

Fit for Partnering:

An organisational development approach
to becoming a *Partner of Choice*





This work would not have been possible without The Partnering Initiative and the generous participation from colleagues in the *Partner of Choice* World Vision country offices particularly those that contributed to the three country profiles.

We would also like to thank Brenda Lipson who conducted a learning review of *Partner of Choice* in 2019 which has informed much of this publication. The quotes from country office leaders and staff have been taken from the learning review which covered the first 8 country offices implementing *Partner of Choice* (in order of start date: Indonesia, Sierra Leone, Lebanon, Chile, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mongolia, and Thailand).

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The Partnering Initiative is an international not-for-profit organisation dedicated to unleashing the power of collaboration for a prosperous and sustainable future.

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The learning review has encountered many inspiring stories of change within the participating country offices. Interviewees have also shared examples of how those internal changes and strengthened capabilities have helped them in managing their partnerships and obtaining identified objectives.

Brenda Lipson, Framework Collective, external consultant for *Partner of Choice* Learning Review, October 2019

Foreword

The collective response to the COVID-19 crisis has been remarkable. Individuals, mutual-aid groups, community-based organisations, companies, governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the United Nations (UN) – all societal sectors have taken up arms and contributed towards an all-of-society effort to combat the disease. This ‘shock to the system’ has demonstrated that collaborative action at scale is possible, and it can happen rapidly where there is sufficient motivation and alignment of interest to act. Moving forward, how can we build on this momentum and deliver the unprecedented level of collaboration that is critical to #BuildBackBetter post-COVID-19 and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals?

One of the key challenges to scaling partnerships is that (particularly larger) organisations are not *institutionally* set up or optimised to be able to partner efficiently and effectively. A lack of strategic clarity can result in investing in partnerships that don’t create sufficient organisational value; internal systems and processes often create blockages rather than support innovative collaboration; and insufficient professional competencies and unsupportive organisational cultures often hold back effective partnership building.

The Partnering Initiative (TPI) has worked with World Vision and a number of international organisations – UN agencies, NGOs, donors, foundations and companies – to analyse their existing practices and support their journey to become institutionally fit for Partnering. We applaud World Vision not only for the extensive, systematic efforts they are making across their organisation but also for their willingness to share their experiences so openly for others to learn from.

Darian Stibbe
Executive Director,
The Partnering Initiative



‘**We are partners**’ is one of World Vision’s core values. Across our advocacy and campaigning, disaster response, and development programming – with a special emphasis in fragile contexts – we seek to work with a diverse range of organisations across the public and private sectors, civil society organisations, faith communities, and institutions.

Our global strategy, *Our Promise*, underlines this core value of partnership, calling us to ‘collaborate and advocate for broader impact’. *Partner of Choice*, a World Vision programme built on **The Partnering Initiative’s Fit for Partnering framework**, is delivering the deep organisational change required to bring the ‘collaborate’ aspect of this strategic imperative to life.

Why are we sharing this report now?

The UN has termed the next 10 years as the ‘Decade of Action’ to deliver the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There is no time to waste. The world is now confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic, which is radically impacting the diverse contexts in which we operate. This additional challenge requires governments, businesses and civil society to raise the bar. We see – perhaps more clearly than ever before – our effectiveness in collaboration as a key factor in how we can best serve the needs of the world’s most vulnerable children.

Now, therefore, is the time to share, with humility, what we are learning about becoming a ‘partner of choice’. On this journey, we are very grateful for the more than 10 years of fruitful collaboration with The Partnering Initiative, and we look forward to many more as we continually seek to live out our core value as a partner, working to become a ‘partner of choice’.

Dana Buzducea, Partnership Leader,
Advocacy & External Engagement,
World Vision International

Norbert Hsu, Partnership Leader,
Global Impact,
World Vision International

Executive summary

The COVID-19 global pandemic, the climate crisis, the gaps in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and increasing state fragility all pose massive challenges for society. Impactful partnerships, involving organisations from all sectors of society, are one necessary way of rising to these challenges.

But partnerships often under-deliver because organisations are not institutionally 'Fit for Partnering'. Therefore, it is time for organisations to invest in partnering capabilities so that they can collaborate effectively with others to address these challenges.

World Vision has started to make this investment.

We describe how our *Partner of Choice* programme – built on The Partnering Initiative's Fit for Partnering framework – has resulted in stronger partnering capabilities in World Vision's country offices, enabling more effective partnerships to be developed. This report includes:

- an overview of the *Partner of Choice* programme and six key success factors we've gathered from our experience implementing it in 12 countries ([page 11](#))
- the critical internal capabilities that country offices are investing in across the four building blocks of Strategy & Leadership, Systems & Processes, Staff & Skills, and Culture ([page 13](#))
- stories of new or revitalised partnerships that have emerged as a result of *Partner of Choice*, including partnerships that are responding to COVID-19 ([page 23](#))
- three country profiles that give insight into the partnering capabilities developed in our country offices of Indonesia, Sierra Leone, and Lebanon. ([page 20](#))

Through *Partner of Choice* we have seen that strengthening partnering capabilities is leading to more effective partnerships contributing to COVID-19 responses and the SDGs. Therefore, World Vision and The Partnering Initiative encourage businesses, government departments, universities, UN organisations and civil society organisations to take the following steps, *shown to the right*:

“ [Partner of Choice] looks at the big picture. How strategy, systems, etc., link together – the four areas. All staff and managers should be required to know about partnering ... it is a cross-sectoral programme. I have seen many differences since we implemented it – very positive differences.

Partnering Specialist, World Vision Mongolia

- **Invest in becoming Fit for Partnering:** Review your capabilities against the Fit for Partnering framework and create an implementation approach suited to your organisation. Listen to your staff and partners to find out what is helping your partnerships be successful – and what is holding you back.
- **Track and review progress:** Ensure that you are measuring how partnerships are contributing to your organisation's goals. Encourage your partnering champions to regularly review progress, making adjustments where necessary, so that your partnerships continue to improve and make significant contributions to your organisation's mission.
- **Share learning:** Share what you've learned with your partners and networks so together we can build ecosystems of transformation – organisations and societal sectors that are equipped and ready to collaborate towards a sustainable future.



Partner of Choice

Adapting to the big picture



Partnering: The Big Picture

By The Partnering Initiative

The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a fundamental shift in thinking in international development, recognising the interconnectedness of prosperous business, a thriving society and a healthy environment. The Agenda names all societal sectors as key development actors and requires an unprecedented level of cooperation and collaboration among civil society, business, government, NGOs, foundations, academia and others for its achievement. Within the humanitarian sector, the [Grand Bargain](#)¹ and localisation agenda both advance a shift towards stronger partnering at the country level, ensuring that international actors prioritise building local capabilities and that all humanitarian response is as locally led as possible.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the critical nature of effective collaboration across sectors of society. There is a renewed sense of our common humanity, of community, of inter-dependence; and we have seen tremendous agility from organisations across society to collaborate. This gives us great hope for the future, despite the challenges.

However, currently the number and quality of cross-sector partnerships required to respond to the challenges associated with COVID-19 and deliver the Sustainable Development Goals are inadequate.

What needs to change? In order to scale up the use of partnerships, we need a stronger 'Partnership Enabling System', as outlined in Figure 1. The Partnering Initiative works across each of these components and, in 2018, launched the [Partnership Accelerator](#) with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), UN Office for Partnerships, UN Global Compact, and the UN Development Coordination Office to focus specifically on individual competencies, organisations to be Fit for Partnering, and partnership platforms.



Figure 1

Partnership enabling system

What is needed for partnerships to make an optimal contribution to the 2030 Agenda.

How is World Vision investing in partnering?

Given that one of our six core values is 'we are partners', World Vision has for many years strived to collaborate effectively with organisations across different sectors of society. Partnering, however, is not something that always comes easily. Therefore, in line with the 2030 Agenda, World Vision's global strategy, Our Promise, emphasises the need to partner effectively with others and deepen our commitment to the most vulnerable children in the hardest to reach places. We have pledged to do this by focusing our programming, delivering high-quality sustainable funding, and living out our Christian faith with boldness and humility.

Using the Partnership Enabling System (see Figure 1) as its frame, the table on the next page, illustrates some of the partnering investments we are making at World Vision. This report focuses on the organisational-level work we are doing through the *Partner of Choice* programme in our country offices, working to ensure they are 'Fit for Partnering'.

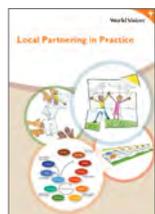
¹ A unique agreement made in 2016 between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations who have committed to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action.

What is World Vision doing?

Table 1: World Vision's Partnering Investments

20,000+ PARTNERS IN NEARLY 100 COUNTRIES WORLDWIDE

INDIVIDUAL



World Vision has formulated partnering competency frameworks for staff and leaders which direct professional development and are supported by e-learning modules and communities of practice.

Staff working in community programmes across 40 countries have participated in an intensive, role-play based, Local Partnering Training designed with inputs from the [Partnership Brokers Association](#) (study [here](#)). An Advanced Partnering and Negotiation training was developed with The Partnering Initiative and targets more experienced practitioners.

ORGANISATIONAL



World Vision's global strategy, **Our Promise**, highlights collaboration as a key driver for greater impact.

Partnering approaches are integrated across all of our work, including reflecting the distinct partnering requirements for different contexts (for example, flexibility, speed and risk management in fragile contexts).

Partner of Choice – subject of this report.



PARTNERSHIPS



World Vision seeks to further its mission through partnerships at all levels of the organisation and across programming, disaster management, and advocacy and campaigning.

Our [current partnerships](#) include various global faith-based (e.g. [Joint Learning Initiative](#)), UN, civil society and private-sector partners.

World Vision is a signatory to the Grand Bargain with a commitment to localisation (*case study forthcoming*).



PARTNERSHIP PLATFORMS



World Vision and The Partnering Initiative collaborated to publish a policy paper on [national-level partnership platforms](#) which provides concrete proposals on ways to accelerate their progress and contribution to the 2030 Agenda.

In 2016, World Vision launched the [Asia P3Hub](#) – a partnership platform now merged with [TBN Asia](#) – which also created a '[hub in a box](#)' concept developed to support the creation of new platforms.



SYSTEM LEVEL



THE GLOBAL GOALS
For Sustainable Development

Over the last seven years we have contributed to the sector's thinking on partnering by publishing several policy papers on the [role of business and partnerships](#) in relation to SDG implementation and the Grand Bargain.

World Vision has championed partnerships at several international events, including at the UN High-level Political Forum's Partnership Exchange in [2016](#) and [2018](#), and, in 2019, co-leading with The Partnering Initiative an SDGs Learning, Training and Practice session on '[Designing and managing SDG partnerships for greatest impact](#)'.



A group of people, including a man in a 'VISION' cap and a woman, are gathered around a table, looking at documents and a bag. A metal bowl is on the table.

Implementing *Partner of Choice*

The Partnering Initiative's 'Fit for Partnering' Framework

In responding to our strategic imperative to 'collaborate and advocate for broader impact', an assessment revealed the need to strengthen partnering capabilities in some of our country offices. We therefore decided to invest in The Partnering Initiative's '[Fit for Partnering](#)' framework.

Partnerships often fail because the partner organisations lack the **institutional capability** to partner well. Fit for Partnering addresses these needs: it is a whole-of-organisation approach to building an organisation's partnering effectiveness. It focuses on four high-level building blocks:

Leadership & Strategy **Systems & Processes**

A strong platform of organisational *Leadership & Strategy* for partnering, including a clear articulation of how and why partnerships can deliver value for the organisation, and the leadership commitment to ensure implementation.

Systems & Processes which support effective collaboration through the partnering lifecycle – from initial identification to effective implementation and completion.

Staff & Skills **Culture**

Staff with the professional competencies and with access to support and guidance to broker and manage transformational partnerships.

A pro-partnering *Culture* across the organisation that is humble, outward-looking, creative, and by nature seeks to collaborate wherever value can be created.

Utilising the Fit for Partnering framework, World Vision has developed our own *Partner of Choice* programme to prioritise and strengthen the partnering capabilities in our country offices. In mid-2017 the World Vision International Partnering Team, with support from The Partnering Initiative², started implementing *Partner of Choice*.

Partner of Choice

² Huge thanks to Darian Stibbe, Ruth Findlay, Julia Gilbert and Melissa Porteous.



As the demands for collaboration grow, most large organisations are finding they are not set up and operating optimally to be able to deliver on the rhetoric.

The Partnering Initiative



Partner of Choice has been an invaluable and very revealing learning journey in which we made a deliberate choice "to leave no stone unturned" and start systematically addressing identified gaps towards becoming a "Fit for Partnering" office. While we have looked at all four Partner of Choice building blocks, we realised that first most significant changes will have to be made in the area of strategy and leadership. Leadership buy-in and endorsement is the critical precondition for the partnering journey we have chosen to take.

Country Programme Director,
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Where *Partner of Choice* is being implemented

Partner of Choice is now being implemented in 12 country offices with further expansion planned. The first three offices to join the programme are profiled on [pages 20-22](#).



How is *Partner of Choice* being implemented and what have we learned?

Implementation happens in four distinct phases. Here's what we did and some key lessons learned.

PHASE 1 | Scoping

- Agree the best approach and deliverables unique to the country office

1 month

Partner of Choice responds to the specific context of the country office – its resourcing, its stakeholders, its strengths and its objectives. During this phase, the leadership of the country office and the World Vision International Partnering Team discuss and agree to the best approaches, timing and deliverables based on the unique context and readiness of that office. The country office's **leadership understanding and commitment is essential**: embarking on a one-year change process is not for the faint-hearted (see Phase 4).

PHASE 2 | Assessment

- Survey staff and partners to analyse partnering performance
- Write a *Partner of Choice* report based on Analysis and recommendations

2 months

This phase is an assessment of current partnering performance in the country office. Typically, approximately 30 staff and partners are interviewed by the World Vision International Partnering Team and over 100 staff and partners will complete an online survey. These findings are analysed alongside relevant organisational examples and documentation.

Based on the findings, the Partnering Team developed an assessment report, including high-level recommendations for how to enhance partnering performance and build organisational partnering capabilities. It is structured using the four *Partner of Choice* building blocks (see [page 9](#)) and their underlying elements (see [pages 13-16](#)).

PHASE 3 | *Partner of Choice* Summit

- Senior staff assess the country office's current partnering performance and capabilities
- Envision the desired future
- Develop an action plan

2 days + preparation

This is the key moment in the *Partner of Choice* process. Informed by the assessment report, the country office's senior leadership team and key staff representing the breadth of the organisation – including support functions – come together at a *Partner of Choice* Summit. They agree on the current status of partnering performance and envision a desired future state for each of the four organisational building blocks. Finally, an **action plan with clear responsibilities and timings** is developed to close the gap. This event normally takes place over two days. **The inclusion of a two-day partnering course prior to the summit significantly improved participant understanding, the quality of summit outcomes and increased motivation.**



[The Partner of Choice programme] was very useful because it confirmed what we thought we knew ... having the assessment information available gave us something tangible to refer to. It was no longer a perception; it was evidence based on interviews/survey.

Partnering Specialist, Lebanon

The community of practice with other offices is a really good platform ... it offers valuable learnings and space for consultation and discussions. There is a huge need for cross-country and cross-context exchange.

Advocacy and Partnering Specialist, Bosnia and Herzegovina

The partnering portfolio was new to me but being connected to the World Vision International Partnering Team and to partnering specialists via the online group, and sharing documents and discussions – that all helps me to improve my knowledge and skills.

Partnering Specialist, Mongolia

(continued)

PHASE 4 | Implementation

- Implement the *Partner of Choice* Action Plan
- Utilise the coaching and resources provided by WVI partnering team
- Engage in peer-to-peer learning via the community of practice

9 months +

While the country office is implementing the *Partner of Choice* Action Plan, the **World Vision International Partnering Team provides coaching and technical support**. As expertise began to build across the country offices, a new *community of practice* was developed to provide a place for learning and sharing.

Sustaining this change agenda over the required time period for implementation (normally at least 9 months) is quite a challenge. **Country offices have found that for effective progress, a senior leadership team focal point, aided by a partnership specialist, is critical** to support more detailed aspects of delivering the Action Plan. Ideally, integrating this change process into the business-as-usual operations of the leadership team makes their overall management task easier.



Creating a World Vision Bosnia and Herzegovina Partnering Strategic Intent Framework was a major step in the right direction. That document and its adjoining tool are strategic documents for our office, endorsed by senior leadership, and embraced and utilised by the whole Team.

Advocacy and Partnering Specialist,
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Key success factors

- Country office's leadership team has a good understanding of partnering and strong ownership of the process
- Country office appoints a senior focal point ('champion') and partnering specialist
- A clear action plan exists with deadlines for key deliverables and who is responsible
- Staff have a good understanding of the Fit for Partnering framework and resources to support this (an online toolkit was developed by World Vision built on country office experience)
- Country-specific Partnering Guidelines have been developed which pull together all the related partnering processes and tools (see [page 14](#))
- Staff can access technical support and coaching from the World Vision International Partnering Team and participate in a community of practice for peer-to-peer learning

Based on experience of implementing *Partner of Choice* across the twelve country offices, we have identified a number of 'elements' as critical components for strengthening each building block.

In the next section, we take a look at each building block, the elements we identified and share World Vision's progress and learnings from our Partner of Choice programme thus far.



This building block helps the organisation define the value of collaboration to its mission and explain how leadership, metrics and management will work together to achieve that value while managing risks and costs. This diagram shows each of the key elements (in orange) and what we learned.

Risk management⁴

Partnering inherently has associated risks, and proactive risk management is required to make wise choices and maximise the chances of success.

What we learned: Risk management is a cross-functional process that needs to be guided by partnering strategy at a senior level in the organisation. Those involved in assessing and making risk management decisions must have sufficient knowledge of partnering dynamics. Therefore, the support functions responsible for financial, reputational and legal risks have been included in the *Partner of Choice* country-level programmes.

Vision and rationale

Explains how working with partners will help the organisation achieve its mission and strategic objectives.

What we learned: A clear vision and rationale are the foundational pieces that drive all decision-making in relation to partnering. Country offices have communicated their 'vision and rationale' to staff, embedded them in Partnering Guidelines (see Systems & Processes) and used them to drive programme design.

Leadership commitment

Leadership is clear about the value of working collaboratively, and consistently communicates and resources this approach.

What we learned: The leadership of the country office has been a consistent success factor across offices. Three key aspects of leadership have emerged: 1) modelling good practice: several national directors have themselves invested heavily into making high-level partnerships work; 2) building accountability for *Partner of Choice* implementation; and 3) championing and communicating change that supports partnering across their organisations.



Leadership & Strategy

Portfolio management

Portfolios of partnerships across the organisation are managed to ensure investment in the right partnerships with the right partners to deliver strategic value.

What we learned: Partnership Portfolio Management, which includes reviewing and forward planning, is a key to ensuring that partnerships and their outcomes are aligned with specific organisational goals. Reviewing the partnerships that contribute to specific programming objectives and/or resource acquisition is an emerging area of practice for country offices. Partner portfolio management has prompted more proactive and strategic 'partner relationship management', using monitoring data.

Value proposition

Provides a compelling answer for potential partners to the question, 'why partner with us?'

What we learned: Understanding the organisation's best capabilities, especially contributions to child well-being, is critical to building partnerships. The *Partner of Choice* survey highlights what partners value about the organisation, allowing country offices to focus on strategic conversations with complementary partners.

Partnering implementation plan

Clearly articulate the internal changes and actions required to become a 'partner of choice'.

What we learned: This plan weaves together the *Partner of Choice* recommendations, prioritisation and action plan. It articulates what the short- and long-term goals will be and describes the contributions of each different function.

Offices must have well-functioning systems and procedures to take partnerships through their lifecycle from initial identification through prospective value assessment, due diligence and sign-off, implementation, monitoring, reviewing, and learning. Support functions such as Finance, Legal and Human Resources have key roles to play.

Finance and procurement systems that support partnering with timely and transparent processes.

What we learned: Finance and procurement issues were the most common issues raised by partners of country offices. Finance standards that are appropriate for an international organisation need careful explanation and process management when applied to partnerships – in particular those with local partners. By including finance leaders into *Partner of Choice* processes, country offices have been able to identify practical ways to address common finance-related issues. These have often involved changes to processes as well as better communications and support to partners.

Design, monitoring and evaluation processes include partnering-specific indicators and support the assessment of the benefits and costs of partnering.

What we learned: Each country office's partnerships should be based on their strategy and theory of change, and then tracked appropriately. *Partner of Choice* has highlighted the importance of this strategy-led approach. It also encourages a strong commitment to monitoring of **partnership performance and health***, including measuring of how partners can contribute to sustaining good outcomes. Country offices are enhancing their ability to track these key measures, and the specific value any partnership brings to achievement of objectives.



Systems & Processes

Due diligence and safeguarding processes with partners are strengthened to enable better risk management.

What we learned: This is about the systems that make up the risk management process defined under the 'Leadership & Strategy' building block. Offices must be confident that appropriate due diligence in partner selection is occurring and that there is a clear safeguarding policy within any partnership arrangement. Country offices have made progress building flexibility into due diligence processes so that they can be more responsive to partnership dynamics.

Partnering guidelines with associated tools and resources help staff members to understand and follow consistent, effective partnering processes across the full life cycle, both at local and national levels.

What we learned: Country offices are finding that these guidelines are foundational to progress in partnering. They bring clarity to processes and tools across the different functions. No 'one-size-fits-all' approach has been taken by the country offices, but sharing of insights on guideline development has been a common learning conversation within the community of practice.

* Partnership Performance and Health Check

This tool has contributed significantly to organisational learning (see Staff & Skills on next page). It provides a set of key dimensions to be reviewed which cover **partnership performance and health**. It also outlines a structured process whereby each partner reflects on these dimensions and scores them from their perspective. The output – a spidergram graphically showing each partner's scores for each dimension – is designed to enable a generative conversation between partners to build on strengths and address weaknesses and issues which otherwise, often, go unspoken.



For example, [a potential partnership] with a municipality: we had a long talk with staff about mitigating the risks (reputation, corruption, etc.), but because we knew there were good people there, we knew what we could gain. But we had to really analyse the risks in a more focused way. Not just say, "we need this partnership, let's go", as we might have done before.

Area Programme Team Leader, Albania

This building block contains the individual and organisational competences and learning needed for effective partnering. It includes recruitment, job descriptions and partnering-related key performance indicators.

Partnering competencies to guide recruitment and development of leaders and staff.

What we learned: After participating in the partnering competence development training at the *Partner of Choice* Summit, leaders noted the benefits of a strong, common understanding of the subject matter and staff reported being more confident in using tools to move partnerships forward). Offices also acknowledged the need to plan and budget for competency development across their organisations.

Recruitment and line-management to support good partnering practice.

What we learned: Across several country offices human resources teams have led the creation of 'job families', which describe clear routes for partnering-related professional development. Operating models have been revised to embed partnering responsibilities in roles at all levels and across the organisation.



Staff & Skills

Organisational learning and knowledge management systems which capture and make available good partnering practice across the organisation.

What we learned: Partnering specialists/focal points are beginning to champion learning and related knowledge management systems and ensure connections to reporting and programme quality standards. Learning and knowledge management is an area for further development and focus.



The P&C team (Human Resources) are working on job descriptions to include the partnering role, which is totally new for us.

Programme Director, Mongolia

After reviewing the key performance indicator on partnering, we reviewed the target in the corporate strategy. After that we facilitated the departments taking the target into their own strategies. Also cascading the indicator into individual performance agreements. It was important because we need to ensure what the individuals should do to contribute to the corporate strategy.

People and Culture Director, Indonesia



This building block is about answering the question, 'what does a collaborative culture look like and what can we do to move towards it?'. Moving towards a collaborative culture requires promoting consistency between the 'talk' (consistent communications that emphasise partnering as a key mode of operation) along with the 'walk' (the set of actions that an organisation undertakes in line with the other three building blocks). Therefore, the changes described in the previous three building blocks contribute to changing an organisation's culture. What we have observed is that when a collaborative culture is in place in a country office, the following is expected:

Partners recognise that the country office has adopted partnering as it's 'go to' implementation approach and there is a willingness to co-create, learn, innovate and adapt.

What we learned: Demonstrating a renewed commitment to genuine partnership and making their partnerships work, several country offices have invested in the Partnership Performance and Health Check tool (see [page 14](#)) developed by World Vision for scoring critical dimensions of a partnership. The tool is an equitable and effective way to review a partnership's progress and processes. In Albania, a team leader noted that: '*...the partner took us more seriously. They see us as professional and see us scoring, etc. They mentioned this to me – that it was a very structured exercise (spider diagram, etc.), and they had to score us too.*'



Culture

Staff in the country office feel supported to amplify their impact and organisational benefits through partnerships.

What we learned: A collaborative culture starts to strengthen then more and more staff shift to seeing partnering as the default setting for achieving an organisational objective.

The country office approaches partners with not only humility but also clarity about its strengths, recognising that it cannot achieve its mission on its own.

What we learned: A collaborative culture is both humble and assertive. Humble in understanding weaknesses and gaps in your organisation (and therefore where partners need to complement), but also being clear about the strengths that you can bring to a partnership.

Partners see the country office as a partner of choice and recognise through the action of leaders and staff that the organisation truly believes that it can achieve more with partners than it can alone.

What we learned: Country offices are proactively seeking new types of partners and in new ways. For example, in some countries there is more intentional participation in platforms which seek to engage businesses in the SDGs. In Chile, staff and leaders are very clear that as an organisation they are moving from implementing alone to implementing together with others. An NGO partner observed this transition and reflected positively on World Vision Chile's change from previously being focused on service provision to now seeking structural solutions to child vulnerability with other organisations.

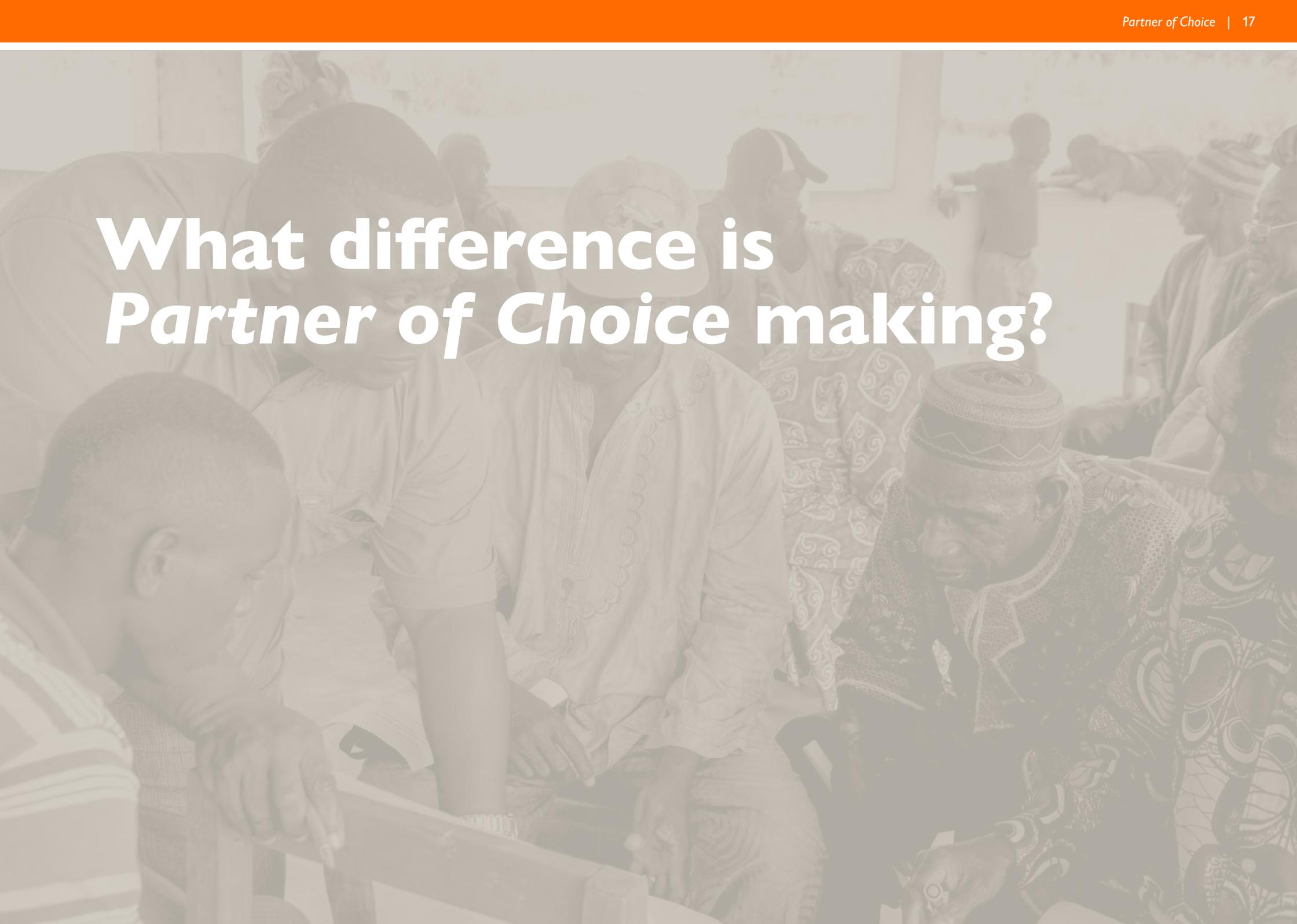


I've been seeing the team's "light bulb moments" on how partners are contributing ...

Programme Quality Director, Lebanon

We don't need to do it all ourselves. Mindsets are shifting – a lot of people [now] recognise the need to partner, rather than thinking we can do everything ourselves.

Programme Effectiveness Director, Sierra Leone



What difference is *Partner of Choice* making?

How is this improving country offices' partnering?

The strategic and operational changes taking place within country offices are leading to better practice in new and existing partnerships. Examples of new or revitalised partnerships resulting from *Partner of Choice* are provided in the partnership stories below and in the country profiles which follow.

Increasing reach in partnership with faith leaders

By Dragana Bulic, Advocacy and Partnering Specialist, and Nikica Reljic, Faith in Development Lead, World Vision Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

Partner of Choice in BiH has resulted in a thoroughly revised Partnering Framework and a strengthened system for brokering and nurturing strategic partnerships. This learning and capacity building process was spearheaded by the senior management team and upheld across the whole organisation.

Partnership Performance and Health Checks (PPHC) and revising existing agreements with key partners were top priorities. Although this process will eventually encompass all strategic partners, we started with faith partners because of their significance in holistic approaches to child well-being.

For the PPHC, we selected four main state level partners from the Orthodox Church, Catholic Church and Islamic Community. We wanted to ensure that partners felt appreciated, so we worked hard to inform them why it was necessary and to prepare for this joint endeavour. We started by revisiting our strategic goals to find better alignment of overlapping or common interests and activities.

After thorough preparation, the most important aspect of a successful process was mutual honesty in detecting gaps and sharing lessons learnt. Once the PPHC was conducted with all four partners, we shared scores and comments. We then began discussing a unified plan for improvement, which was formalised in new individual partnering agreements.

The first agreement we signed was with the Riyasat of Islamic Community. Based on the relationship-building PPHC process, we will now work together in strengthening family values, parenting capacities, and improving overall well-being of children and youth in BiH. We are about to publish and put to good use a new joint product, the 'Celebrating Families'⁶ manual for moderators and educators in BiH. This product will be a key vehicle for achieving new standards in supporting vulnerable children and families, thereby enhancing our impact, especially in challenging post-COVID-19 times.



Our partnership reflects a deep sense of purposefulness and is achieving excellent and visible results, which characterizes the project we are working on together. While we do need to put additional focus on crystallizing a clear, strategic vision of the wider partnership leading to clear steps in the mission, we are constantly witnessing progress within the project itself, communication between partners and adaptation of interventions to the context and needs of users. Our people in charge for communication between the two organizations enjoy the trust of their offices and across the partnership, which has been built and invested in the past three years and in the recent process of partnership review. We are determined to build on this solid foundation towards a constant improvement of the relationship between all the complimentary elements and action of the two organizations.

Doctor Sa ija Malkic, Head of the Family and Marriage Department of the Faith Affairs Office of the Riyasat of the Islamic Community Bosnia-Herzegovina

⁶ *Celebrating Families* is an approach World Vision developed to support parents and caregivers in the creation of a family and community environment that fosters children's spiritual development and overall well-being.

Love Yourself | United against Gender Violence

By Juan Pablo Venegas, Advocacy Manager, World Vision Chile

Starting in 2018, World Vision Chile has partnered with the Catholic University of Temuco – an institution widely recognised for quality in educational, intercultural and gender issues – on a joint project funded by the European Union called, ‘Love Yourself – United against Gender Violence’. In collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Gender Equity and the university, World Vision Chile, developed a practical framework and resources that support the incorporation of gender perspective into daily teaching practices in educational communities. Teachers, parents and youth activists have been trained to be replicating agents by taking these resources and training to their communities.

The work is being implemented in 58 schools and 12 school-based parent associations in collaboration with municipalities and community-based organisations. Because of this partnership, 627 teachers have been trained, and through them, we have reached 10,332 boys and girls with this type of education. Likewise, 194 young people were trained in topics related to sexual and reproductive rights, gender violence, and new masculinities so that they in turn can teach their peers in their communities.

One particularly innovative aspect of this partnership has been the creation of a book called *Don't Tell Me More*, which is composed of 13 sexist phrases that reflect gender stereotypes, each accompanied by illustrations by Chilean artists. The phrases and illustrations have provoked much discussion about gender-based violence; nearly 10,000 hard copies have been distributed along with 15,000 downloads to readers not only in Chile but also in Ecuador, Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Spain.

This partnership would not have come about if not for the learning and change inspired by *Partner of Choice*. One of the aspects that we concentrated on within the Leadership & Strategy area of the programme was on developing a clear value proposition. Having a really sharp understanding of what we brought to the table gave us the confidence to approach the partners and – for the first time – the European Union.



What I liked most about the workshop is that you learn to socialize more, because you interact with people you don't know, and you also learn things that school doesn't teach you. The workshop on Prevention of Gender Violence is incredible, because I realized that even if I didn't want to, we let ourselves be carried away by stereotypes and we don't realize it.

Fernanda, participant of the Workshop “Youth against gender violence” in La Pintana

COUNTRY OFFICE PROFILE

Indonesia

Wahana Visi (World Vision) Indonesia works widely across the world's fourth largest country with a fast-growing economy. Wahana Visi has 52 programmes reaching the most vulnerable children who often live in catastrophic situations; experience relationships characterised by violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, exclusion and discrimination; and endure various humanitarian crises. The country's programmes cover four key sectors: health, education, the economy and child protection.

Why did Wahana Visi invest in *Partner of Choice*?

Wahana Visi's role has evolved in recent years, in line with Indonesia's developing economy and civil society. Today the country office has a clear ambition for how it works with partners:

- strengthen local capacity for long-term sustainable development beyond Wahana Visi's presence
- maintain and increase the resources available for community-level programming
- reach the maximum number of most vulnerable children
- strengthen Wahana Visi's position as a preferred development partner.

What did Wahana Visi focus on?

The *Partner of Choice* survey revealed that many of Wahana Visi's partnerships were transactional rather than transformational. The goal is to build more innovative, value-creating and transformative partnerships that will scale up Wahana Visi's mission. Achieving this goal required change in all four building blocks.

Wahana Visi's leadership team took responsibility for:

- understanding and then driving the changes needed
- determining strategic value of partnering options
- adapting changing operating models to focus on working with partners
- developing and providing new guidance and training staff across all World Vision's operations.

One key area of change

The human resources department took an early lead – taking responsibility for organisational development by catalysing organisational-level changes. First came a thorough review of job families and descriptions. Then we integrated the *Partner of Choice* action plan into staff performance agreements across different functions and from top to bottom in the organisation. This widespread focus on partnering meant that drivers for change were built into key systems and processes across Wahana Visi.

**A new partnership:****Speaking up for children affected by violence**

Wahana Visi has been instrumental in building 'Indonesia Joining Forces'⁷ – an advocacy coalition of the six largest child-focused civil-society organisations in Indonesia – and replicating an existing global coalition approach. With a commitment to 'put logos and egos outside the room', the six organisations are working to end violence against children through an advocacy campaign in schools across the country. Indonesia Joining Forces has emerged at just the right time to be able to **respond to the challenges of COVID-19**.

The partners have initiated a child-led campaign to ensure that children are heard in the current crisis situation. Using data aggregated from the six partners and using their reach to cover the entire country, the coalition is able to speak powerfully to policy makers with one voice to advocate for the inclusion of child rights obligations within its national COVID-19 response plan.



⁷ Joining Forces is a partnership whose partners are Child Fund Alliance, Plan International, Save the Children International, SOS Children's Villages International, Terre des Hommes International Federation, and World Vision International. It operates at both the global and country levels.

COUNTRY OFFICE PROFILE

Sierra Leone

World Vision began operating in Sierra Leone in 1996, during the country's civil war, undertaking life-saving relief and humanitarian assistance interventions. After the war ended, World Vision International Sierra Leone (WVISL) transitioned to development programmes and has helped improve the lives of more than one million citizens. During the Ebola epidemic from 2014-16, WVISL worked with the government and helped to catalyse faith leaders in prevention efforts through community behaviour change across the whole country. Currently, WVISL's presence at the community level covers 7 out of 16 districts through 24 long-term development programmes.

Why did World Vision Sierra Leone invest in *Partner of Choice*?

WVISL had observed that its partnering tended to be ad hoc and opportunistic rather than strategic and intentional. At the same time, assuring sustainable outcomes was challenging because of the low capabilities of both government and civil society. As a response to this context, a key element of WVISL's approach to sustainability is in strengthening the range of actors that contribute to child well-being at the community level. Importantly, building on learning from the Ebola response, there was a clear recognition that, 'We don't need to do it all ourselves'.

What did World Vision Sierra Leone focus on?

A key aspect of the approach has been to design a clear partnering business plan that articulates the goals, approaches, and range of new and existing partners that WVISL plans to work with in pursuit of its strategic objectives. To help achieve the new business plan, we created a partnering team to drive change through the organisation and have recruited a partnering specialist to monitor and document learning and emerging best practices.

One key area of change

WVISL started by building the capability of leadership to take ownership for making *Partner of Choice* a reality. The senior leadership team now consistently communicates the importance of partnering and models partnering principles to staff. Practical steps have included leadership decisions to allocate budget to support systems for partnering, embedding the contribution of partnerships in the new country strategy and establishing portfolio analysis of partnerships to make sure that the organisation invests wisely.

**A new partnership:****AimHealth Plus for maternal and child health**

Inspired by *Partner of Choice*, WVISL has been working with the national government to strengthen collaboration. Instead of a series of individual projects and the associated reporting, we've negotiated a new provision that brings together all of WVISL work into one portfolio for strategic planning and monitoring at the highly influential level of the Permanent Secretary in the Ministries. An early success resulting from elevating the strategic nature of collaboration with the government is AIMHealth Plus. This project focuses on ending preventable deaths in maternal and child health, and improves the health and nutrition of women and children. It leverages mobile phone technologies to gain access to health services and was piloted in partnership with local district health units. Leveraging the new strategic relationship with the government, we've been able to rapidly take this project from the pilot stage to the point where it will now be implemented nationally, targeting over 58,000 pregnant mothers.

COUNTRY OFFICE PROFILE

Lebanon

World Vision has been working in Lebanon since 1975. Its programmes have focused on child protection; water, sanitation and hygiene; education; livelihoods; and humanitarian relief activities through a participatory and community-led approach. World Vision was able to respond rapidly and at scale to the onset of the Syria crisis in 2011 by leveraging established operations, experienced local staff and strong relationships with local stakeholders. Over the last nine years, this country office has assisted over 1.3 million Syrian refugees and vulnerable members of local host communities throughout the country.

Why did World Vision Lebanon invest in *Partner of Choice*?

Lebanon is a fragile context that suffers from a broad set of vulnerability factors. To address these factors, we need an integrated approach that includes bringing together actors who are focused on child well-being. Partnering is embedded in World Vision Lebanon's strategy, with the goal of increasing reach, accessing more resources and together achieving greater impact. World Vision Lebanon enrolled in *Partner of Choice* in order to become a more trusted and effective partner for key stakeholders within the country and the region.

What did World Vision Lebanon focus on?

Based on the *Partner of Choice* assessment and new country strategy, World Vision Lebanon decided to focus on:

- designing and socialising a simple and clear business process for partnering
- operational staff having greater clarity about the value of their partnership activity
- ensuring that partnering responsibilities were built into job descriptions and performance expectations across the organisation.

One key area of change

One of the key areas that World Vision Lebanon prioritised was strengthening its partnership systems by developing a business process to guide its partnership process, including a responsibility-accountability matrix. This has ensured staff across functions know what to do and when to do it throughout a partnership lifecycle, and it has brought clarity and accountability to the partnering process.

**A new partnership:****Partnering for better job opportunities**

Lebanon's Bekaa Valley has long borders with Syria, and hosts a large number of refugees. These refugees and many local Lebanese families face extreme economic difficulties.

After the *Partner of Choice* workshop, WV Lebanon sought partners in the region to provide economic support. One such partner is the Michel Daher Foundation (MDF).

Together, the partners are running a livelihoods project to give vulnerable households and young people better economic resilience. World Vision Lebanon focuses on livelihood technical components and organizational capacities (e.g. finance and project management) to support MDF to run the project in an efficient and effective way. MDF brings their expertise in community engagement and technical training. To date, 172 people have completed courses ranging from computer skills to carpentry, video editing and child-care. Both partners hope to expand the joint project.



MICHEL DAHER FOUNDATION
مؤسسة ميشال ضاهر

Partner of Choice in the COVID-19 global pandemic

Both the immediate responses to COVID-19 and the rebuilding of societies require significant [collaboration](#). At the time of writing, the pandemic continues to unfold, with more and more economic and social damage revealed each day. World Vision is [responding](#) and has provided tailored partnering guidelines to each office, taking into account the unique situation. The *Partner of Choice* programme continues, and World Vision's country offices seek new opportunities to work with others and respond to the widespread need around them.

The country offices in the *Partner of Choice* programme are leveraging partnerships in their COVID-19 response as illustrated in these three examples:

- in **child protection and education**, creating safety for children out of school in Thailand
- in **relief**, getting food to isolated households in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- in **advocacy**, speaking up for vulnerable children in Indonesia (see Country Profile on [page 20](#)).



A national education network addressing COVID-19 – the Thailand Safe School Network

By Theerawut Worachat, National Coordinator, Humanitarian & Emergency Affairs, World Vision Thailand

Strategically aligned partnerships and co-created designs are key capabilities that have been strengthened in our *Partner of Choice* programme. One partnership directly resulting from this work within *Partner of Choice* is the Thailand Safe School Network (TSSN), which World Vision Thailand convenes and which includes three UN agencies, Ministries of Education and Interior, and civil society organisations. TSSN has been implementing disaster projects mostly focused on ensuring students are safe and protected in accordance with the international framework standard, 'Comprehensive School Safety'. Approximately 27,000 schools with 30,000 teachers under the Ministry of Education have received online training, which will benefit 5 million students. With the arrival of COVID-19, TSSN has pivoted to create national online education about the pandemic, bringing together the resources of the government and civil society members to:

- share accurate COVID-19 information via digital channels
- coordinate, communicate and create knowledge for students, teachers and related persons during lockdown
- provide appropriate care for students in the midst of an outbreak of disease.



Partner of Choice in the COVID-19 global pandemic

(continued)

Bingo! Innovative partnership responding to the COVID-19 pandemic

By Dragana Bulic, Advocacy & Partnering Specialist, World Vision Bosnia and Herzegovina

Partner of Choice in World Vision Bosnia and Herzegovina inspired a thorough revision of our partnering framework and a strengthened system to help us focus on brokering and nurturing strategic partnerships. The COVID-19 crisis has truly put our new partnering approach to the test. Our overall response is underpinned by partnerships with key government institutions, civil society organisations and businesses.

One business partnership that has made a significant contribution to our response has been with Bingo d.o.o. – the largest retail chain in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This two-year partnership had previously focused on reaching the most vulnerable children with basic necessities during the Christmas and New Year festivities.

Once the COVID-19 pandemic hit our country, a critical challenge that emerged was to quickly and safely reach hundreds of families of vulnerable children registered in our programmes with much-needed food and hygiene items. As a result of creative discussions with Bingo d.o.o., the company opened a special account to help meet these needs, enabling specific vulnerable families to access supermarkets in 17 communities throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. These 'at risk' families were invited to visit the supermarket and directly choose food and hygiene items up to the agreed value. Within a week, 600 families were served in this way, enabling them to get through the initial phase of the crisis.

This innovative and effective partnership approach is already attracting donor attention and other funding opportunities to reach additional families in need.




Next Steps and Call to Action





Next steps

Now that we have established a working model for the *Partner of Choice* programme in World Vision, we are focusing on the following three areas:

1

Ensuring that this culture of partnering goes deep enough to make a lasting difference beyond individual champions in the country offices. This will need a focus on institutionalisation supported by continuous measuring and learning.

2

Going wider across World Vision's country offices. This includes ensuring that the partnering models are effective across fragile, humanitarian and development contexts. The programme can become more cost-effective by building on what has been achieved with a growing group of experienced practitioners and with the tools and resources available. Already – as demanded by the COVID-19 pandemic – the *Partner of Choice* Summit workshop [see [page 11](#)] has been redesigned so it can take place virtually.

3

Sharing the journey with partners to ensure that their feedback is sought and acted on. Then, together, we can achieve the desired impact for vulnerable children.

Call to action

The Sustainable Development Goals and the localisation agenda are extremely clear on the importance of partnerships in all sectors of society. Ongoing response and recovery from the COVID-19 crisis will also be faster and better through effective collaborations across society.

However, many times partnership ambitions remain unfulfilled because organisations are not institutionally 'Fit for Partnering'. To capitalise on the potential of organisations of all different sizes, mandates and motivations working together, it is important that organisations invest internally to build capacity and optimise their systems to partner well.

Through *Partner of Choice* we have seen that strengthening partnering capabilities is leading to more effective partnerships contributing to COVID-19 responses and the SDGs.

Therefore, World Vision and The Partnering Initiative encourage businesses, government departments, universities, UN organisations and civil society organisations to take the following steps:

- **Invest in becoming Fit for Partnering:** Review your capabilities against the Fit for Partnering framework and create an implementation approach suited to your organisation. Listen to your staff and partners to find out what is helping your partnerships be successful – and what is holding you back.
- **Track and review progress:** Ensure that you are measuring how partnerships are contributing to your organisation's goals. Encourage your partnering champions to regularly review progress, making adjustments where necessary, so that your partnerships continue to improve and make significant contributions to your organisation's mission.
- **Share learning:** Share what you've learned with your partners and networks so together we can build ecosystems of transformation – organisations and societal sectors that are equipped and ready to collaborate towards a sustainable future.

To share learning on your Fit for Partnering journey contact lan_deVilliers@wvi.org or info@tpiglobal.org





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wvi.org/our-partners



To explore how TPI might be able to support your organisation's to become Fit for Partnering, contact:

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