

CHILD SPONSORSHIP RESEARCH

CRITICAL INSIGHT INTO

**FAITH-BASED**

DEVELOPMENT

World Vision's Christian identity and the way it informs programming

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# Foreword

Interest in faith in development has increased in recent years. There is growing recognition that faith-based organisations make a unique contribution to development.

In World Vision, our Christian faith is central to our approaches to child-focused community development and child sponsorship. Inspired by God, we are empowered to love our neighbours – each one made in the image of God. Through our work, we seek justice for the poor and oppressed, bearing witness to God’s unconditional love for all persons. We desire that all our work and relationships reveal a good and loving God who desires ‘fullness of life’ for all children. For example, our aims to include the most vulnerable children and to enable gender equality and transformed relationships within families and communities all flow from biblical teaching and our faith identity.

World Vision’s partnership policies guide the organisation’s practices, providing principles for Christian witness at the heart of our organisational identity. They uphold humanitarian principles that aid is not provided on condition of belief or participation in religious activities. Policies also guide church partnerships and interfaith relations. They provide principles for spiritual nurture of children, respecting the rights and responsibilities of the parents and children who participate in World Vision programmes.

Yet faith is inherently personal, and in a multi-denominational organisation like World Vision, it is diverse. This diversity is evident in programmes which are operated with staff from a broad range of backgrounds, working together with community volunteers and partners of many different faiths. Child sponsors also bring their diverse personal experiences of faith and a diverse range of expectations. Given this complexity, the question of how our Christian identity influences our practice is a challenging one, but one that we are often asked by both the communities we serve and our donors.

We commissioned this research to learn more about the relationship between our faith commitments and the effectiveness of our programmes in order to strengthen accountability with communities and sponsors. This research explores this relationship in a range of different contexts. The findings are illuminating – they highlight how diverse our sponsorship programmes are, yet they also point to consistent themes. These include our approach to Christian witness, engagement with issues of faith in development, partnerships with faith-based organisations and a holistic focus on the well-being of children, including their spiritual nurture.

The research shows ways that these themes are operationalised in different contexts. In Uganda, Christian and Muslim organisations are mobilised to promote prevention of HIV and care of people affected by HIV. In Sri Lanka, the focus is on restoring relationships in a post-war context. In Armenia, World Vision partners with the Orthodox Church to build its capacity in promoting issues of social justice.

The researchers found that at times some staff did not understand how to distinguish their personal expression of Christian faith from organisational policies. These learnings are helping to build greater internal coherence around our consolidated policy perspective.

We hope this report will help us reflect on our Christian identity and assist us to better understand how our Christian faith unifies us as an organisation *in our practice*, despite diversity. We hope it helps readers understand how our faith is integral to sponsorship programmes.

We look forward to next steps in this research journey that involves research institutions with substantial expertise to deepen our understanding. Please join us on this journey. We welcome any feedback on this initial report.

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# Introduction

*'Poverty is a surmountable condition of deprivation, vulnerability and broken relationships, which often threatens human survival and involves unacceptable human suffering, preventing people from fulfilling their God-given potential.'* – World Vision Ministry Framework

As a Christian agency, World Vision's work is explicitly motivated by a desire to exhibit an expression and sign of God's unconditional love for the poor and powerless. Historically, World Vision's Christian identity has primarily been understood in terms of core purpose and values. Recent internal reviews have begun to explore the impact of its Christian faith on programming.

It has been argued that faith-based organisations compare favourably to secular organisations when it comes to building bridges with local communities.<sup>1</sup> Kessler and Arkush highlight that local communities are often more receptive to faith-based organisations, and that collaboration with faith-based organisations contributes to inter-religious and cross-cultural understanding.<sup>2</sup> They also point to some of the challenges that faith-based organisations need to manage, such as perceptions within their own faith community of giving to 'others' before their 'own'. They further argue that faith-based organisations often need to manage concerns that they may represent the interests of one faith community over others in the communities with whom they engage. Questions about proselytism are also often raised with regard to faith-based organisations.

The interest in the role of faith in development has contributed to changing perceptions of faith-based organisations and a deeper understanding of the unique contribution they make to international development, through their extensive reach and their critical role in providing outreach, resources and service delivery.<sup>3</sup>

While there is a growing body of external evidence on the contribution of faith-based organisations in international development, little research has been conducted to understand and demonstrate the way World Vision's Christian identity informs its development practice. The Child Sponsorship Research begins to address this gap. Given that existing evidence is limited, the research is exploratory in nature and seeks to provide insight into the range of ways that Christian identity influences World Vision programming. These insights are to be tested in a subsequent phase of the Child Sponsorship Research.

This report summarises the findings of eight programme evaluations that explored the way World Vision's Christian faith influences its programming. The eight programmes were selected from five countries: The Kaswa and Nabiswera programmes from Uganda, the Colomi and Arani programmes from Bolivia, the Weeraketiya and Pottuvil programmes from Sri Lanka, the Vardenis programme from Armenia, and the Samaki Meanchey programme from Cambodia. Detailed descriptions of the programmes can be found at the end of this report.

1 A. Scott and E. Anjangwe, 'Faith-based organisations: Should dogma be left out of development', *Guardian Professional* (23 May 2013).

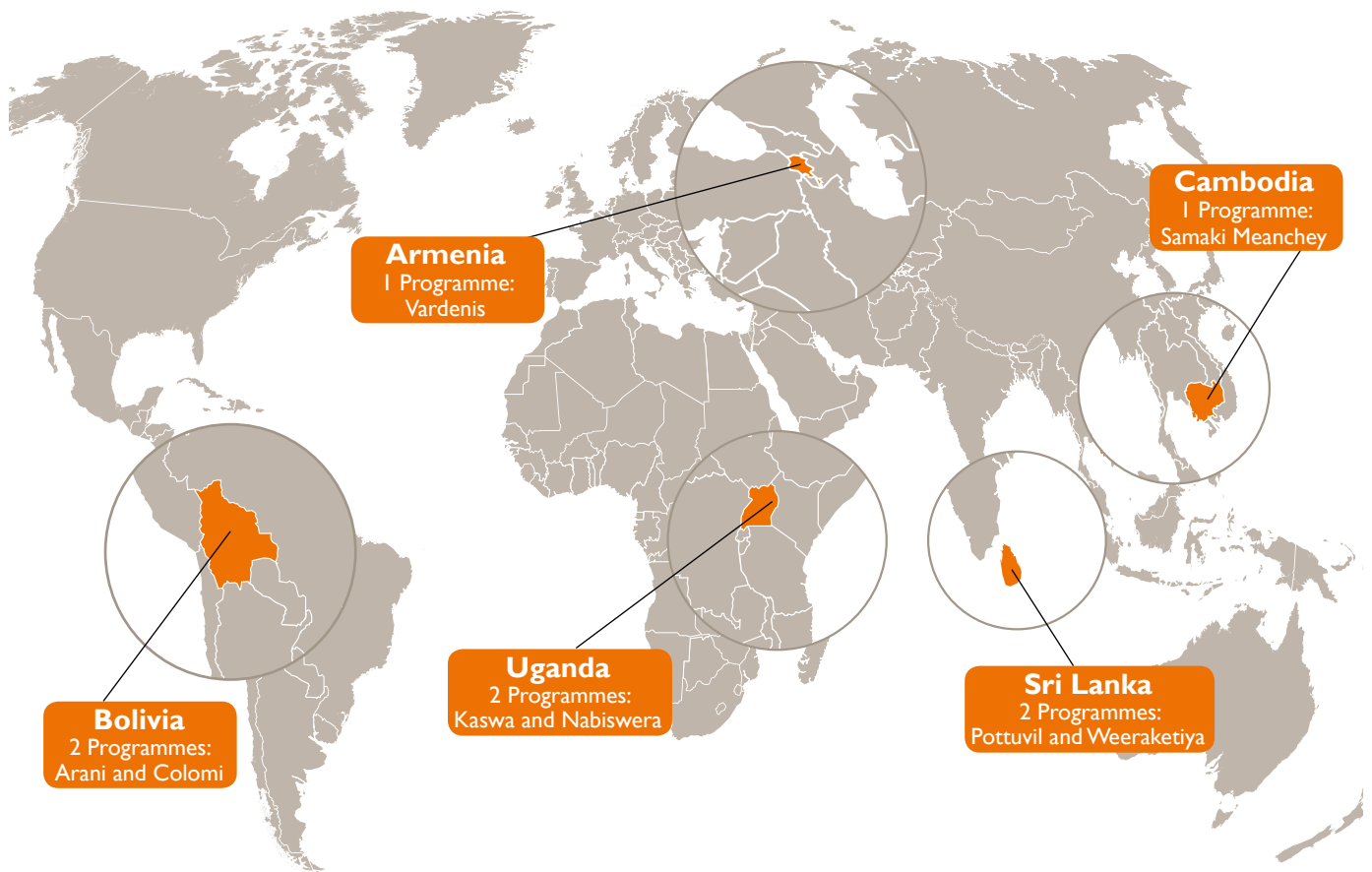
2 E. Kessler and M. Arkush, *Keeping faith in development: The significance of interfaith relations in the work of humanitarian aid and international development organisations*, Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths (2009), <<http://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/uploads/Keeping%20Faith%20in%20Development.pdf>>.

3 UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), *Guidelines for engaging faith-based organisations as agents of change* (2009), <[http://www.unfpa.org/culture/docs/fbo\\_engagement.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/culture/docs/fbo_engagement.pdf)>.



Through its grassroots presence, World Vision seeks to build relationships. Photo: Jon Warren/World Vision

### Figure 1. Map of programme evaluations



# Community perceptions of World Vision's Christian identity

Several of the eight programme evaluations explored community perceptions of World Vision's Christian identity. In others it was deemed inappropriate to explore this topic explicitly in light of local sensitivities; nevertheless, it emerged as a topic of conversation in most of the research sites. It must be noted that a positive response bias is likely given that evaluations were conducted internally.

Several programmes had to overcome initial community apprehension and misunderstanding about World Vision's Christian identity; nevertheless, research findings with regard to community perceptions of World Vision's Christian identity are encouraging.

In Kaswa, Uganda, several respondents noted that when World Vision first came to work in the region there was some expectation that Muslims might not benefit from the programme since World Vision is known to be a Christian organisation. In other programmes, concerns were expressed about World Vision's purpose:

*'When World Vision arrived, people had doubt ... whether they will convert us to their religion. However, now they do not have that fear.'* – Education official, Pottuvil, Sri Lanka

*'At the beginning people were a bit concerned about the influence of Christianity on their religious beliefs. Many people talked about their concerns and felt reluctant to participate in the World Vision meetings or activities, especially when World Vision first came to this area ... After attending a few meetings and listening to the World Vision staff, people ... understand that World Vision does not come to promote Christian beliefs or force any villager to become Christian.'* – Agriculture official, Samaki Meanchey, Cambodia

Data suggests that World Vision was able to overcome initial community concerns and suspicion where this emerged. In fact, an oft-cited characteristic of World Vision across the research sites was that World Vision is inclusive, works without bias and is respectful of people. For example, in Kaswa, World Vision was described as inclusive and fair because of its partnerships with Muslim organisations, equitable cross-faith provision of sponsorship and project activities for all community members, regardless of faith. An official comments as follows:

*'[W]hen doing their work they never discriminate. They serve everybody in the community regardless of belief or ethnicity, although their staff members continue to practice and exhibit their Christian values in their services. In fact, they are considered highly in every home in Masaka.'* – Agriculture official, Kaswa, Uganda

In other contexts, similar comments were made:

*'In my point of view, the support has been unconditional, unrestricted without regard about way of thinking or creed.'* – Local leader, Arani, Bolivia

*'Each World Vision activity ... is open to participation of all villagers without discrimination.'* – Village leader, Samaki Meanchey, Cambodia

Even in some communities with a predominantly Christian populace, staff members reported having to overcome initial misunderstandings about the purpose of World Vision's work. However, in others, community members commented on the 'natural' or 'easy' collaboration with World Vision as a Christian organisation. For example:

*'Almost everybody is Christian in Armenia and the collaboration of a Christian organisation with Christians is easy because God is in the centre.'* – Church leader, Vardenis, Armenia

In fact, for some, World Vision's Christian faith was important to ensure trust:

*'As we are a Christian nation, it's very important that World Vision is a Christian organisation. People trust it.'* – Caregiver, Vardenis, Armenia

Overall, community perceptions of World Vision were positive, with feedback suggesting World Vision is inclusive, works without bias and is respectful of all people. However, findings also support the



literature referred to earlier that highlights that faith-based organisations need to manage perceptions that they may represent the interests of one faith

community over others. Findings suggest programmes were generally successful in overcoming such concerns where they emerged.



*World Vision activities are open to participation by all. Photo: Sopheak Kong/World Vision*

# Expression of Christian faith within programming

The work plans of the eight programmes that were included in the Child Sponsorship Research mostly emphasise the technical aspects of activities and resemble those that are developed by secular agencies. However, World Vision is not a Christian organisation in name only. Nor is its Christian faith expressed only in terms of its core purpose and values. Christian beliefs underpin programming priorities and the community-based approach that is core to World Vision programmes. World Vision's programming aims to see that children grow in their awareness and understanding of God's love, and it promotes spiritual nurture as a necessary part of the holistic well-being of children. At the same time, World Vision policy respects and promotes children's rights to freedom. World Vision's policies pre-empt proselytising and require compliance with international codes of conduct that prohibit inducing or demanding that people hear a certain message or affirm a specific belief as a prerequisite to receiving assistance.

Findings reveal that across the eight programmes, activities are premised on a relational view of poverty. This is informed by World Vision's Christian world view that conceives of poverty as the result of broken relationships – with self, community, God and the environment. Therefore, activities seek to foster transformed relationships in communities, and this manifests in three key ways: through Christian witness, through the spiritual nurture of children and through partnerships with faith-based organisations.

## Christian witness

Through its grassroots presence and long-term engagement with a community and local partners, World Vision seeks to be transformative in building

and restoring relationships. Staff are encouraged through their daily activities to identify with and live alongside the poor and vulnerable. This 'ministry of presence' motivates World Vision to operate in some of the most difficult places in the world. It is explicitly inspired by a desire to bear witness to God's unconditional love and recognises the equality of all human beings.<sup>4</sup> It requires depth of engagement and time.

Many staff reported their work with World Vision provided an opportunity to live out their faith and bear witness. For example:

*'[We] are Christians and look at things and handle them the way our Lord lived and treated people. Like here, working with people of different character ... in the community where you are not born. It is because of love. I interact with the people in the community, and I like it.'*  
– World Vision staff member, Nabiswera, Uganda

*'We don't declare [our Christian faith], we teach that through our life.'* – World Vision staff member, Weeraketiya, Sri Lanka



*World Vision staff often live alongside and identify with those whom they serve. Photo: Eugene Lee/World Vision*

To promote a strong grassroots presence, staff members mostly live in or nearby the programme area. Some staff report that they struggle with requirements to live a long way from family and facilities. Nevertheless, the value of World Vision's ministry of presence is evident from comments by community members:

<sup>4</sup> B. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, Revised and expanded edition (2011), Orbis Books, New York.

*‘[The programme staff] were sent from heaven. There was so much trust that we took them to our house to share with our families. We have built a relationship of trust. We are like brothers, [the programme staff] became like our family because they earned our trust. If someone leaves, we miss him and feel sad.’*

– Community member, Arani, Bolivia

*‘World Vision has helped children who are disabled or needy because they do as Christ said. They have taught people and fed them just like Christ did. This symbolises real Christianity.’* – Church leader, Nabiswera, Uganda

However, at times the scale of operations and the practice of national offices to locate staff at the district level mean that staffing levels in the community are not sufficient to enable in-depth engagement. For example, in Nabiswera, Uganda, staff report maintaining the depth of engagement within the communities they serve is challenging, given the low staffing levels and the substantial scale and scope of operations. As a result, they are not always able to meet community expectations. This leads to frustrations on the part of both staff and community stakeholders:

*‘Community development assistants are supposed to live at parish level; however we have one staff person for three parishes. There is a disconnect between what should be and what is happening.’* – World Vision staff member, Nabiswera, Uganda

### **Critical insight: The implications of scale for grassroots presence**

Research findings highlight that as World Vision seeks to scale up its technical programmes, staff numbers at the local level are sometimes reduced and instead located at the district level. This undermines the ‘ministry of presence’ and depth of engagement that is core to World Vision’s model, which seeks to catalyse transformed relationships by being with and coming alongside the communities it serves.

While several programmes concentrated resources in focus areas to enable depth of engagement, this was not the case everywhere. For example, the Vardenis programme in Armenia targeted a

large area with the result that resources were spread thinly. This did not allow for the depth of engagement that was evident in other programmes.

Finally, research revealed that at times staff members seem unable to articulate the organisation’s policy view, or to effectively distinguish or reconcile their personal expression of Christian faith with the global policy that promotes witness without proselytism and promotes spiritual nurture while respecting and promoting children’s rights to freedom. Given that faith is inherently personal, and therefore necessarily diverse in a multi-denominational organisation like World Vision, this is a difficult issue to navigate. This further highlights the importance of clarifying how Christian faith informs programming.

## **Partnerships with faith-based organisations**

In addition to Christian witness, programme activities seek to foster transformed relationships in communities through engagement with issues of faith and partnerships with faith-based organisations. This reflects a view that faith and spirituality are core to value formation, human development and relationships.

Formal and informal partnerships with churches and other faith-based organisations were evident in all of the eight programmes. This section includes in-depth descriptions of such partnerships to highlight how these enabled programmes to respond to specific local development challenges and opportunities in a way that sought to foster transformed relationships.

For WV Lanka, the relational view of poverty is explicit in its strategic intent to support interfaith relationships. The Pottuvil programme worked with Muslim and Hindu organisations with the intent to diffuse religious tensions through interfaith committees, which promoted dialogue, mutual understanding and respect. The programme also developed a formal partnership with local Christian churches to build their capacity and gain their support to improve the well-being of children. In addition, the programme sought to bring children from different villages together in children’s clubs. In doing so the programme intentionally tried to improve understanding and foster relationships across different ethnic and religious groups as a

form of reconciliation for the next generation. This is important given the history of civil conflict in the area.<sup>5</sup> Between 2011 and 2014, roughly 2,600 children participated in children's clubs in the Pottuvil programme.

In Kaswa, Uganda, World Vision partnered with all the churches and mosques within its geographic boundaries to promote HIV prevention, care and support. Through the 'Channels of Hope for HIV Initiative', the programme mobilised and trained local religious leaders from Christian and Muslim faith communities on HIV prevention and care. The training included discussion and interpretation of passages from the Bible and Qu'ran to inform participants' responses to individuals affected by HIV in their communities. Religious leaders were also encouraged to form Community Hope Action Teams within their own congregations to promote voluntary counselling and testing, advocacy, and provide home monitoring and support for members affected by HIV and AIDS. Many research participants credited the Channels of Hope initiative with transforming relationships within congregations. HIV-related stigma was reduced, people living with HIV felt more cared for and well-being markedly improved for many HIV-affected children and families:

*'It is because these faith leaders receive many people on a weekly basis. Whatever they say goes straight to the entire community.'* – Muslim Community Hope Action Team Member, Kaswa, Uganda

*'They encouraged us not to stigmatise people living with HIV/AIDS, but to handle them with love and care, as we know they are all people like us.'* – Female community member, Kaswa, Uganda

*'Yes, we have had a big change in attitude; it is very vivid that a big number of HIV-positive believers have come out in our Mosque openly and are getting all the possible support, as a result of the work done by the Hope Team Members. They counselled them well. In our community these days everyone is almost like a counsellor to the other. When one finds the other one down due to sickness, he or she will take care and ... will inquire if the sick person has ever taken a HIV test, and will advise accordingly. For example, the person you are already talking with. I did not want to disclose to you at first, but I was personally counselled by the Hope Team Members.'*

<sup>5</sup> R. Nanthakumaran, *End phase evaluation of the World Vision Lanka-Pottuvil Area Development Programme, 1999–2009, Phase II, Sri Lanka (2009)*.

*I decided to go for a HIV test and I began treatment.'*  
– Male community member, Kaswa, Uganda

*'If I never had [the Hope team] around me, I could have died. And now I have raised my children, and I am on HIV medication. I am 52 years old. My son had a wedding. He is 32 years. Do you think I would have had that joy otherwise? Me, I see that the goal of the initiative was achieved. It was to boost people's lives and to withstand the challenges.'* – Female community member, Kaswa, Uganda

The Nabiswera programme in Uganda provides another good example of a situation where it was critical to engage with issues of spirituality and bring faith leaders, government and community stakeholders together to address a significant impediment to health service provision. The primary health facility had been closed for six months due to reports of witchcraft. To address this situation, World Vision organised a meeting of government and community stakeholders, including church leaders, to facilitate dialogue. At the meeting, stakeholders agreed the centre had to be re-opened. It was further agreed that local government would provide security for the clinic; community churches provided an altar at the health centre and prayed every morning and evening; the health department provided health staff that lived in the quarters and ensured they reported to work daily; and finally, World Vision supported the installation of solar power to improve lighting in the facility, enabling staff to serve at the centre without fear, 24 hours a day. The facility was able to re-open, and as a result, pregnant women had a place to go for prenatal care and childbirth; children suffering from malaria, diarrhoea, pneumonia and other serious illnesses could get treatment; vaccinations could resume; and individuals had a place to go for confidential testing and counselling on HIV and AIDS.

In Armenia – a very different context – World Vision engages intentionally with the Orthodox Church, recognising the important role of the church in shaping Armenia's religious and cultural identity. World Vision Armenia has sought to contribute to rebuilding the church, following its decline during the Soviet era. The focus of this engagement has been on issues of social justice. The Vardenis programme supported church projects such as computer classes for vulnerable youth, cultural-historical excursions and seminars on topics such as child protection.

In addition, clergy and church representatives were trained in HIV and AIDS awareness, strategic planning and programme design to ensure their effective participation. A review conducted in 2010<sup>6</sup> suggests that WV Armenia was recognised as playing an influential role in transforming the church in some of the communities where it works:

*‘In the last 20 years, World Vision has really helped to change the environment of faith; it is exceptional to think that family clubs and AIDS training could be run through the church.’ – Local church leader, Armenia*

In Bolivia, the Arani programme supported pastoral counselling of families affected by alcohol use and intimate partner violence:

*‘They taught us respect and values as a couple. He used to hit me before, not anymore now. Yes, the [programme] has changed us because it teaches us to have values as a family.’ – Community member, Arani, Bolivia*

Given the faith context in Cambodia, it is not surprising that partnerships with Christian churches were limited in Samaki Meanchey. However, where such collaboration did take place, church leaders noted that World Vision was the only organisation with which they collaborated. They also reported that their linkage with local government and focus on social activities was growing as a result of World Vision’s facilitation:

*‘Gradually, the individual local government officers, who once marginalised the Church’s role, now have engaged the Church in social development activities because of World Vision Cambodia, which has bridged this gap through various programme and activities.’ – Local church leader, Samaki Meanchey, Cambodia*

The Samaki Meanchey programme also worked with a number of pagodas (Buddhist temples) to carry out community development:

*‘World Vision is a Christian [non-governmental organisation], but all activities and programmes are supporting social development in the village, which align with the mission of the Pagoda. So we often work together to improve the livelihood of villagers.’ – Buddhist monk, Samaki Meanchey, Cambodia*

Overall, research findings provide important insights into the context-specific ways that World Vision programmes engage with issues in the spiritual domain and partner with local faith-based organisations.



WV Armenia engages with the Orthodox Church, which plays an important role in shaping Armenia’s religious and cultural identity. Photo: Ani Chitemyan/World Vision

### **Critical insight: Accelerating change through engaging with issues of faith**

Findings suggest efforts that mobilise faith leaders and engage directly with issues in the spiritual domain may be an effective way to promote local social norms and values that are conducive to improving child well-being. Engaging with issues of faith and partnering with faith leaders may accelerate progress towards improved child well-being. Further research is required to validate this.

<sup>6</sup> A. Newmarch and A. Goode, *Evaluation report: WV Armenia Christian Commitments Program*, World Vision Australia and World Vision Armenia (2010).

## Spiritual nurture and lifeskills

World Vision's Christian faith informs the way that child well-being is defined within a broad framework that does not just focus on survival and basic needs. It also emphasises spiritual nurture, social connectedness, civil life skills, value formation, personal skills and safety. Programme activities are designed to build resilience and hope, and empower children to experience the love of God and their neighbour, even if these activities are not explicitly Christian or religious in nature.

In the Weeraketiya programme, which works in a predominantly Buddhist community, the spiritual nurture of children included a focus on mobilising children and adolescents to participate in societies. These brought children together to promote awareness of child rights, life skills development, leadership development and value formation. While no baseline data is available to assess change over time, surveys with these adolescents revealed that a large majority report positive relationships with their parents and feel supported by their families. They also scored relatively high on the resilience scale (122.4 out of a possible 140), as well as on the hope scale (19.47 out of a possible 24). Moderate, but statistically significant correlations were observed for adolescents who had participated in child societies and who had high hope scores.

Similar associations were found in all six programmes where correlation analysis was conducted.<sup>7</sup> In Pottuvil (Sri Lanka), findings highlight a trend towards higher hope and resilience scores among adolescents, as the level of participation in World Vision activities increased. In Kaswa (Uganda), participation in World Vision activities, such as children's clubs, leadership training and peer networking activities, were statistically associated with youth reporting higher levels of family and adult support. The data for Vardenis (Armenia) indicates that adolescents who had participated in children's clubs in the past 12 months tended to have higher resilience, and adolescents who had participated in a higher number of programming activities had higher scores on the hope scale. In Colomi (Bolivia), participation in youth network activities correlated with spiritual growth

and optimism about their lives. In Samaki Meanchey (Cambodia), those who participated in activities designed to promote child rights, learning groups and leadership activities scored higher on scales that assessed their internal development assets (for example, social competencies and social support).

### Youth network in Colomi, Bolivia

The Colomi programme mobilised a youth network to improve child protection. Approximately 300 adolescents participated in 12 networks in schools and churches that organised workshops, campaigns, theatre festivals, spiritual retreats and exchanges with other networks, as well as fun activities such as a soccer tournament. Activities focused on child rights, prevention of drug and alcohol abuse, issues of child protection and communications. An optional open-ended question on the youth survey asked about the types of changes they experienced as a result of the network. This was answered by 111 of the 153 survey participants and highlighted a range of positive changes, most notably developing a positive sense of self, improving social competencies and development of positive values:

*'The changes that the network makes me live out is the best version of me.'*

*'I have a vision for my future, and I feel confident in my skin.'*

*'Thanks to the network I know myself better, which is one of my greatest achievements. Also, I lost my shyness.'*

In this Christian context, some of the adolescents expressed how their experiences had impacted them spiritually:

*'[Participation in the network] helped me to approach God. Before I didn't know what it meant but now I know it.'*

*'In my case, I used to drink a bit and I was into drugs. At a retreat I met God's love and left my past behind. Now I have a mission to help people. If God did something for me, why couldn't I do something for people? Through World Vision it is easier.'*

<sup>7</sup> Except for Samaki Meanchey, associations were statistically significant. In Samaki Meanchey sampling issues resulted in wide confidence intervals.

### **Critical insight: Hope, resilience and social scores correlate with participation in World Vision activities**

In all six programmes where correlation analysis was conducted, positive associations were found between adolescent participation in World Vision activities and hope, resilience, social support or social competency scores. Activities included children's clubs, leadership training and peer networking. Further research into these associations is required to determine if programme activities led to these outcomes.



*Children who participated in programme activities scored higher on scales that assessed hope, resilience or social competency. Photo: Laura Reinhardt/World Vision*

Overall, programmes explicitly referenced a desire for children to experience the love of God, even if in non-Christian contexts this was not through Christian religious activities, or understood by children through a Christian framework. Both qualitative and quantitative findings highlight youth exhibited moderate to high levels of confidence, self-awareness, support from those around them, hope and resilience. Some of these were found to be positively correlated with participation in World Vision activities.

### **Towards transformed relationships**

Overall, findings reveal that programme activities are consistently premised on a relational understanding of poverty that is informed by a Christian world view, and this is manifest in a focus on Christian witness, faith partnerships and spiritual nurture of children. **In fact, findings suggest that the focus on transformed relationships is core to the way in which World Vision programmes seek to contribute to child well-being.** However, while qualitative data collected as part of the research provides many examples of the ways in which programme activities fostered transformed relationships, it was more difficult to assess this quantitatively.

The research explored adolescents' perceptions of their relationship with their families and communities. It also assessed caregiver perceptions of social cohesion, participation and collaboration, ability of community members to manage conflict, and strength of local leadership. With some variation, responses were often favourable on these indicators, particularly for programmes that were about to conclude. Moreover, for some of these indicators findings are positively correlated with programme activities. However, World Vision tends not to assess these types of outcomes of programmes, and therefore these aspects were not assessed at the baselines of the eight programmes. This makes any assessment of change over time difficult.

### **Critical insight: Measuring transformed relationships**

World Vision has made substantial progress in measuring child well-being outcomes. However, the organisation has not yet conducted the necessary research to demonstrate World Vision's contribution to child well-being. Research findings suggest that programme activities are consistently premised on the notion that transforming relationships is core to World Vision's contribution. Further research is recommended to strengthen the evidence for this hypothesis.

# In summary

Perceptions of World Vision were predominantly positive. Findings suggest programmes were successful in overcoming initial apprehension or misunderstanding when they began operations, particularly in communities of other faiths. An oft-cited characteristic of World Vision in research sites is that World Vision is inclusive, works without bias and is respectful of all people.

While programme documentation is often technical in nature, and descriptions of programme activities may be similar to those found in secular agencies, research findings highlight that World Vision is not Christian in name only. Its Christian identity informs its approach and underpins many of its programming priorities, specifically its community-based approach.

Findings reveal that across the eight programmes, activities are premised on a relational view of poverty that is informed by World Vision's Christian faith. Poverty is considered to be the result of broken relationships – with self, community, God and the environment. Therefore, activities seek to foster transformed relationships in communities. This manifests in three ways.

Firstly, motivated by a desire to bear witness to God's unconditional love that recognises the equality of all human beings, World Vision sought to have a grassroots presence in each of the eight programmes. Many staff report being motivated by their faith. The value of World Vision's ministry of presence is evident from comments by community members. However, at times the scale of operations and the practice of national offices to locate staff at the district level mean that staffing levels in the community are insufficient to enable this level of in-depth personal engagement.

Secondly, World Vision's Christian faith informs the way that child well-being is defined. It does not just focus on survival and basic needs, but also emphasises spiritual nurture, social connectedness, civil life skills, value formation, personal skills and safety. Programmes are designed to build resilience and hope, and empower children to enable them to experience the love of God and their neighbours, even if these activities are not

explicitly Christian or religious in nature, and the experience is not necessarily understood by children through a Christian framework. Both qualitative and quantitative findings highlight youth exhibited good to excellent levels of confidence, self-awareness, support from those around them, hope and resilience. In six of the eight programmes these findings were positively correlated with participation in World Vision activities, such as children's clubs and leadership training.

Thirdly, World Vision actively engages with issues in the spiritual domain, recognising faith and spirituality as core to value formation, human development and community relations. Therefore World Vision collaborates with and mobilises local faith-based organisations for development. Formal and informal partnerships with churches and other faith-based organisations were evident in all of the eight programmes. Findings suggest that efforts that mobilise faith leaders and engage directly with issues in the spiritual domain may be an effective way to address local social norms and values to improve child well-being. Further research is required to validate this.

## *Critical insight: Christian faith within programming*

World Vision's Christian faith is evident in programming through a focus on fostering transformed relationships in communities. This focus is manifest in the eight programmes in three key ways: through Christian witness, through the spiritual nurture of children and through partnerships with faith-based organisations. How these three elements are expressed in programmes is very diverse, as programmes engage with different faith communities and respond to context-specific development challenges.

To assess the extent to which programmes fostered transformed relationships, the research explored adolescents' perceptions of their relationship with their families and communities. It also assessed perceptions of caregivers on social cohesion, confidence in participation, collaboration, their



ability to manage conflict and the strength of local leadership. With some variation, responses were often favourable on these indicators, particularly for programmes that were about to conclude. Moreover, for some of these indicators, findings positively correlated with participation in programme activities. However, no assessment of change over time was possible.

In summary, research findings highlight a range of ways in which World Vision's Christian identity influences its programming. Further research should shed light on the way in which this impacts its effectiveness in improving child well-being.

## More about the Child Sponsorship Research

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The investigation of World Vision's Christian identity and the way this influences its programming was conducted as part of World Vision's global Child Sponsorship Research. This project was established in 2013 to address the evidence gap for sponsorship programming. The research is part of World Vision's global Sponsorship Transformation Programme and seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What contribution do World Vision programmes make to the well-being of children, including the registered/sponsored children? Do the most vulnerable children participate or benefit?
2. How does World Vision's community-based approach support communities to improve the well-being of their children?
3. How does World Vision's Christian identity inform the way it works?
4. How effective are child sponsorship activities (i.e. sponsorship communications and child

monitoring) in creating life-enriching experiences for children, communities and supporters?

5. How do development programmes enable communities to sustain improvements in child well-being?

To explore these questions, World Vision conducted eight programme evaluations in countries across the globe. In addition, it sought to address the evidence gap on sponsor transformation by exploring sponsors' experiences, specifically the various ways sponsors engage and how sponsorship generates enriching experiences.

This report is a summary of the findings for research question 3, which were derived from eight programme evaluation reports that were completed in July 2015. For readers seeking more details, please contact James Addis, Communications Officer, Child Sponsorship: [james\\_addis@worldvision.org](mailto:james_addis@worldvision.org).

## Methodology

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Given that existing evidence was limited, the aim of the research was to provide insight into the range of ways that Christian identity influences World Vision programming. This was done with a view to generating hypotheses to be tested in a subsequent phase of the Child Sponsorship Research. To support this exploratory focus, programme evaluations relied heavily on qualitative methods, but also included quantitative methods. Qualitative methods, including group discussions and in-depth interviews, were conducted with church leaders and community members, including children. Quantitative methods comprised surveys with adolescents and caregivers. These assessed child well-being, particularly the extent to which children enjoy positive relations with their families and communities, feel cared for and loved. Surveys also explored hope and resilience among adolescents, and relationships in community.

### The eight evaluated programmes

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The programme evaluations summarised in this report were conducted in five countries:

**Uganda.** Uganda suffers high poverty rates and was significantly affected by the HIV and AIDS crisis. Two Ugandan programmes, Kaswa and Nabiswera, were selected for inclusion in the research. The Kaswa programme began its operations in 1991. This programme partnered with 28 local churches and mosques to promote HIV prevention and care as part of the Channels of Hope initiative. World Vision was preparing to exit from this primarily rural community at the time of the evaluation in 2014. The Nabiswera programme is a relatively new programme established in a rural area in 2010. Apart from ad hoc engagement, the programme implemented a targeted project to build capacity of local church leaders to strengthen the spiritual nurture of children in the area. Both programmes operate in predominantly Christian communities. Kaswa is 86.5 per cent Christian and 13 per cent Muslim. In Nabiswera, 93.1 per cent of the community reported they were Christians, 6 per cent were Muslim and a small percentage had no religion. While not represented in these statistics, folk religion and witchcraft are also common in Uganda.

**Bolivia.** Bolivia's challenges include deep-seated poverty, social unrest, illegal drug production and climate change. Despite being one of the poorest countries in South America, the current President of Bolivia – and first democratically elected indigenous leader – has succeeded in making positive economic and social changes in the country over the last decade. The Roman Catholic Church has a dominant presence in Bolivia, with 76.8 per cent of the population identifying as Catholic. A further 19 per cent are Protestant, while there are a very small number of Muslims and Jews. Many indigenous communities in rural areas practice a mix of Catholic and spiritual traditions.<sup>8</sup> Two Bolivian programmes were selected for inclusion in the research. Both serve rural communities in central Bolivia. The Arani programme began operations in 2001, and World Vision is preparing to exit from this community in 2016. In Arani, the programme has partnered with the Catholic Church to support a home for orphaned children, for social campaigns, and for weeks of prayers on social issues. The Colomi programme was established more recently, in 2010. It collaborated informally with church leaders to coordinate activities, to utilise church buildings and to work together to plan special events, like Christmas parties.

**Sri Lanka.** Sri Lanka suffered from a long-running civil war and the devastating effects of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Children have suffered reduced access to health care and education, and chronic displacement. Two rural programmes, Pottuvil and Weeraketiya, were included in the research. The Pottuvil programme operated from 1999 until 2014 in two divisions – one that had a Hindu majority (96.3 per cent), and the other a Muslim majority (77.2 per cent). Both also have a small Christian and Buddhist presence. The programme partnered with 28 Christian churches located in targeted villages, particularly the Methodist Church and the Catholic Church. Engagement with Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim organisations was more informal and ad hoc. The

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<sup>8</sup> CIA, *The World Factbook. South America: Bolivia*. Retrieved from <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bl.html>>; United States Department of State, *Bolivia 2012 International Religious Freedom Report* (2012). Retrieved from <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/208670.pdf>>.

Weeraketiya programme is located in the south of Sri Lanka in a primarily Buddhist area (98 per cent) that is largely comprised of Sinhalese people. As a result of local sensitivities, the programme did not partner with faith-based organisations. The programme began operating in 1998 and will conclude in 2015. Both programmes have focused on child protection, livelihoods, education, health and nutrition.

**Armenia.** The Vardenis programme began operations in 2004. It is situated along the border with Azerbaijan and comprises a small town within a predominantly rural district. Vardenis is characterised by general decay due to the combined effects of post-Soviet de-industrialisation and war. Christianity has been a defining feature of Armenian culture and identity ever since Christianity was adopted as the national religion as early as AD 301. However, the role and influence of the church in Armenia declined during the Soviet era, which saw thousands of clergy killed and expelled, and churches destroyed and closed down.<sup>9</sup> Since Armenia regained its independence, the church is gradually restoring its role in society. Today, 95 per cent of Armenians identify as Orthodox Christians.<sup>10</sup> The Vardenis programme established a formal partnership with the local Orthodox church.

**Cambodia.** Cambodia is a poor, largely rural, agricultural society. Child protection issues present a persistent problem particularly among the rural poor – with child trafficking and child labour of special concern. The Samaki Meanchey programme was established in 1997 and is preparing to finish work in September 2015. Samaki Meanchey experienced sporadic insecurity due to Khmer Rouge activity early in the life of the programme. Khmer Rouge soldiers occupied several villages in the area until 1998. Survey findings suggest that Samaki Meanchey is a multi-faith community principally comprised of Buddhists with a very small number of Muslims and Christians. The government permits religious freedom but has historically exhibited caution towards Christian organisations due to concerns that some Christian groups convert children to Christianity. Indeed, the government has banned evangelism through several directives, with the most recent issued by the Ministry of Cults and Religions in 2007.<sup>11</sup> World Vision is one of a number of Christian organisations permitted to operate in Cambodia. Mirroring local trends, the programme staff come from a range of faith backgrounds. The programme worked with all of the local Christian churches, of which there are few (4 churches and 25 home churches), to support Sunday School education materials for children. Ten local pagodas have also participated in World Vision; however, the engagement of local mosques was more limited.

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9 E. Stetz, Y. Shahnazarova, A. Harutyunyan and A. Pokhsranyan, *Mid-term evaluation report: Strengthening Christian witness in Armenia Project*, World Vision United States and World Vision Armenia (2013).

10 Armenian Apostolic – 94.7 per cent, other Christian – 4 per cent, Yezidi (monotheist with elements of nature worship) – 1.3 per cent. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/am.html#top>>.

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11 E. Cole, 'Cambodia Bans Evangelism; Accuses Christians of 'Disrupting Society'', *The Christian Post* (18 July 2007). Retrieved on 2 May 2015 from <<http://www.christianpost.com/news/cambodia-bans-evangelism-accuses-christians-of-disrupting-society-28495/>>.

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World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, we are dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. We serve all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

