



# **Sustainability guidelines**

**June 2021**

# Introduction

## **‘...towards self-sustaining communities.’**

Sustainability is one of the key principles for Help a Child towards responsible (child) well-being. For child centered community development programs to be sustainable it is required that long term perspectives should apply to all policies and actions that are undertaken with as objective responsible well-being for present and future generations.

### **Areas of attention**

Areas of attention for sustainable child centered community programming are:

1. Clarity about what we mean with sustainability (definition)
2. Principles to achieve sustainability in child centered community programs
3. Organizational requirements to contribute towards child well-being in a sustainable manner.

# 1. Help a Child's definition of Sustainability

When we talk about sustainability within the context of a Child Centered Community Development Program, we can use this definition:

*'A child centered community program of Help a Child is sustainable when the community is able to continuously provide for children needs after phase-out of the project. Community mechanisms are functioning well and knowledge, skills and practices of community members are continuously adapting to the changing context and thereby contributing to community transformation and child-wellbeing. In a sustainable project there is attention for the changing complex context, how to be stewards of God's creation, local ownership, inclusive participation, self-reliance and ability to link and lobby.'*

In the next chapters, we will explain what we mean by sustainability more in detail.

# 2. Help a Child's sustainability principles

## **Ability to adapt**

In the first place sustainability is something communities already pursue to survive with the means that are at their disposal. Communities seek to manage their means in such a way that not only current but also future generations can benefit and survive. However communities have to deal with an ongoing changing and increasing interrelated complex environment that requires ongoing adaptation and in many cases external support.

## **Protect God's creation for future generations**

In the second place Help a Child also recognizes that God sustains His creation whereby He also calls human mankind to take care of creation as well as for fellow human-beings. Help a Child with its mandate to contribute towards child well-being seeks to walk along-side communities to meet their aspirations for responsible well-being of children. At the same time it is good to recognize that creation shows to be resilient and human mankind is endowed with the desire and skills to sustain creation.

## **Local ownership**

Help a Child recognises that families and the communities are the owners and managers of the adaptive development process they go through. This ownership means that people feel and believe that it are their own efforts that are driving the process of change. They believe they contribute the maximum of their own human, financial and materials resources. In the process Help a Child travels along with the communities that aims at the self-reliance of its inhabitants and the community as a whole.

## **Inclusive<sup>1</sup> participation<sup>2</sup>**

To allow the communities to be owners and on the driving seat, the process needs to be participative. This means that community members are the owners of the identified needs of change and are the main decision makers and implementers towards the process of change. Participation also involves all segments of the communities including women, children, youth and marginalized groups such as the disabled involved in decision making and implementation. To allow empowerment of the different segments of the community it might be necessary to have a discrete stage with critical and reflective analysis of power to contribute towards equity<sup>3</sup>. Individual participation and motivation is key for sustainable change in a community. To see this happen it is often needed that self-respect, self-confident and self-reliance of the different segments of communities are enhanced and supported.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Programming Manual Annex 28](#): guidelines Inclusive programming

<sup>2</sup> [Programming Manual Annex 27](#): Guidelines Sustainable Child Centered Community Empowerment

<sup>3</sup> See [Toolsheet 4.5: Take a Step](#).

### **Self-reliance through capacity enhancement**

To contribute towards self-reliance of communities Help a Child and its facilitating partners don't do things for people but assist people to do things for themselves. However Help a Child does assess if communities in a particular target area are open for external facilitation and collaboration to work towards responsible child-well-being. Key contribution in the collaboration is the increase of capacities of both individuals and institutions to contribute towards increased awareness, knowledge to enhance child well-being<sup>4</sup> and have skills to manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their well-being which are consistent with their own aspirations.

### **Use of local available resources**

Starting point for the capacity building is that communities already have knowledge and skills. The sustainability of programs depends on building on existing skills and development initiatives that have happened in the community in the past. Jointly community members need to determine what skills they need to increase their self-reliance towards well-being. Based on the community action plan<sup>5</sup> and tools for resource mobilization<sup>6</sup> communities determine how necessary resources are acquired.<sup>7</sup> Because Help a Child considers as its key mandate to facilitate development processes in a sustainable manner the support in terms of resources from Help a Child will only be considered as final resort. Initially community resources, government service providers and private sector actors will be considered in addressing a particular issue. Support provided by Help a Child will be provided under specific conditions.

### **Balanced social & economic development**

Besides attention for the human development, the social and the political development also economic development is necessary to ensure sustainable child centred community development. Social development is dependent on a resource base. This means that individuals, families but also communities as a whole requires sources of income but also need to invest in their resource base to ensure sustainable economic initiatives.

### **Ability to link and lobby**

As capacities already exist also social structures have been part of the sustainability of responsible child well-being of community for some time. Strong and well-functioning structures are very important for responsible well-being in communities. For sustainability purposes it is most effective to make use and build on existing structures. An assessment of existing structures will have to happen to determine their suitability to effectively the identified aspirations of the community. However existing structures are not always effective or suitable to ensure child well-being. New structures are being introduced for example Self Help Groups (SHG) and Cluster Level Associations (CLA). For more info see the manual on SHG, CLA's and Federations.

To allow ongoing change for well-being to happen it is crucial that the members of the existing structures as well as new established structures own the processes of change and represents the different segments of the community. The members and particularly the leaders of the structures

---

<sup>4</sup> The [participatory toolbox manual](#) is not only developed for needs identification but also to create awareness raising to allow empowerment of marginalized groups and to enhance well-being (see chapter 4 about awakening and mind-set change tools).

<sup>5</sup> See [Toolsheet 7.2: Community action plan](#)

<sup>6</sup> See [Toolsheet 7.3: Resource mobilization](#)

<sup>7</sup> See [programming manual annex 29](#): guidelines use of hand-outs and [annex 31: guidelines construction guidelines](#).

need to be intrinsically motivated to take the lead in the processes of change. Because of the important role of the structures for the sustainability contribution towards responsible well-being, facilitators need to give special attention to the well-functioning of the structures. The strengthening should be in the governance, leadership, financial management and dynamics within the groups. Structures need to have an effective process of handing-over of roles and responsibilities. Other essential skills especially for the CLAs are the ability to write proposals, manage budgets, lobby and communicate with governmental service providers and other stakeholders. CLAs' legal recognition contributes towards sustainable effectiveness. The CLAs to become sustainable requires quite some time. Therefore the set up and support of the CLA structures need to happen as early as possible during the life of the program.

To sustain the well-being of children it is necessary that there are strong linkages between structures within the community to ensure effective complementarity in achieving common aspirations. As local churches and other religious entities have a significant influence in the community, linkages and collaboration are pursued from the start of the program. From the start, strong linkages need to be established between the existing structures and the new structures as well as between the new groups. Both new as well as existing structures should benefit from capacity strengthening initiatives.

Besides the internal community linkages, also linkages with external structures such as health, education as well as private business service providers are crucial for sustainable child well-being. Also linkages with these external structures need to be strengthened from the beginning of the program to contribute towards sustainable child well-being. If development, in its widest sense, is to truly benefit the people, then the political structure must be responsive to their needs and aspirations as well as protect their rights and their property. The enhancement of skills of community structures to engage with external service providers to ensure access to required services for child well-being are therefore a necessity.

# 3. Organizational requirements to contribute towards sustainability

## Facilitation and coaching

To ensure community ownership and sustainability of development initiatives requires special facilitating and enabling skills of the involved staff of Help a Child and its partner organizations.<sup>8</sup> Staff and volunteers<sup>9</sup> are trained and coached in participative, mobilization, awareness and enabling skills that contribute towards self-reliant individuals, families and communities.

The involved staff and volunteers engage in a partnership where they value relationships with the communities that promote trust and cooperation. Good communication and time spent listening to each other will contribute towards strong partnerships and understanding. Clear communication and regular reviews allows good management of expectations and any problems are dealt with quickly. Skills are required to enhance the abilities of local structures including their abilities to link up with external stakeholders and lobby to access resources. To ensure a child focus on the improvement of child well-being the facilitators are rather focused on attitude change and values then the use of authority. Furthermore do facilitators have planning skills to allow a clear and smooth process to take place.

## The slow and fast way

For the different segments of the community to be involved and own the process requires time as they increase their capacities and become owners of processes of change. Sufficient time is allocated for the various phases of the development program. The different segments of the community need to be given time to join (mobilization phase), time need to be given for new information to be digested (awareness raising phase) and community members need to be given time to organize themselves and develop their capacities that contribute towards their self-reliance. To ensure equity in communities to allow the most marginalized members to benefit from the program special support (resources) can be considered to be provided to these members. This so called fast way will allow the poorest of the community link up with the development process in the community. However this is only done under particular conditions with a limited time frame.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> See [paragraph 1.3 of the participatory toolbox](#) with a description of facilitation skills.

<sup>9</sup> [Programming manual annex 30](#): Guidelines incentives for volunteers.

<sup>10</sup> [Programming manual annex 29](#): Guidelines use of hand-outs.

### **Financial sustainability**

During the life span of a project, the project will be handed over slowly to the community. It is crucial that the project will become more financially sustainable over the years and will endure after the life span of the project. The financial sustainability need to be kept in mind from the start of the project planning. It means that it is likely that during the project time there is a decline in costs for example number of staff and volunteers, and payment for per diems for trainings, transport to participants and an increase in own contribution of the communities for salaries for trainers, investments and other project activities.

### **Clear project phasing**

Help a Child and its partner organizations join the communities capacity enhancement process as facilitators, trainers and eventually especially as coaches for a limited defined period of time. From the beginning of the engagement of Help a Child in the community capacity enhancement and self-reliance process it is clear what the phases of development (see picture below) are and what the time frame is of the involvement of Help a Child and its partners comes to an end.<sup>11</sup> Also are roles and responsibilities between the community and Help a Child and its partners clear in the process of phasing out and handing over to ensure local ownership and sustainability.

Working with the end in mind and the phasing of the program also implies that multi-annual plans include multi-annual activity plans.

---

<sup>11</sup> [Programming manual annex 22](#): Principles & Guidelines for program phase out and sustainability.

## Child Centered Community Development Program

### Phases, objectives and milestones

