

World Vision's Theory of Change

January 2013
(Summary)

Acknowledgements

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Glossary of terms

- Children** This term covers boys and girls, adolescent and youth under the age of 18 years.
- Community** It is understood that there are multiple typologies of communities (rural, urban, etc). World Vision’s programming will engage with all types of communities and not only the traditional ‘rural’ community context.
- Family** The term family is used broadly in the programming context. Even marginalised children who are not living in traditional family or community structures usually form some sort of family. World Vision does not target children as individuals alone, and our intent is that children live in families and communities that are caring, protective and nurturing.

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World Vision's Theory of Change

I. Background

World Vision was established in 1950 to respond to the needs of orphans at the end of the Korean war. Since then it has evolved into a global child-focused Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation, dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable children and their families to overcome poverty and injustice, enabling the sustained well-being of children. To address the well-being of children, the organisation aims to address the causes of poverty, focusing on basic needs such as health and nutrition, education, water, sanitation, care and protection, food security and income generation.

Since its inception, World Vision (WV) has expanded to incorporate three ministry (programming) areas that are integrated in our work as outlined in our mission statement:

- **Development:** Transforming communities to improve the well-being of children and reduce poverty.
- **Relief (Disaster management):** Responding to disasters to help communities with immediate needs like food, water and shelter when disaster strikes, assist their recovery and help them devise strategies to cope with future catastrophes.
- **Advocacy:** Advocating for global justice, engaging governments, institutions, donors, communities, and the general public globally, nationally and locally to address global, the systems and structures structural issues that perpetuate poverty and oppression. Today, WV works in 93 countries with 40,000+ staff across the globe in entities that operate as a federated network.

As part of a drive to bring better focus and greater alignment across the Partnership, WV has collectively made a number of strategic choices to clarify our role and priorities. The organisation has confirmed that at the heart of our work are three foundational elements of being Christian, Child-focused and Community-based, which make up our Integrated Focus. Motivated by our faith in Jesus Christ, World Vision serves alongside the poor and oppressed as a demonstration of God's unconditional love for all people. Our child focus prioritises children, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, and empowers them together with their families and communities to improve their well-being. Our work is community-based, which means that WV's primary role is to 'walk alongside' communities, organisations, agencies and the church, who are rooted in the situation.

In addition to outlining our Integrated Focus, the organisation has determined the Principle Level Choices that drive us towards what we want to achieve. These choices are:

- to tackle the **causes of poverty**
- through an **empowerment** approach,
- using **multiple ministry** foci that are
- driven by ministry **priorities**.

WV has also confirmed its commitment to the sustained well-being of children within families and communities, especially the most vulnerable. This single goal for our work has been defined in terms of four specific **Child Well-Being Aspirations**:

- Children enjoy good health;
- Children are educated for life;
- Children experience the love of God and their neighbour; and
- Children are cared for, protected and participating.

Finally, the organisation has developed a Ministry Framework to support this goal and align our approaches to disaster management, development and advocacy. The framework outlines four ministry approaches drawn from methodologies that are asset-based, rights-based, participative, relational, and reflect an understanding of child well-being in terms of the ecology of the child. They include promoting just systems and structures; enabling caring and transformed relationships; assuring resilient households and communities; and empowering children and interdependent communities.

Building on these foundational pieces of work, this document articulates World Vision's theory of change. This includes a diagram (see Appendix) that maps the necessary and sufficient steps that form the pathway of change towards sustained child well-being, and the supporting narrative below that describes the diagram, as well as the assumptions that underpin this theory of change and associated change strategies – our ministry approaches.

2. Theory of change

The theory of change that is described in this document reflects all the changes at various levels that need to occur to lead to the sustained well-being for all children in communities where WV is present. The change inputs to achieve child well-being are *much* broader than WV's ministry contributions; WV will only contribute to some elements that are required for change. No change can be directly attributed to WV, rather our level of contribution will vary from minor to significant, depending on the context.

It is also important to note that the theory of change that is described here reflects our current collective understanding of how change takes place. As we build our evidence base, utilise this in our approaches to programming, and learn from our monitoring and evaluation data and other information, we will refine and adjust our theory of change going forward.

3. How will it help us?

The theory of change provides the basis for a number of aspects of our work. It focuses on the root causes of poverty and injustice. For programming, this theory of change provides a holistic perspective on how elements of our programming integrate to support a broader change process. It also helps us to see how we need to integrate our advocacy and programming work. It further provides an anchor for evidence building and learning in our programmes, outlining a hierarchy of outcomes that can be measured and submitted to empirical enquiry.

The theory of change is also useful in the strategy process, as it provides a practical guide to inform our strategic choices.

Given that as an organisation we facilitate change, our strategies should be based on a very sound theory of change. Just like a business that works out its business model by determining where it will add value to the value chain, so too can WV, or any individual entity within WV, a sector or even a programme, broadly determine the value it will add, and scope its work with reference to the overarching change process that has been mapped here. Each entity, sector or programme will be able to determine what particular capabilities it has that allow it to add value to aspects of the change process. In other words, the theory of change can help WV to decide where we will focus, when and how we will partner, and what we will and will not contribute to at organisational level, national, sector and programme levels.

4. World Vision's theology of change

While our theory of change provides a framework for evidence-based practice and empirical exploration and validation, it is important to highlight that WV's practice is first and foremost informed by our Christian world view – our theology of change.

At the core of WV's Christian world view of development is our view that change is ultimately the work of God. WV has recently reaffirmed that it 'hopes that all we do will bear witness to God's unconditional love and contribute to people experiencing fullness of life as followers of Jesus Christ in an environment that respects their rights and freedom'. We are vital participants in God's work rather than the primary actors. The role of the Holy Spirit in change is what Jesus is referring to when he speaks of the Spirit of Truth 'convicting the world of sin, righteousness and justice'; again, when Paul asserts that 'when anyone in Christ there is a new creation... behold, all things have become new'. Similarly, when Paul in Romans 8 speaks of all of creation 'groaning' in labour awaiting the redemption of humankind, this is what it means to pray for God's will to be done and for God's Kingdom to come on earth. God is the active agent of change – making life right and just – and we have the role of participating in this dynamic process, which at its core involves restored relationships. Firstly there is our need for a restored and loving relationship with God, secondly our relationship with other people and thirdly our relationship with God's creation, the environment. WV has a vision of 'fullness of life' and this is based on the idea that the full expression of what it means to be human will only be realised when these relationships are being restored. WV's view of change is based on acknowledging that God is the ultimate agent of change for achieving fullness of life.

5. World Vision's theory of change

This section provides the narrative that supports the attached change diagram. It describes the steps in the diagram, the assumptions that explain how we believe the steps in the diagram are connected and why, and the implications for WV change strategies.¹

1. Cf. Anderson, A. (2005) *The Community Builder's Approach to Theory of Change: A practical guide to theory development*. New York: The Aspen Institute.

5.1 Pathways of change diagram

The theory of change diagram (see Appendix) outlines the steps towards achieving the long-term goal of sustained well-being of children. Our understanding is that these are the necessary and sufficient steps towards achieving this goal. It is important to note here that the diagram is a simplified, linear depiction of change – in reality change is often cyclical and non-linear.

The diagram highlights that our theory of change is informed by our overarching Christian world view which acknowledges that change is ultimately the work of God, and that God has given us the tools of science and technology, conventions on human rights, public policies, civil and political structures and prayer as vital tools to use in our participation in God's transformation in the world, God's Kingdom on earth. God is there, building every step of the pathway and guiding our way forward; God permeates our lives and our work, and surpasses all our individual and collective efforts, working at every level to redeem the world and bring redemptive change.

In terms of achieving the sustained well-being of children within families and communities, especially the most vulnerable, the theory of change asserts that this is dependent on achieving four child well-being aspirations: Children enjoy good health; children are educated for life; children are cared for, protected and participating; and children experience the love of God and their neighbour.

These aspirations can be further defined through the 15 child well-being outcomes (CWBOs) detailed in the theory of change diagram (level 3).

The diagram reflects that to achieve these CWBOs, the child cannot be viewed in isolation, and family-level change is critical. For example, families' economic well-being needs to be assured; families' basic needs in terms of access and availability to education, health, care, nutrition, shelter and sanitation need to be met; families need sustainable livelihoods and food security; women and children need to be empowered as agents of change; families need to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children; families need to be resilient; strong and equitable relationships need to exist within the family that are based on respect for diversity; the spiritual well-being of families needs to be nurtured; and families need to sustainably manage and protect their natural assets.

Furthermore, to support family-level change, a number of local, national and international outcomes need to be achieved. At a local level social, political, technical, environmental and economic enabling conditions need to be met to ensure that communities and families are empowered to work together towards sustained child well-being. An empowered community will also be mobilised to demand (sub-)national-level change that supports its vision for improved child well-being.

At a national level, it is important that the policies and practices of government, civil society and businesses enable positive change at a local level. Also, if national governments, civil society and businesses are mobilised to support positive change, then these in turn will be better positioned to influence and demand greater change at the global level.

Finally, a reformed international order that facilitates global justice and equity will enable positive change towards the sustained well-being of children, in families and communities, locally and nationally.

5.2 Assumptions and implications for World Vision contribution to change

This section outlines 12 core assumptions that underpin the theory of change. These assumptions explain why and how the steps in our theory of change diagram achieve sustained child well-being. For each assumption, WV's contribution to change is outlined:

Assumption 1: We are dependent on the transforming work of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, who responds to our prayers and empowers us to witness to God's love in Christ, with signs, word and deeds, to contribute to the sustained well-being of children.

The theory of change reflects the movement from a position of poverty to a position of 'life in all its fullness'. Biblical theology drives our ministry and our identity. We acknowledge that all we accomplish is possible only through God's direction and grace. In developing this theory of change, we freely affirm our dependence on God and God's work, the role of prayer and our witness to God's love in Christ. We seek to contribute to the movement of children, families, individuals and communities from the condition of poverty and powerlessness to 'life in all its fullness' – a vision that is rooted in Biblical reflection.

'Life in all its fullness' is a reflection on John 10:10 and is a gift from God found in Jesus Christ. 'Fullness' means more than merely the absence of poverty and powerlessness, and 'life' means more than merely the absence of suffering and death. 'Fullness of life' flows from the abundant generosity of God's grace. This life is evident when:

- people respond to God's love expressed in Jesus Christ, by loving God and one another;
- children are protected, cared for and given the opportunity to become all that God meant them to be;
- families and communities dwell together in justice, harmony and hope;
- the most vulnerable receive protection and provision; and
- God's creation is preserved

We affirm our dependency on the Spirit of God and live in anticipation of God's restoration of a world in which all flourish under the reign of God.

Assumption 2: Children's well-being is dependent on their relationships with others and on the social, political, spiritual, physical and environmental contexts in which they live.

This is understood as the 'ecology of the child'. WV's theory of change shows the different levels and types of influence on children's development, from the closest (micro level, e.g. families) to the furthest (macro level, e.g. national, global). Children are unique and affected by their contexts in different ways. Who God made them to be, where they live, who they live with and many other variables affect their capacity to engage, participate, learn and flourish in the relationships around them, and also their capacity to respond to the many risk factors in their lives.

Implications for WV

- WV's approach addresses the different relationships, institutions, systems and structures at family, community, national and global level to create an enabling environment where children can thrive.
- WV ministry approaches support child participation to encourage them as agents of change to become active, critical, entrepreneurial, relational, democratic, ethical, spiritual citizens empowered to change society.

Assumption 3: A focus on equity is required to ensure that the most vulnerable receive intentional, focused support to realise their rights and well-being.

The most vulnerable are often negatively affected by changes in their community. Even positive change at the national and community level can result in them becoming more marginalised and create greater inequity. Certain groups of children are amongst the most vulnerable, for example orphaned children, street children, or children with a disability. They are more vulnerable than others to ending up in a crisis situation. WV's theory of change shows the need to intentionally focus on the most vulnerable by addressing equity and the factors of vulnerability, such as extreme deprivation, serious rights violations, vulnerability to disaster, and abusive or exploitative relationships.

Implications for WV

WV aims to assure the resilience of households and communities to reduce their vulnerability, to increase equity, and to emphasise duty bearers' responsibility to protect their rights and provide basic social services. World Vision's approaches and project models aim to address factors of vulnerability and equity.

Assumption 4: Empowering women and girls as agents of change and promoting gender equality is critical to achieving sustained child well-being.

Women play a crucial role in the well-being of the family, and in the development of community and society, but they are marginalised and discriminated against in most societies. Gender inequality disempowers half of the population of the world, and curtails the achievement of women and girls' full potential and their contribution to the family and society. WV cannot fully contribute to child well-being if we are not intentional in addressing gender injustice.

Implications for WV

Gender equity is identified as a key cross-cutting theme that needs to be addressed in all projects and programmes. This requires that projects take a strategic approach to tackling the issues of power and control between genders. World Vision programmes aim to empower women, men, boys and girls as actors in sustainable transformational development, by challenging and changing unequal gender relations and addressing structural, attitudinal and cultural barriers that prevent women and girls from participating in and benefiting from development.

Assumption 5: To achieve sustained child-well being, WV change strategies need to address different life cycle stages of children.

Children develop rapidly through different life cycle stages. With each stage, from prenatal to 5 years, 6 to 11 years, and 12 to 18 years, there are specific survival, growth and development issues, in addition to some general needs across these stages, such as household food and livelihood security.

Implications for WV

To address the specific life cycle stages that children develop through, different types of approaches are required. For example, from 0 to 5 years, WV's focus includes health, nutrition and early childhood development; from 6 to 11 years the focus includes education and life skills; from 12 to 18 years our focus includes life skills, active participation and entrepreneurship.

Assumption 6: The likelihood of long-lasting, sustainable change is significantly increased if communities are enabled to drive their own development.

Development involves a dialogue between communities and internal and external ‘change agents’ who support change and bring different perspectives and access to information and support. However, ultimately, change is endogenous to the communities in which we work – where change is always already underway and ongoing. Our theory of change acknowledges that organisations such as WV can only support this change and should enable and empower communities to drive their own development.

Implications for WV

Our ministry approaches empower children and interdependent communities and support their capacity for development rather than focusing solely on service delivery.

Assumption 7: Fullness of life for every child is enhanced by a rights-based approach to address structural and systemic causes of poverty.

Science and technology can provide important inputs into the change process. However, on their own, science and technology are not sufficient to achieve positive change. The impediments to positive change are often social and political. People who are poor may not have the power to change their circumstances until the structural and systemic causes of poverty are confronted and eliminated. Others (e.g. NGOs) will also struggle to change the circumstances of the poor in a meaningful, sustainable way unless these causes are addressed. The causes of poverty are not only local, but also national, global, structural, as well as rooted in world views, historical events, spirituality and cultural values. The theory of change provides that the transformation of communities in developing countries is dependent on the fulfilment of human rights, the transformation of communities and the transformation of global structures and systems.

Implications for WV

- WV focuses on both addressing the causes of poverty as well as alleviating the symptoms.
- Advocacy and marketing programmes aim to engage governments, business, civil society, donors and the general public globally, nationally and locally to address the systems and structures that perpetuate poverty and oppression,
- WV ministry approaches promote just systems and structures and support change processes that emphasise empowerment and justice, and the fulfilment of human rights.

Assumption 8: Fullness of life for every child is enhanced by breaking the cycles of deprivation that entrap generations of children.

To break the cycle of inter-generational poverty requires addressing the social, cultural, structural and spiritual causes of poverty and addressing the ecology of the child.

Implications for WV

- WV aims to implement a life cycle approach that works with pregnant mothers and focuses on early childhood development.

- WV ministry approaches aim to empower children and youth as agents of change to become active, critical, entrepreneurial, relational, democratic, ethical, spiritual citizens empowered to change society.

Assumption 9: Change is complex.

The change process is very complex – it comprises many interconnected social, political, economic and environmental systems, at different levels (local, national, global), each simultaneously going through different cycles of change (short-term, medium-term, inter-generational change), at different speeds. This requires a partnership approach that connects our work to others operating at a range of scales and sectors. As history shows us, we must always leave room for partnerships to spin off into powerful movements of social change, where the whole is much, much greater than the sum of its parts.

Implications for WV

- Achieving child well-being requires an integrated, multi-pronged approach that addresses the many interconnected issues that cause poverty – legal, social, spiritual, political, economic, environmental, technical, etc. – at different levels – individual, family, local, national and international.
- WV increasingly works in partnership with government, business, and civil society, recognising that we are only one partner in a complex system. Partnerships are developed locally through a variety of approaches, but also nationally and globally with corporations, multilateral agencies, research institutions, civil society and government institutions.
- WV must make strategic choices regarding which areas of change and which actors to engage with. WV cannot effectively engage in every area and therefore must identify gaps that are not being filled by others and focus on areas that contribute to the fulfilment of the child well-being aspirations.

Assumption 10: Change is unpredictable and non-linear.

Change is a non-linear, multi-directional, fragmented, multi-faceted and discontinuous process – it emerges unpredictably from the many interactions of actors within the many different systems and networks that we engage in to address child well-being. Sometimes small actions can have big effects; sometimes big actions have very little impact. Sometimes change is progressive, sometimes the effects of shocks and crises lead to communities or individuals moving backwards. Furthermore, the nature of change itself is changing as people are connecting in different ways and on different scales as a result of telecommunications technology and social media. This means that the change process is increasingly difficult to control, manage or comprehensively understand and predict.

Implications for WV

Change agents like WV need to become ‘searchers’ with communities rather than ‘planners’ for communities.² This involves stakeholders and partners in a reflective, social learning process that

2. From Easterley, W. (2006), *The White Man’s Burden*. New York: Oxford, cited in Lenneberg, C. (2010) ‘The other side of complexity’. World Vision Australia (unpublished paper).

allows for dynamic exploration and adaptation. Supporting change is about collectively exploring an issue and adapting to it, rather than implementing a pre-defined solution.

- WV ministry approaches aim to address risk and vulnerability, recognising that change is non-linear, by assuring resilient and secure households and communities.
- WV is exploring approaches to engage with communities, supporters and donors in a way that acknowledges the increasing connectedness between people in the world, and the new ways of communicating through the internet and social media.
- WV is exploring more flexible planning, budgeting processes and systems.

Assumption 11: To support change, WV change strategies need to emphasise the positive drivers of change.

There are many factors that drive people to change – fear, coercion, choice and hope. Some of these are positive drivers, some are negative. World Vision aims to emphasise the positive drivers as integral to our approach to change.

Implications for WV

WV practices aim to provide people with choice, space, courage, hope and the right to change through a focus on changing cultural practices, legislative frameworks, capacity development, spiritual nurture and prayer.

Assumption 12: To ensure sustained change, it is important to tackle the root causes of poverty, to ensure community ownership of the development process, and to facilitate behaviour and policy change.

Not all change is sustainable. The multitude of external influences can reverse gains and alter the status quo. World Vision's programmes seek to contribute to sustained well-being of children and therefore need to ensure that factors that affect sustainability are understood and are, to the extent possible, mitigated in programmes.

Implications for WV

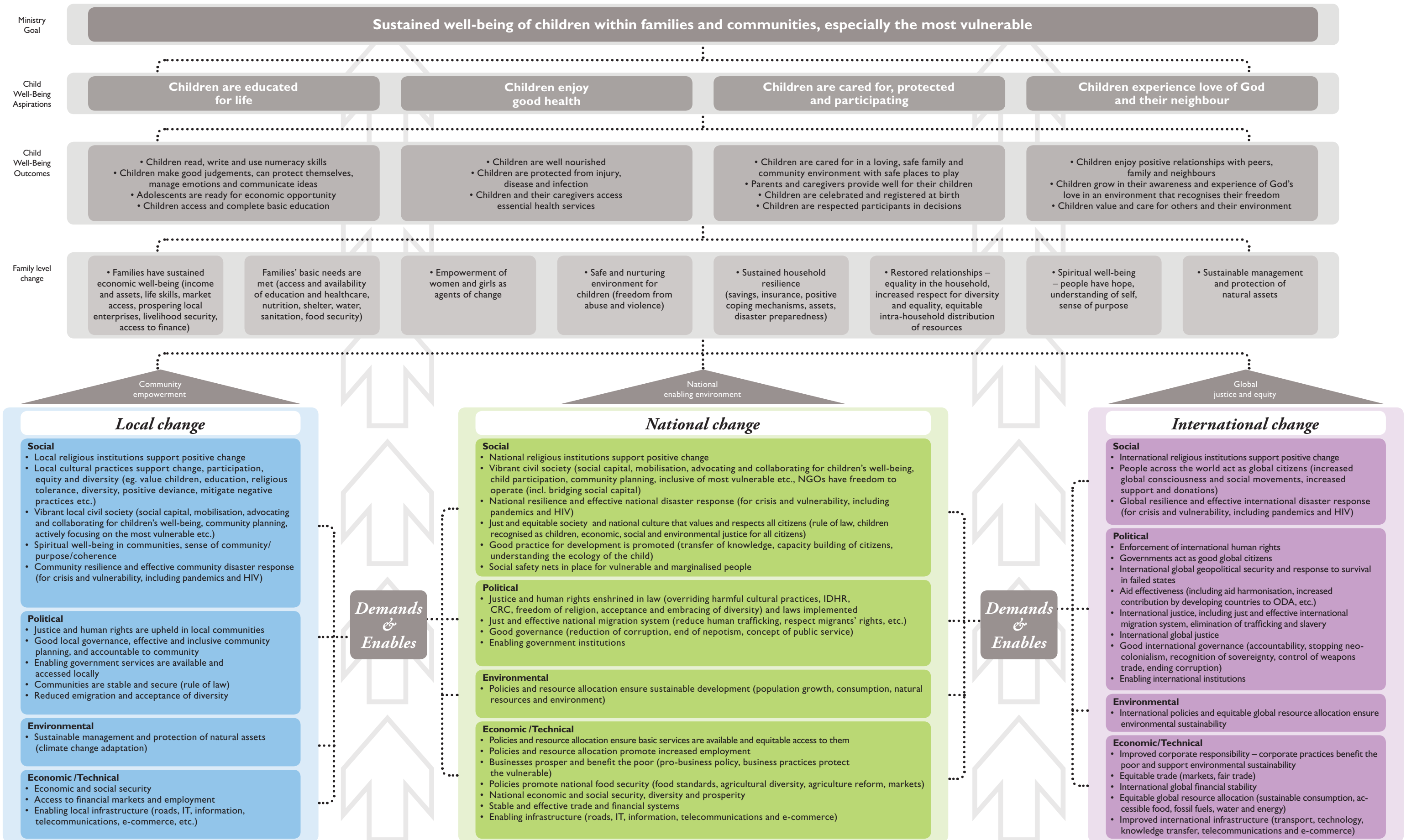
- Programmes need to tackle the root causes of issues, not the symptoms; facilitate community ownership; and aim to support behaviour and policy change.
- WV must choose programmes that lead to sustainable change whenever possible; however, sometimes extreme needs require responses that do not result in sustainable change. In those cases we need to address the immediate needs, while seeking as quickly as possible to shift our attention to more sustainable solutions.

Conclusion

This theory of change provides World Vision with a holistic perspective on how change takes place and how our various ministries and sectoral approaches integrate to support this change. It also provides an anchor for our evidence-based approach to programming, as it reflects our hypothesis of how change takes place, and a hierarchy of outcomes that can be measured and submitted to empirical inquiry. This allows us to assess and reflect on the success and impact of our work in a holistic way, and refine and adjust our approach accordingly.

Overall, it is envisaged that the theory of change will provide a strong anchor for evidence building and learning in our programmes and sectors, as well as helping WV entities, sectors and programmes to make strategic assessments and choices, and determine and measure the value they add to a broader global change process.

Life in all its fullness through God as the agent of change



Change is ultimately the work of God. We prayerfully rely on the Holy Spirit to inspire change and discernment of our staff to participate in God's transformation in the world, God's Kingdom on earth.