

child well-being reference guide



An introduction to
child well-being and
child-focused programming

Introduction

This guide contains information about World Vision’s understanding of child well-being and our child well-being aspirations and outcomes (CWBAAs and CWBOs), as well as our approach to child-focused programming.

The principles in this guide are operationalised through World Vision’s Development Programme Approach. Please refer to the **Guidance for Development Programmes** (www.wvdevelopment.org) for further details.

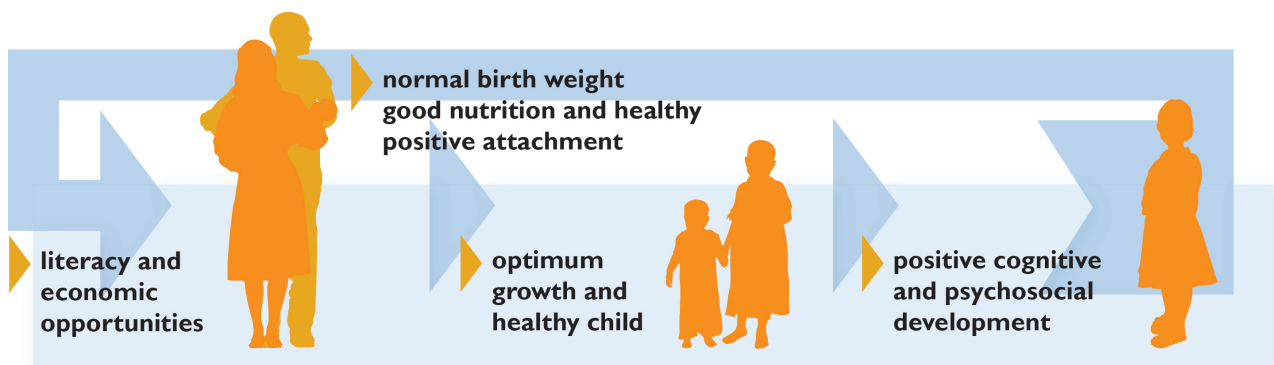
Why focus on child well-being?

Children are born with the same rights and dignity as adults. Children are also citizens with rights and this compels us, along with partners and governments, to seek progressive fulfillment of those rights.

Children are a barometer of poverty. Children experience poverty differently than adults do because of their vulnerability and lack of legal and economic status in society. A child’s well-being, in all aspects of his or her lives, reflects the overall health and development of the family, community and society they live in. A thriving society values all children, especially the most vulnerable, and upholds their human rights.

Childhood poverty can have lifelong consequences. Children are especially vulnerable to shocks, trauma and poverty. The most important figures in most vulnerable children’s lives, their parents and caregivers (especially women), are often disempowered, poor and illiterate, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty.¹ Breaking this cycle of intergenerational poverty requires a fresh approach to development.

Breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty



There is a connection between sustained action in communities and a focus on children and the most vulnerable.² Compared to groups that connect over economic or social concerns, research shows that groups working with the most vulnerable children sustain their actions over longer periods of time.³ Concern for children can unite communities in ways that other issues cannot. Children can be the social and cultural glue that sustains community involvement.

Investment in children at an early age can generate huge returns to society. Research shows evidence that investing in children at an early age can lead to greater success in education; higher income levels; reduction in risky behaviours and expenditure on welfare services, as well as improved civic health and governance. Investing in children and their immediate caregivers can break the intergenerational cycle of deprivation, and lead to sustained change for individuals, communities and ultimately society.⁴

¹ Wheeler, R., Devereux, S., and Hodges, A. *Taking the Long View: What does a Child Focus Add to Social Protection?*, IDS Bulletin, Volume 40, Number 1, January, 2009.

² Donahue, J. and Mwewa, L., *Learning from Community Experiences and Perceptions*, USAID DCOF (2006).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Engle, P. et al. *Strategies for reducing inequalities and improving developmental outcomes for young children in low-income and middle-income countries*, The Lancet, Volume 378, October 8, 2011.

What are the child well-being aspirations and outcomes?

The primary goal for all World Vision programming is the **sustained well-being of children within families and communities, especially the most vulnerable.**

World Vision views child well-being holistically. Children’s well-being refers to:

- Positive relationships
- Healthy individual development (involving physical and psychosocial health, cognitive, social and spiritual dimensions)
- Contexts where all children are valued and experience protection, social justice and participation in civil society.

World Vision’s understanding of child well-being is informed by four different perspectives: theological, developmental, ecological and political. These perspectives help us to understand who children are, how they develop, what affects their development and who has responsibility for enabling them to develop fully.

The child well-being aspirations (CWBA) and child well-being outcomes (CWBOs) are World Vision’s way of describing a holistic picture of child well-being. The foundational principles show our intent to utilise child rights to improve child well-being.

| Goal: Sustained well-being of children within families and communities, especially the most vulnerable Luke 2 v 52 “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and people.” | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| Girls & Boys: | | | |
| Enjoy good health | Are educated for life | Experience love of God and their neighbours | Are cared for, protected and participating |
| Children well nourished | Children read, write, and use numeracy skills | Children grow in their awareness and experience of God’s love in an environment that recognises their freedom | Children cared for in a loving, safe, family and community environment with safe places to play |
| Children protected from infection, disease, and injury | Children make good judgments, can protect themselves, manage emotions, and communicate ideas | Children enjoy positive relationships with peers, family, and community members | Parents or caregivers provide well for their children |
| Children and their caregivers access essential health services | Adolescents ready for economic opportunity | Children value and care for others and their environment | Children celebrated and registered at birth |
| | Children access and complete basic education | Children have hope and vision for the future | Children are respected participants in decisions that affect their lives |
| Foundational Principles: Children are citizens and their rights and dignity are upheld (including girls and boys of all religions and ethnicities, any HIV status, and those with disabilities) | | | |

Note: World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Motivated by our Christian faith, World Vision is dedicated to working with the world’s most vulnerable people. World Vision serves all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

How does WV use the child well-being aspirations and outcomes?

In work with communities:

Defining a good life for children begins with dialogue. Our understanding of child well-being helps us to facilitate this process with all community stakeholders and potential partners. However, the CWBOs are not intended to be imposed on community members, stakeholders and partners with whom we work. We use participatory methods to encourage community dialogue around child well-being and rights. These discussions and the statements that community members make help us to understand the community's view of child well-being in the area.



Connecting communities' understanding of child well-being to WV's child well-being outcomes can promote a more holistic approach to programme design, monitoring and evaluation with partners. WorldVision uses a *Compendium of Indicators for Measuring Child Well-being* which can improve our accountability to communities and donors. Monitoring child well-being with children and communities increases local ownership and empowerment.

What is child-focused programming and what defines it?

World Vision's theory of change

Our theory of change brings clarity to our understanding of poverty, inequity and vulnerability, and our philosophy of how we respond. All World Vision programmes and projects are designed according to their context and contribute to the goal of sustained well-being of children within families and communities, especially the most vulnerable.

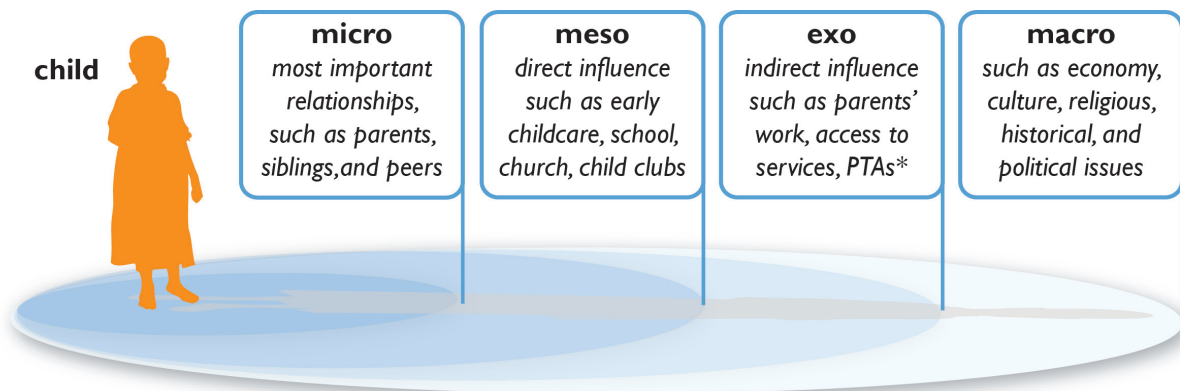
Our theory of change is not centred on children alone; rather, the sustained well-being of children depends on approaches that contribute to empowering children and interdependent communities, caring and transformed relationships, resilient and secure households and communities, and just systems and structures.

About child-focused programming

World Vision understands that parents and caregivers play the most important role in raising their children. A good start for a child depends on these primary relationships irrespective of the social and economic situation of the family.

World Vision is Christian, community-based and child-focused and through programming we seek to enable families and communities to create environments where children thrive. An integrated focus takes a life cycle approach to child development, taking into account the spiritual, cultural, socio-economic, political and environmental issues that affect their well-being and rights. Improved outcomes in childhood link to better well-being outcomes in adulthood. We believe this approach can break the cycle of poverty and vulnerability that entraps millions of children, and their families.

The ecology of the child



*Parent-Teacher Associations

Key characteristics of child-focused programming

Ecological understanding of child well-being

A child's well-being depends on his or her relationships with others and the social, political, spiritual, physical and environmental contexts that they live in. This is called the ecology of the child or an ecological model.⁵ The approach helps us to consider the different relationships, institutions, systems and structures that create a positive environment where a child can develop to his or her fullest potential. The theory shows us the different levels and types of influence on a child's development, from the closest (e.g. families and peers) to the farthest (e.g. political and cultural systems and structures). In each context, children are unique and affected in different ways. Children's nature, where they live, and who they live with affects how they deal with the risk factors in their lives.

Systems approach

Approaches that focus on issues or interventions in isolation from a broader understanding of how they relate to the overall ecology of a child have serious limitations. World Vision's work, together with local partners, can touch the child, family, community, civil society, national and global institutions and systems. A systems approach recognises that all these levels interact and influence each other.

Effective approaches to address root causes affecting child well-being require mature and sustained cooperation and collaboration between all levels of partners and stakeholders. World Vision's Development Programme Approach guides World Vision together with local partners to define functions, contributions and capacities along with children, families and communities towards mutually-agreed development activities. This helps nurture an environment where children can thrive.

Progressive fulfillment of child rights

Child-focused programming seeks to contribute to building safe and just communities. Using rights-based approaches enables World Vision and its partners to hold governments to account for their commitments to children. Raising awareness of rights and local-level advocacy can improve the quality of and access to basic services and social protection mechanisms. Fulfilling rights also empowers, supports and protects the most vulnerable children.

Empowered and participating children

Children's opinions matter. When opportunities are provided, children powerfully express their opinions about their lives and communities. Building the skills and capacities of children to express their opinions and have genuine opportunities to contribute to community change is a central characteristic of child-focused programming. Empowered children and youth can model new behaviours and values that transform society and contribute to a culture of democracy.

What is social protection?

Social protection is the set of all initiatives, both formal and informal, that provide:

- ▶ social assistance to extremely poor individuals and households
- ▶ social services to groups who need special care or would otherwise be denied access to basic services
- ▶ social insurance to protect people against the risks and consequences of livelihood shocks
- ▶ social equity to protect people against social risks such as discrimination or abuse.*

For WV, social protection is a set of policies and programmes that help poor and vulnerable children and their families to counter deprivation and reduce their vulnerability to risk. Equitable access to social protection services strengthens the care and protection of children within the different contexts in which WV operates. WV supports advocacy work at community and national levels that assures equitable access to these services.

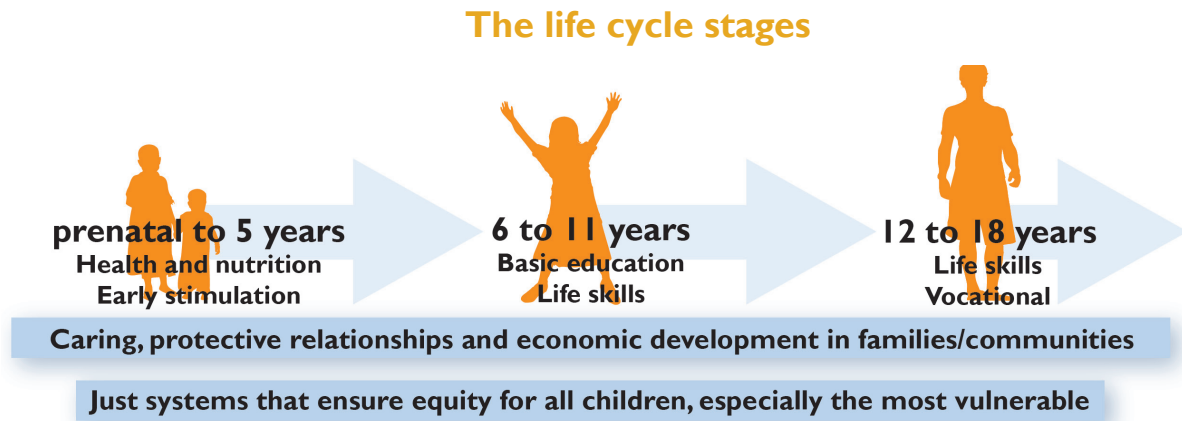
* Devereux, S. and Sabates-Wheeler; 2004

⁵ Bronfenbrenner, Uri (1970)

Life cycle approach

Child-focused programming takes into account that children develop rapidly and dynamically through different life cycle phases. With each phase, from prenatal to five years, six to 11 years, and 12 to 18 years, we recognise that there are specific survival, growth and development issues that should be prioritised. Each child progresses through these life phases at his or her own pace, shaped by genetic and environmental context.

Life stage interventions that link health, nutrition, education and protection outcomes with economic development and advocacy issues significantly improve children's spiritual, cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. A life cycle perspective also gives attention to the special needs of girls and boys at each stage of development.



Enhanced child and community assets

Child-focused programming builds on existing resources and assets within communities, families and children that enable children to thrive. Child-focused programming takes a positive, assets-based approach as opposed to a deficit, problem-focused approach. Communities, including children, identify existing resources and assets that promote healthy development. Building and strengthening existing assets as well as addressing gaps helps to sustain community efforts towards the well-being of their children. The more assets children have both as internal skills and competencies, and external within their families and communities, the better they are able to thrive.⁶

“Generally it is the accumulation of risks and assets in a child’s life that tells the story, not the presence or absence of any one negative or positive influence.”

– J. Garbarino,

Children and the Dark Side of Human Experience

Equity for the most vulnerable children

Ensuring the participation and empowerment of the most vulnerable children and families presents challenges in humanitarian aid, advocacy and community development work. We need to work with our heart, head and hands to understand the issues around extreme vulnerability. This includes awakening and deepening our commitment and spiritual strength to explore personal fears and biases, recognising injustices and discrimination both within us and in the context where we work, as well as developing programming that addresses these practices in culturally-sensitive ways.

In our strategy and our engagement with partners, we need to raise these questions: Who are the most vulnerable children? Why are they disempowered? What spiritual, political, social and cultural forces are oppressing them? What are the barriers that deny their rights and participation? An intentional focus on most vulnerable children and their families should be included in designing, monitoring and evaluating the impact of our programmes.

The child as the point of integration

Building on the understanding that child well-being is holistic and interconnected, effective programming approaches maximise the potential for impacting multiple well-being outcomes in project and programme design. The child becomes the point of integration.

⁶ Visit [Search Institute](#) for more information.

There are several approaches to integration including:

- ▶ **Life cycle approach:** A specific stage of a child's life provides an entry point for programming interventions. For example, an early childhood programme could include health and nutrition components, which link to livelihoods and food security programming, gender-based violence awareness, child protection and parent education.
- ▶ **Scaffolding:** A specific sectoral intervention can provide a platform upon which other sector or thematic projects can be built. For example, a water and sanitation project can provide opportunities to develop children's life skills through participation in project design, or peer-to-peer education in children's clubs. In another case, an economic development project like savings or self-help clubs can become the entry point for empowerment, preventative health, and literacy for disempowered mothers or young people.
- ▶ **Modular:** Specific content modules are included in life skills curricula. The modules both build the competencies and life skills of children at different ages, as well as provide life-giving information that can be applied in their families, schools or communities. Content could include sexual and reproductive health, protection, disaster risk reduction, water and sanitation or youth entrepreneurship.
- ▶ **Child-sensitive:** Programmatic interventions are sensitive to their impact on children. For example, a community sanitation project that takes into account children's views on location, disability access and design, and also considerations of safety and privacy for girls.

Conclusion

The purpose of this guide is to describe World Vision's approach to child-focused programming and understanding of child well-being.

In summary:

- ▶ Children are agents of hope and change.
- ▶ World Vision's primary goal for all programming is the sustained well-being of children within families and communities, especially the most vulnerable.
- ▶ Focusing on child well-being is important for development because it can unite and sustain community action, and break intergenerational cycles of poverty through the nurturing, protection and empowerment of children and their families.
- ▶ The child well-being aspirations and outcomes are an expression of World Vision's understanding of child well-being and are both holistic and interconnected.
- ▶ The child well-being aspirations and outcomes are used to bring strategic focus and alignment to our programming, promote dialogue with communities and partners, provide a common framework for measuring World Vision's contribution to child well-being, and guide our development, relief and advocacy work at all levels.
- ▶ Child-focused programming takes into account the spiritual, cultural, socio-economic, political and environmental issues that affect children's well-being and rights.
- ▶ Child-focused programming includes:
 - an ecological understanding of the child
 - a life cycle approach
 - the progressive fulfillment of children's rights
 - building on existing assets within the child and community
 - empowered and competent children
 - equity for the most vulnerable children
 - the child as the point of integration.



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