and education and create opportunities for people to build a better future for themselves.

We also deliver emergency aid to survivors of natural disasters and conflict, and help people rebuild their lives.

We have 70 years' experience in successfully fighting poverty, and last year we helped change the lives of 65 million people around the world.

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About Live & Learn

Live & Learn works towards a sustainable and equitable world free from poverty.

We educate, mobilise communities, and facilitate supportive partnerships in order to foster a greater understanding of sustainability, and to help move towards a sustainable future. Local ownership of environmental and development education programs, open participation and equality remain the foundation of our organisation.

Live & Learn works with communities throughout Asia and the Pacific to design, implement and learn from community-based development projects. The projects are specific to each community and cover a number of thematic program areas, including water, sanitation and hygiene, environmental governance, and community disaster prevention and preparedness.

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