



# Theory of Change

Help a Child

# Introduction

## The rationale of our approach

Help a Child (Red een Kind in Dutch) is a Christian non-governmental organization with its headquarters in the Netherlands, and with affiliates in India and different countries in Africa. Help a Child sees every child as a unique gift of God. Therefore, Help a Child wants every child – regardless of their social, political, religious, ethnic or economic background – to have a life in dignity, with love and with a promising future. We want to give perspective to children in need. In order to achieve that ambitious goal in an effective and transparent way, we have developed a Theory of Change (ToC), outlining the rationale of our approach.

Help a Child's identity is grounded in the Christian faith: this entails that our religious outlook determines our organization on various levels, and that faith guides the way we work. Guided by the love and compassion which the Gospel teaches us, we want to show children that they are loved. And we want to do so in an inclusive manner. This means that children and others can participate regardless their social, political, religious, ethnic, or economic background. Through our commitment to reconciliation and justice, we want to teach children how to live in a responsible way, in peace and harmony with each other. Through our emphasis on good stewardship and mercy towards the poorest of the poor, we want children and their families to have a hopeful and dignified future. Thus, God's love for us drives us to help children in need to live their lives to the fullest.

### Objective and use of the Theory of Change

Projects and programs of Help a Child need to be developed according to the framework of the Help a Child ToC. It describes critical elements which are to be considered carefully as to contribute effectively towards sustainable well-being of children. The ambition of holistic child-wellbeing does not imply that all elements need to be incorporated into one all-encompassing project. Rather, it means that we strive towards the holistic wellbeing of children in everything we do. Based on local needs and the strengths of a specific project, a local ToC must be developed which contextualizes the Help a Child ToC and provides a justification for the selection of project elements. Multi-annual planning and phasing is crucial in Help a Child's projects. Elements from Help a Child's ToC can be phased over the years and do not need to be addressed every year.



# Our ToC step by step

## What impact do we want to make?

For children to have a life in dignity, with love and enjoying a promising future, we believe that four domains of holistic child well-being need to be addressed:

- **Healthy & Strong:** Physical development to become healthy and strong;
- **Educated for life:** Cognitive development to foster lifelong learning and a growth mind-set;
- **Socially & emotionally developed:** to become self-confident, respectful and emotionally stable;
- **With Hope & Dignity:** Spiritual development to live a life with purpose, hope and dignity.



It is through a combined and balanced development of these four domains that a child comes to full growth and well-being. Describing child well-being in four domains does not mean that these domains can be separated or that they need to be addressed separately. The domains are interlinked and influence each other. An imbalance in one of the domains also impacts the other domains.

## Who contributes to this impact?



Help a Child values the contribution of key stakeholders directly responsible for the well-being of children. These are the children and youth themselves, but also their parents and the broader community. Only with the participation of all these stakeholders in the community we are able to reach our goal. Therefore, Help a Child envisions interventions focusing at the following target groups:

- **Children** themselves to encourage and empower them so that they are able to develop well at all levels;

- **Youth** to provide them with the life-skills (agricultural, vocational, business, entrepreneurial skills) necessary for them to become resilient, confident, are able to sustain themselves and become responsible citizens;
- **Parents and caretakers** in order to ensure that families are strengthened and parents and caretakers are able to take care of themselves and of the children in their family;
- **The whole community** and other stakeholders to support them in setting up sustainable structures to increase access to socio-economic services, and to contribute towards social cohesion for holistic child well-being. Communities' disaster risk reduction and preparedness is enhanced, enabling them to reduce disaster risks and cope with current and future crises.

In short, these elements are reflected in four anticipated results visible in our ToC:

- A. Children are resilient to overcome barriers and are prepared for the future;
- B. Youth are resilient, confident and economically active;
- C. Parents and caretakers are able to take care of themselves and their children;
- D. The community has social cohesion, can participate in economic development and is able to cope with crisis.

Only when these four target groups are reached in an integrated approach, communities can be transformed and children are able to grow up in a safe and supportive environment and turn into responsible adults. It is important to notice that the four target groups do not stand in isolation. Instead, they often relate to each other. Families (households) are the linking pin between interventions with children, youth and parents/caretakers (men and women) on the one hand and the community as a whole on the other.

### **How will we reach this impact?**

Help a Child uses three strategies that contribute to the envisioned impact of improved child well-being.

#### *1. Basic needs, knowledge, and skills*

The first strategy starts from the assumption that people, in order to unleash their full potential, need to acquire basic needs, crucial knowledge, skills and practices as to strengthen attitudes and practices contributing to child well-being. Help a Child supports the community by providing them with access to basic needs and transfer of skills and knowledge.





*A women's self-help group during their weekly meeting in Mavindini, Kenya*

## *2. Working in groups*

We consider social exclusion to be an important factor contributing to poverty and lack of resilience: for people living on their own it is hard to escape the cycle of poverty and to cope with crisis. For this reason, our second strategy is to organize people in groups. Working together in groups fits also very well within the cultural context of Africa and Asia. Depending on the context and local needs, women, men, youth and children are organized either in mixed or in separate groups. Encouraging men, women, youth and children to join groups stimulates active participation in the community. In addition, each group can work on issues that are of particular interest to their group (e.g. children on children issues, parents on parenting, communities on disaster risk reduction). This allows us to apply an integrated approach whereby a broad range of challenges are addressed simultaneously and within a relatively short timeframe.

We assume that development is boosted by sharing and learning. Sharing and learning in a group also increases mutual solidarity and recognition and creates synergy. The established groups are also used as a vehicle to transfer knowledge and skills. Sharing and learning in these groups leads to increased resilience and self-esteem. Working together provides the people with the ability to speak up, to claim their rights and to make their demands known. After all, a single voice is not easily listened to, but a thousand voices make a better tune. The strength of this ability to lobby and advocate increases when the

group-structure develops itself further: as the number of groups in a community or geographical area grows, these groups are encouraged to establish a network or association of groups (i.e. 'Cluster Level Associations' or 'Civil Based Organizations'). Representing the community at a higher level enables these groups to bring about change at high(-er), political and social levels. Also from an economic perspective working in groups has an added value. For example, when a group of farmers joins its efforts, it becomes able to produce larger volumes and/or to deliver better quality. This makes the group an interesting market player. For these reasons, we believe that working in groups empowers. We believe that group empowerment is able to be a multiplier and to generate sustainable effect, directly contributing to the well-being of children.



### 3. Cooperation with external actors and systems

Communities do not stand in isolation, but are part of a larger environment that has influence on the well-being of children and on the ability of communities to support children's development. The third strategy of Help a Child and partners is therefore not to work in isolation but to take into account external actors and systems which influence community interventions positively or negatively. This local context is different for each community. Therefore, as a first step, it is crucial to identify relevant actors and systems and their potential role. The strength of Help a Child is in the area of community-based systems. Help a Child supports these systems and strengthens them where needed. Often these systems start out from communities but develop further to the level of districts, provinces and sometimes even to national level. It is our experience that strengthening these systems is contributing to sustainable changes and development. Therefore we collaborate with other relevant players like other (local) NGOs, churches, religious or local leaders, local businesses and local government.

# Our assumptions

From the narrative description provided above, it becomes clear that our ToC is based on a number of assumptions. The most important assumptions are summarized below. Distinction is made between assumptions related to causal links, other actors, belief systems, and the context.

## Causal assumptions

- The formation of community-based groups leads to sustainable structures. These structures provide local communities with the possibility to take the cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual development of their children in their own hands.
- When communities have secured access to basic needs they are able to acquire knowledge and skills and further grow towards sustainable communities.
- The transfer of skills and knowledge helps marginalized groups to unleash their potential.
- Working together creates synergy (1+1=3) – both in the groups as well as in the cooperation with partner organizations, external systems and actors.
- The three-fold working strategy aimed at 1) ensuring access to basic needs and transfer of knowledge & skills; 2) working in groups; and 3) linking with systems and external actors is sufficient to bring about the anticipated changes for all beneficiaries. Transfer of skills and knowledge in groups within the context of the community thus contributes to empowerment. And working in groups where sharing and knowledge transfer takes place, brings about sustainable change for people.
- At family level, interventions with children, youth and parents/caretakers (men and women) come together and strengthen each other so that families have increased holistic empowerment. When this is combined with community level empowerment that links families to local authorities, markets, and service providers, children have improved conditions for increased well-being.
- Empowerment of the community, families and children contributes to resilience and the well-being of children.
- Working in a participatory manner from the start contributes to ownership as it makes people aware of their own potential. Ownership and active participation of the community leads to more sustainability.
- Through increased solidarity, well-being and harmony, social cohesion can be established.



### **Assumptions on other actors**

- Well-functioning structures composed of intrinsically motivated people are key to success and to sustainability.
- Relevant actors are willing to participate and to play their expected roles.
- If possible, external actors, like governments, are motivated and capacitated to take up their mandate to provide for the communities, which leads to sustainability of results.

### **Assumptions on belief systems**

- An integrated approach that addresses all four domains of child well-being is the most effective way to improve child well-being.
- Addressing all four domains of child well-being requires cooperation with key stakeholders directly responsible (children, youth, parents and community) as well as with important influencers and agents of change like the government and economic actors.

### **Assumptions on the context**

- In areas/countries where development projects are implemented, we assume that there is an enabling environment for non-state actors.
- In areas/countries where people are in great humanitarian need and the environment is unsafe/unstable, we assume it is possible to link up with actors and network to establish a base of humanitarian operations.
- It is possible to establish a network of people's institutions up to district/province or national level

# Starting points

Help a Child distinguishes three starting points that are essential in all our projects. These are community transformation, participation and an inclusive approach.



*Members of a Child Protection Committee in Edingeni, Malawi*

## **Community transformation**

All people have qualities and an intrinsic ability to develop their own unique potential. However, due to a lack of basic needs and due to their specific context they may lack the power to develop these capacities and thus to flourish. To make sure that people can change their lives in a truly sustainable way, their potential needs to be unleashed. This is also true when it comes to children's well-being. Our strategy is therefore, on the one hand, to ensure that communities are able to access basic needs, and on the other, to empower marginalized children, youth, parents, families and communities to escape the poverty trap by strengthening their resilience and their voice.

Children, youth, parents, families and the broader community are not living in isolation. They are influenced by the systems and other actors in the environment they live in. In the

context of children's well-being this can be both positive (e.g. effective education system) and negative (e.g. malfunctioning child protection systems). For this reason working closely with different types of actors and relating directly or indirectly to existing systems is part of the strategy. In all communities social, economic, and political empowerment takes an important place in community transformation. The combination of social, economic, and political interventions contributes to sustainable development that benefits the community as a whole, and specially the children.

### **Participation**

For sustainable change it is required that people participate in their own development. For this reason, Help a Child works in a participatory way. Community members, including the children themselves, participate actively from the start and therefore become the owners of their own development. Projects are designed to stimulate active involvement of (representatives of) the whole community (e.g. children, community leaders, women, men, people living with a disability) and to take their actual needs and opportunities into consideration. Together we choose the best entry point to improve the well-being of children. To illustrate this; in some of our projects we work directly with children. In other cases, however, the best way to enhance the well-being of children is through improving the environment children live in, such as through increasing family income. In such cases our projects focus more on assisting adults in their roles as parents and caretakers. The active involvement is key throughout the project: from design to implementation, to monitoring and closing evaluation activities.

### **Inclusive approach**

The approach of Help a Child is inclusive. This means that people can participate regardless their social, political, religious, ethnic, or economic background. In addition, the participation of the poorest families, IDPs, host communities, people living with a disability or with an illness (like HIV-AIDS) is actively encouraged. Children are at the core of Help a Child's projects, which means that we strongly value child rights; this includes children's active participation in matters affecting their lives.



## With whom?

In recent years we have discovered the vast potential of working together at different levels:

- We work together with local partner organizations, as they are near the communities, they are knowledgeable about the specific context and the culture;
- We work together with the communities, as they know best what their problems and strengths are, and as they need to participate and own the solutions that fit their context best.
- We work together with other stakeholders like churches, the private sector, research institutes and other NGO's, as there is so much to be done and to be known, that we cannot do alone.
- We work together with governments as it is their responsibility to deliver services needed by the communities. We do this at three different levels: at local, regional and national level.



# Sustainability and phasing

Projects of Help a Child are implemented in different contexts and each context is unique. We distinguish three phases in which projects can be implemented; the relief phase, the recovery phase and the development phase. These phases are not linear and do not always follow each other subsequently. Projects can contain of a mix of two or three phases.



**Relief phase:** Due to natural or man-made disasters lifesaving support is needed in disaster response contexts. We refer to relief in order to ensure that access to basic needs and protection needs are addressed. As quickly as possible we strive to ensure that elements of resilience and sustainability are included.

**Recovery phase:** This is the phase where interventions shift from relief towards development. Recovery consists of humanitarian interventions underpinned by development principles. It goes beyond providing lifesaving support and involves capacity building and restorations of community assets.

**Development phase:** In this phase there is a relatively stable environment which allows Help a Child to invest with multi-annual funding in a community towards sustainable phase-out. A project in the development phase of Help a Child is sustainable when the community is able to continuously provide for children's needs after the phase-out of the project. Community mechanisms should be functioning well and knowledge, skills, and practices of community members should be continuously adapting to a changing context. Thus, they contribute to community transformation and child well-being. In a sustainable project there is attention for the changing context, local ownership, inclusive participation, self-reliance, and the ability to link and lobby with public and private actors. From the start in the development phase, the exit strategy is part of the design of the project. Communities need to have ownership. Over the course of the years they will become more and more empowered to further their own development process, preparing them to continue safeguarding the flourishing of children after the phase-out.

