



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. Internationally Red een Kind is known as 'Help a Child'. 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. Help a Child provides a future for children in need. In order to do that in an effective and transparent way, a Theory of Change (ToC) has been developed, showing the rationale of our approach.

Help a Child's identity is based on Christian faith: this means that religion influences our organization on various levels, and that faith is the motive that guides our work. Through the love and compassion we are taught by God, we want to show children that they are loved. Through our commitment to reconciliation and to do justice we want children to know how they can live morally, in peace and harmony with each other. Through our emphasis on good stewardship and mercy for the poorest of the poor we want children and their families to have a hopeful and dignified future. This way our love for God drives us to help children in need live their lives to the fullest.

Objective and use of the Theory of Change

Projects funded by Help a Child need to be developed within the framework of the Help a Child ToC. It describes critical steps and elements that are to be carefully considered to effectively contribute towards sustainable wellbeing of children. The depiction of child-wellbeing as holistic does not mean that all elements need to be incorporated in an all-encompassing project, but it means we strive in all we do towards the holistic wellbeing of children. Based on local needs and strengths of a specific project, a local ToC must be developed that contextualizes the Help a Child ToC and provides a justification for decisions of selected 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 achieve?

Help a Child sees child wellbeing as encompassing four domains:

- Healthy & Strong: Physical development to become healthy and strong;
- Educated for life: Cognitive development to foster lifelong learning and a growth mind-set;
- Social & 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 wellbeing. Describing child wellbeing in four dimensions does not mean that these dimensions can be separated or need to be addressed separately. The domains are interlinked and influence each other. An imbalance in one of the dimensions also impacts the other dimensions.

What outcomes contribute to this impact?

Help a Child values the contribution of key stakeholders directly responsible for the wellbeing of children. These are the children and youth themselves, but also their parents and the broader community. In order to reach our goal, Help a Child envisions interventions focusing at different target groups:

- Interventions with children themselves to encourage and empower them so they are able to develop well at all levels.
- Interventions with the youth, to provide them with skills (agricultural, vocational, business, entrepreneurial and life-skills) they will need to sustain themselves
- Interventions with parents and caretakers in order to ensure they are able to take care of themselves and the children in their family.
- Interventions with the whole community and other stakeholders to support them in accessing or setting up systems, services and structures that can ensure holistic child wellbeing after phase-out.

This is also reflected in four anticipated outcomes for these target groups:



- A. Children participate successfully in life, are well-educated and receive adequate care;
- B. Youth are self-reliant, confident and ready for work;
- C. Parents and caretakers are able to take care of themselves and the children within their families;
- D. Interventions with the whole community and other stakeholders to support them in accessing or setting up systems, services and structures that can ensure holistic child wellbeing after phase-out.

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) at the one hand and the community as a whole on the other. At family level all interventions come together, and all families together form one community.

How will we reach this impact?

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

1. Transfer of knowledge and skills

The first strategy starts from the assumption that to unleash people’s potential they need to acquire good knowledge, skills and practices. Children, youth, parents/caretakers and communities need to acquire additional knowledge and skills to strengthen attitude and practice towards children’s wellbeing. Help a Child supports the community through all kinds of training and development of skills and knowledge.



2. Working in groups

We consider social exclusion as an important aspect of poverty and lack of resilience: for people living on their own it is hard to escape the cycle of poverty. For this reason, our second strategy is to organize people in groups. Working together in groups fits also very



A women's selfhelp group during their weekly meeting in Mavindini, Kenya

well within the context of Africa and Asia. First, this takes place at community level. Depending on the context and local needs; women, men and youth are organized either in mixed or separate groups. Encouraging men, women, youth and children to join groups stimulates involvement and active participation of a large part of the community. In addition, each and every group can work on issues that are of particular interest to their group (e.g. children on children issues, parents on parenting). This makes it possible 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 feelings of solidarity and recognition and creates synergy. The established groups are therefore used as a vehicle to transfer knowledge and skills. It is expected that sharing and learning in these groups leads to increased resilience and self-esteem. Working together provides the people with the ability to speak out, claim their rights and make their demands known because, 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: as the number of groups grows in a community or geographical area these groups are encouraged to establish a network or association of groups (i.e. 'Cluster Level Associations' or 'Civil Based Organizations'). To represent 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, for an individual smallholder farmer it is almost impossible to produce sufficient volume and to adhere to market standards. However, when a group of farmers joins forces, they become able to produce higher volume of better quality which makes them an interesting market player. For these reasons, we believe that working in groups empowers. We also believe that group empowerment is able to generate a multiplier and sustainable effect contributing to the wellbeing of children.

3. Cooperation with external actors and systems

Communities do not stand on their own, but are part of a larger environment that has influence on the wellbeing 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 that influence community interventions positively or negatively. This local context is different for each community. As a first step, it is therefore 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, local businesses and local government.



Who is doing what?

Help a Child in the Netherlands:

1. Develops the Help a Child Theory of Change and checks whether local TOCs are in line with the Help a Child ToC.
2. Gathers relevant knowledge and good practices, by linking with other NGOs, knowledge institutions and knowledge networks in the Netherlands and internationally;
3. Adapts this knowledge and good practices to the local context of the partner organisations; develops inspiring tools, and develops and tests intervention models and evidence-based methodologies;
4. Shares knowledge and skills through values and a language that Help a Child has in common with its partners and beneficiaries. This means that sometimes Help a Child uses Christian language and sometimes the language of morals and Human Rights.

Help a Child Country Office:

1. Coordinates country programmes and adds expertise and project elements on Early Childhood Development and Youth & Work;
2. Contextualises the ToC of Help a Child to the local context and designs projects to improve the well-being of children.
3. Builds the capacity of our implementing partners since they are crucial players in working with children and communities;
4. Facilitates linkages to external service providers if needed and lobbies and advocates for improved child well-being

The partner:

1. Contributes to the country programme of Help a Child and the contextualisation of the ToC of Help a Child
2. Facilitates the set-up of groups and empowers members through transfer of skills and knowledge to the members; and other implementing activities;
3. Coordinates with other stakeholders and lobbies and advocates for improved child well-being.

The community:

1. Participates actively in the design and monitoring of the project;
2. Organizes themselves in people's institutions where capacity of the members is built in order to create supportive communities for the well-being of children.

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, belief systems, other actors 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. We assume that they indeed take over the leading role to guide the development process in the community after approximately seven years;
- The transfer of skills and knowledge helps marginalized groups unleash their potential. It is possible to establish a network of people's institutions up to district/province or national level that is able to take the cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual development of their children in their own hands; which enables Help a Child and partners to withdraw and move on to another community after approximately seven years;
- 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) transfer of knowledge and 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, market, and service providers, children have improved conditions for increased wellbeing.
- Empowerment of the community, families and children contributes to the wellbeing 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.
- Healthy structures composed of intrinsically motivated people are a key to success and to sustainability.
- Through increased solidarity, wellbeing and harmony, a more peaceful context can be established.



Assumptions on other actors

- Relevant actors are willing to participate and to play their expected roles.
- 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 dimensions of children's well-being is the most effective way to improve children's wellbeing;
- Addressing all four domains of child wellbeing requires cooperation with the key stakeholders directly responsible (children, youth, parents and community/farmers) as well as important influencers and agents of change like the government and economic actors;

Assumptions on the context

- If possible, we work and contribute to increasing peaceful communities where basic facilities (like schools, market, and health system) are in place.
- We work in areas/countries that provide an enabling environment for non-state actors.

Our approaches

Community transformation

All people have qualities and an intrinsic ability to develop themselves to their potential. However, due to circumstances and their environment they might lack the power to develop these capacities and to prosper. To make sure people can change their lives in a long-lasting and sustainable way, this potential needs to be unleashed. This is also true when it comes to children's wellbeing. Our strategy is therefore to empower marginalized children, youth, parents, families and communities to escape the poverty trap by strengthening their resilience and their voice. All people have a unique personality. This personality is shaped by the natural and social environment someone lives in. 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 wellbeing this can be positive (e.g. effective education system) and negative (e.g. malfunctioning child protection systems). For this reason working closely with different type 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 both 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 have active involvement of (representatives of) the whole community (e.g. children, community leaders, women, people living with a disability) and to take the actual needs and opportunities into consideration. Together the best entry point to improve the wellbeing of children is chosen. To illustrate this; in some of our projects we work directly with children. In other cases however the best way to enhance the wellbeing of children is through improving the environment children live in, such as through increasing family income. In that case our projects focus more on assisting adults such 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 target groups know their local context best. Their knowledge and insight is key to develop initiatives that contribute to children's wellbeing in their own communities. The approach of Help a Child is inclusive.

This means that people can participate regardless their social, political, religious, ethnic or economic background. Also the participation of the poorest families, 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 project and therefore we value child rights; this includes children's active participation in matters affecting their lives.



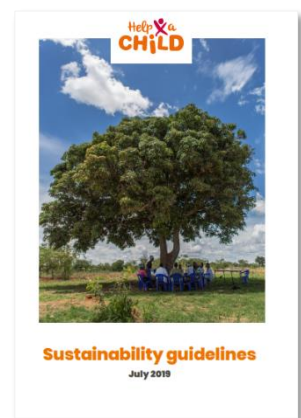
With whom?

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

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

Sustainability

A project 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 should be functioning well and knowledge, skills and practices of community members are continuously adapting to a changing context. Thereby contributing to community transformation and child wellbeing. In a sustainable project there is attention for the changing context, local ownership, inclusive participation, self-reliance and ability to link and lobby with public and private actors. You can read more about sustainable programming in our before mentioned Sustainability Guidelines.



Phasing and exit strategy

Help a Child works in communities for a period of approximately seven years. The strategy of Help a Child is to exit a community when the community is resilient to safeguard the wellbeing of children even after phase-out. From the start, 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 take up their own development process, preparing them to continue safe-guarding for children after the phase-out.