Online learning tools for human rights advocates

WEBINAR SUMMARY
April 7, 2016

I. Expert:

Claudia Pederson, Regional Project Manager, World Vision Middle East and Middle East and Eastern Europe Regional Office

II. World Vision Background:

Mrs. Pederson started by giving a brief overview of World Vision to give a sense of the online courses that the organization has developed. Present in over 90 countries, the organization’s focus has been on protecting children’s rights. It has over 260 advocacy staff, focused on local, national and international level advocacy.

The organization defines advocacy as policies and systems that affect the lives of children and develops programs designed to empower citizens as well as mobilize and educate them about children and human rights.

World Vision compared the benefits of traditional learning to online learning, in order to empower people and improve their learning processes. Whereas, with traditional learning, direction and interaction with a facilitator/trainer are essential, for online learning, interaction happens through the web interface. Additionally, with traditional learning, individuals have to attend a class with a group of people at the same time. With online platforms, the participants choose to attend the course at their gre, either alone or in a group with no geographic boundaries. She stressed that, over time, online platforms end up being more cost effective, since the cost per learner is significantly smaller than in the face-to-face trainings and allow access to participants, who might not others be able to take part in such opportunities.

Based on the comparison, World Vision decided to transition to an online learning platform. In order to ensure this transition, they had to ensure their staff adequate training, in moving from face-to-face trainings to the online and blended learning systems, from printed materials to online repositories. They also had to adapt from having limited communities of practitioners in the traditional classrooms to substantially larger online communities.

III. Mapping World Vision’s E-learning Resources

A. The Advocacy e-Lab
This platform has eight modules. For each completed, the learners get a badge. There are currently 500 learners worldwide. It is self-paced and represents a general, introductory approach, open to all World Vision, but soon open to external users as well.

There are currently 12 hours of quizzes and other resources, such as a pre-test, with the final assignment being reviewed by an expert. The evaluators can be seen online, with their credentials listed and available.

B. Instructor-led Training:
This is a virtual classroom, focused on one topic, with structured hours, where groups come together. Shared learning is emphasized and the participants have the power to intervene with the facilitator.

This training lasts for two weeks and requires a two-hour comments. There is a selection process, during which 35 learners are selected. There is a final project that needs to be completed, with a certificate of participation being issues.

C. Community of Practice
Individuals, who have completed the lab and/or the training, are invited to join the community of practice, which has the role of keeping them engaged and forming a strong network of practitioners. This platform mostly contains forums and webinars.

IV. Lessons Learned Developing these Resources:
Mrs. Pederson emphasized that, when considering developing courses, understanding the learner, their learning styles and needs is essential. There are certainly different learning elements. Some prefer listening to videos, others printing materials and reading. She further stressed that there should be consideration for language and Internet connectivity, which may vary in terms of quality.

The expert added that specialized support should be asked for, with the instructional and graphic designers being key individuals involved in putting platforms together.

She stressed that designing such platforms is a two-phase investment, revolving first around hiring the team and developing the platform and then ensuring the time and human resources dedicated to the updating of the content, in order for it to remain engaging. She also recommended giving time to plan and evaluate the learning program, making sure that it remains relevant for staff.

Mrs. Pederson revealed ultimately believing in the complementarity of the face-to-face versus online learning. She ended by inviting participants to sign up on World Vision’s page for some of the existing opportunities.