LEARNING FROM STORIES OF CHANGE
An Internal Evaluation Study

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Executive Summary

The following report provides an overview of the Learning from Stories of Change project and presents a detailed analysis, findings, and recommendations. The purpose of the project is to understand if and how graduates from the Coady International Institute are learning and whether or not they are using this knowledge to create positive social change. By doing so, it also explores the linkage between transformative education and longer-term outcomes.

The Coady Institute was founded in 1959 as an adult education organization with the mission to work with community development practitioners around the world. All education programs focus on development leadership within three themes: building resilient communities; strengthening inclusive economies; and, promoting accountable democracies. Programs range in length from 10-15 day certificates to the 5 month Diploma in Development Leadership. While the study encompasses most on-campus programs, there is a specific focus on the Global Affairs Canada's Leadership and Learning in Development Effectiveness Initiative (Leadership: P000528), and the Women's Leadership for Economic Empowerment and Food Security in Ethiopia, Ghana and Zambia Initiative (Empower: P000441).

The first question posed in the study was, *How do the Coady Institute's education programs contribute to social change?* The methodology used online surveys and focus group discussion to report on key indicators and gather Stories of Change from the alumni. The stories provided a window into the depth of participants' learning, what they value about their Coady experience, and the change they were making.

Coady staff and facilitators form a community within each cohort that fosters critical and reflective dialogue on social justice issues. While it is often referred to fondly as "Coady Magic," the respondents identified a series of factors that contribute to the success of the transformative learning process. These factors include:

> **Learning environment:** Inclusive working and living spaces that promotes dialogue and reflection, allowing for intentional and serendipitous learning.

> **Relevant content:** The curriculum blends theory, practice, and experiential learning on relevant topics that can be easily applied in the field.

> **Peer-to-peer learning:** Living and working together in a diverse community is key to fostering dialogue and sharing of experiences across cultures and continents. Participants often compare and contrast their experiences, and challenge each other to think beyond the expected routines and standards solutions.

> **Quality Facilitation:** Participants appreciate the experience and commitment of the facilitators and highlighted their ability to create a positive learning environment and foster transformative learning. Participants were also impressed with how facilitators were able to adapt the content and schedules according to the interests of the class.

The Coady environment and pedagogical approach deepen the participants' learning experience. In survey results six to eight months after graduation, 97% of the alumni continue to report that they gained new knowledge and skills. The qualitative analysis also found that graduates acquired knowledge and skills as well as changes in attitudes and motivations. The analysis of the data shows it is the attitudes and motivations that trigger the transformative element in the learning process and includes a rethinking of

personal bias or world views, increased confidence and leadership abilities, a holistic understanding of development, recognition of assets and responsibilities, as well as the inspiration to continue their work.

With the recognition that transformative learning did indeed take place, the study posed a second question, *What are the outcomes of the Coady Institute's education programs?* The data show that Coady alumni are applying and adapting the citizen-led, asset-based development perspective along with the transformative education pedagogy as soon as six to eight months after graduation. In fact, 82% of respondents reported that they have shared what they learned, and 85% reported that they had applied or are planning to apply their new knowledge and skills.

One of the most common activities after graduates arrive home is sharing with others in their professional and social networks. This occurs through formal organizational capacity building, training and education programs, as part of the implementation of new concepts and tools, adapting resources materials, and informal coaching among colleagues, friends and family. It also creates a multiplier effect that moves through the graduate's organizations and social networks as well as through the graduate's own behavioural change and application of concepts, tools, and leadership abilities. The stories of change show that this improvement in development practice is leading to development results in communities around the world.

Overall, the stories reflect a high degree of consistency with Coady's curriculum and the design of the Leadership and Empower initiatives. The respondents coded their own stories in terms of relevance to areas, topics, and populations of change. This established a clear pattern. First, change begins with individual learning, and then as graduates improve their practice, the development results radiate outwards along formal and informal pathways. Second, the topics of most stories were development leadership, and particularly women's leadership. Their leadership was located in the fields of local economies, resilient communities, and accountable democracies. The self-coded data also showed that alumni are working with a diversity of people, but most often women, children and youth, and Indigenous people from North and South America, Africa, and Asia.

Transformative learning is a dynamic and ongoing process. The study shows that Coady graduates are eager for more formal and informal engagement through networks, online course, mentorship/coaching, regional chapters, reunions, and coalition-building. This presents an opportunity to extend and reinforce transformative learning well beyond the classroom.

As an educational institution, Coady uses different education enrichment and support mechanisms to enhance the curriculum and fit specific contexts. The supports may include customized courses, fellowships, mentorships/coaching, peer groups, and so forth. These methods should be identified and assessed to ensure fit with Coady's pedagogy and citizen-led, asset-based development approach.

While gender differences in quantitative data were minimal, there were subtle differences in the narratives between men and women. Women tended to describe growth in confidence and leadership, that they share and apply their knowledge and skills in less formal settings, and face more invisible social barriers in their organizations. However, when the female responses were disaggregated by program, it indicated that women who attended programs with additional education enrichment and support mechanisms were able to close this gap.

Based on the findings, the last section of the study includes a series of proposed recommendations, which are intended to build on the success, both in terms of the transformative education approach and

contribution to development results. The recommendations fall within six headings: sustain and enhance Coady's approach to transformative education; enrich Coady's curriculum; expand the transformative learning process; strengthen the administration and delivery of courses; study and promote Coady's approach to transformative learning; and, enhance monitoring, evaluation and learning.

The experiences and voices of our graduates are captured in the Stories of Change and quotations used throughout the report. While names and countries have been removed to respect confidentiality, the following graduates granted us permission to use their stories and photos.

Street Girls Empowered

"After my return from Coady, I have designed and implemented a program which specifically targeted street girls who are exposed to risky situations and empowered them through economic capacity building … I had learned from Coady that promoting democracy does not mean only in the higher level but from at the grass roots. So we gave the young girls the decision-making power about how they want this program to go about. It was a way they could have ownership of the program. At first the young girls would not even talk and now they are taking leadership for the daily activities at the training centre. To see them being empowered has been significant for me."

– Swastika Kasaju, Global Change Leaders 2015, Nepal

Community Restores Local Market

"There are many pressing needs in the community… but the council decided to build a market before anything else… To my surprise no one used the market. It was being vandalized and neglected… At Coady, I learned about appreciative inquiry, I thought to myself, why can't I use this knowledge to try to bring change. So I took a survey in the community just to find out why nothing was happening in the market place. People told me that sellers could not trade because there was no water, washrooms and electricity. Well after I got satisfied with the idea that people wanted water, I called a meeting to choose volunteers who would come with me to council… In March this year they drilled a borehole next to the market. And everyone is now using it and benefitting from it… Vandalism has reduced… through the experience and knowledge gained from Coady, I felt complete and as a youth my fear of engaging in development was removed."

– Castrol Singelengele, Empower 2013, Zambia

Inclusive Business Model Improves Livelihoods of Dairy Farmers

"I am currently working in a dairy value chain project and after I joined the Coady I realized some of the implementation strategies that we are working with needed to be revised… I introduced the inclusive business model in the value chain project… There was no milk testing facility located in the remote areas and the farmers were being deprived because of an unstructured market system and poor market linkages… The proposal pointed out how a community-based Digital Milk Measurement machine would help to make both the company and farmer profitable… One of the major milk producers (BRAC) showed interest and came forward to implement the restructured inclusive business model. This was one of the great achievement that we have made from the learning at Coady."

- Mohammad Akram Ali, Certificate 2014, Bangladesh
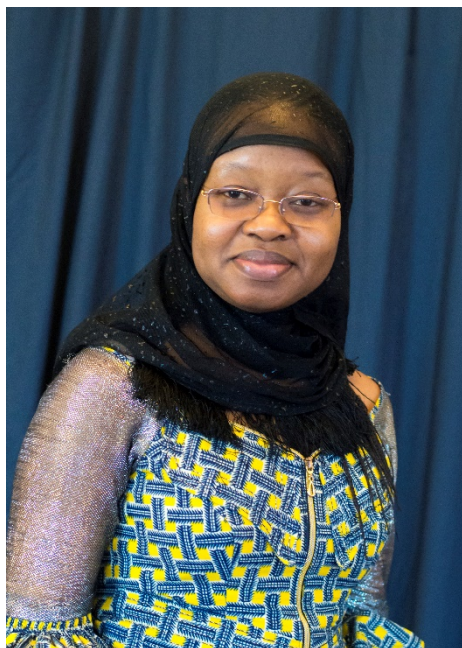
Young Girl Stays in School

"My organization supports village savings and loans associations, majority of women. The project succeeded in significantly increasing their income however they don't have control over it, their husbands decide over what they do with the money. Sometime they even use it to take another wife… I succeeded in supporting our local NGO Partner staff in conducting discussions on the importance for women to build support among themselves and discuss their own choices with their husbands. As a result, a woman convinced her husband to let their daughter resume classes from which she had stopped because her father was intending to give her in marriage. The woman said she would pay for her daughter's books from her own resources, which her husband accepted. Coady Institute gave me the appropriate resources for this change."

- Maimouna Mohana, Diploma 2015, Benin