

CHILD SPONSORSHIP RESEARCH

CRITICAL INSIGHT INTO

WORLD VISION

CHILD SPONSORSHIP

How World Vision sponsorship programmes contribute to improvements in child well-being

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

© World Vision International 2015

All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced in any form, except for brief excerpts in reviews, without prior permission of the publisher.

Published by Child Sponsorship on behalf of World Vision International.

For further information about this publication or World Vision International publications, please contact wvi_publishing@wvi.org.

World Vision International would appreciate receiving details of any use made of this material in training, research or programme design, implementation or evaluation.

Communications Officer, Child Sponsorship: James Addis. Senior Editor: Marina Mafani.

Production Management: Katie Fike, Daniel Mason. Copyediting: Melody Ip.

Proofreading: Audrey Dorsch. Cover Design and Interior Layout: Blue Apple Design.

Cover photo: © Niroshini Fernando/World Vision.

Back cover photo: © Gary W. Dowd/World Vision.

Acknowledgements

The Child Sponsorship Research team would like to thank all community members, partners, local stakeholders, sponsors and staff who generously gave their time to participate in the surveys, interviews and group discussions. Special thanks are due to the national offices that provided extensive support for the field work – WV Armenia, WV Bolivia, WV Cambodia, WV Lanka and WV Uganda. Further, the team is grateful to the Program Insight & Results team, led by Joel Hughey (WV US), and the Child Development & Rights Technical Cluster, led by Paul Stephenson (WVI), for their partnership in the design and implementation of the Child Sponsorship Research. With in-kind and financial support from support offices, the research delivered a standard of evidence well beyond expectation. The team would also like to thank the Research Reference Group for its helpful feedback on drafts of the technical reports. Finally, the Child Sponsorship Research team would like to thank Associate Professor Simon Feeny from RMIT University and Professor Matthew Clarke from Deakin University for their guidance throughout the implementation of the Child Sponsorship Research.

Project Sponsors

Kathy Currie, Partnership Leader, Child Sponsorship, WVI; Charles Owubah, Partnership Leader, Evidence & Learning, WVI

Child Sponsorship Research Project Director

Lucia Boxelaar, Senior Director, Child Sponsorship Research, Child Sponsorship, WVI

Evaluation Leads

Christine Fu, WV US (Pottuvil and Arani programmes); Bridget Lavin, Tulane University/WV US (Masaka Kaswa and Samaki Meanchey programmes); Anna Mackintosh, WVI (sponsor experiences); Tafadzwa Nyanhanda, WVI (Vardenis and Weeraketiya programmes); Teresa Wallace, WVI (Nabiswera and Colomi programmes)

Evaluation Teams

Nabiswera, Uganda: George Ebulu, Peter Walyaula, Gilbert Guma, Victor Ochaya, Emmanuel Erayu, Obed Sebenya (WV Uganda); Robert Waswaga and Carolyn Nyanjura, Kenwill International, Ltd. (Consultants); Anna Mackintosh (WVI); Kelley Brown (WV US); Nami Kurimoto (WV Australia)

Masaka Kaswa, Uganda: George Ebulu, Peter Walyaula, Francis Onyait (WV Uganda); Norbert

Katsirabo, John Bosco Asiimwe (Consultants); Brian Bakker, Kelley Brown (WVUS); Anna Mackintosh (WVI)

Pottuvil, Sri Lanka: Asanka Senadheera, Sutharsana Kathiramalai, Samson Alexander, Gunawardana Umagaran, Rasika Mendis, Venilla Thevarajah, Ushanthi Srivimaleswaran, Thayalan Ledsumanan, Kajendra Nesarajah, Hinthu Kumaraswami, Eranda Rathnadiwakara (WV Lanka); Nkemdiri Wheatley (WVI); Aaron Mok (WV Canada)

Weeraketiya, Sri Lanka: Asanka Senadheera, Sutharsana Kathiramalai, Chanaka Peiris, Ishani Kurukulasuriya, Jayantha Fernando, Nimali Anthony, Ranadewa Fernando, Rasika Mendis, Venilla Thevarajah, Ushanthi Srivimaleswaran, Rochelle Senanayake, Eranda Rathnadiwakara (WV Lanka); Anna Mackintosh (WVI); Krystal John (WV Australia); Ravi Bamunusinghe (External Consultant)

Arani, Bolivia: Evelin Troche, Jhonny Mamani, Hugo Navarro, Paulino Condori, Richard Miranda, Nancy Laguna, Jose Enriquez (WV Bolivia); Elisa Waidelich (WV US); David Amaya, Aaron Mok (WV Canada); Nami Kurimoto (WV Australia)

Colomi, Bolivia: Evelin Troche, Jorge Daza, Boris Fernandez, Silvana Herrera Ayreyu, Walter Diaz (WV Bolivia); Anna Mackintosh (WVI); Elisa Rustenbach (WV US); Marcelo Terán and staff at ISO Consultores Asociados SRL

Samaki Meanchey, Cambodia: Robert Gillen, Sereivuth Keo, Kong Try, Aysas UI (WV Cambodia); Prom Tola, So Sovannarith and the enumerator team (Consultants); Brian Bakker (WV US); Anna Mackintosh (WVI); Aaron Mok (WV Canada)

Vardenis, Armenia: Astghik Movsysian, Anna Pokhshrayan, Mikayel Hambardzumyan, Husik Sargsyan, Evrik Ghazaryan, Zorik Karapetyan, Kristine Ter-Abrahamyan, Inga Haroutyunyan, Yulia Shahnazarova, Anush Shakhshuvaryan, Anna Harutyunyan (WV Armenia); Mike Gubser (External Consultant); Anna Mackintosh (WVI); Krystal John (WV Australia); Thorsten Baer, Katherina Gerarts (WV Germany); Aaron Mok (WV Canada)

Sponsor research: Nkemdiri Wheatley (WVI), Sharon Blair and Marie Capewell (WV Australia), Christine Muhl (WV Germany)

Foreword

Child sponsorship has long been a successful aid modality that allows sponsors to engage actively and regularly with the development process in the communities where international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) operate. By fostering personalised connections by sponsors with children and their communities, sponsorship not only enables long-term commitment to and engagement with children and their communities but also seeks to be transformational for the supporter.

Despite substantial global investments through the contributions of child sponsors, rigorous academic assessment of sponsorship has been limited. Research tends to focus on sector-specific approaches (e.g. in education or health), rather than the ways these approaches are integrated within a community-based programme to improve child well-being, and how the programmes are supported by sponsorship.

In recent years, public demands for greater transparency and accountability on the part of INGOs have become increasingly urgent. Trust is no longer something that INGOs such as World Vision can just take for granted. In addition, questions have been raised about the role of INGOs in an increasingly disintermediated world. The relevance of traditional programming approaches is questioned, as many developing countries no longer necessarily suffer from a lack of resources but from a lack of equity. A final challenge for the civil society sector relates to the fact that many development issues – climate change most notably – require global solutions. A recent publication by the International Civil Society Centre highlights that to be effective in the face of this disruptive change, INGOs need to become more effective at the global level, while simultaneously becoming more responsive to changing local priorities.¹

To sustain their legitimacy in the donor landscape, organisations such as World Vision need to demonstrate the relevance and effectiveness of their

programming models and show their commitment to ongoing learning and adaptation.²

In response, as part of its global Sponsorship Transformation Programme, World Vision initiated a research project to assess the effectiveness of its sponsorship model. We hope the findings of the first phase of this research, presented in this report, not only improve transparency to donors but also support the organisation as it comes to terms with the changes that characterise the civil society sector.

The research sheds light on issues we need to grapple with as we reposition sponsorship as part of a broader programming portfolio that seeks to connect grassroots engagement with national and global imperatives. It helps us understand how we best nurture and leverage our work at the grassroots level for greater impact at scale. It also builds on recent investments to better align globally with a development approach that expresses the organisation's identity as community-based, Christian and focused especially on the well-being of children.

Over the past decade, World Vision has strengthened its commitment to the well-being of children following a global shift in development thinking. This demanded emphasis not just on the survival and basic needs of children but also on the positive domains of well-being, such as social connectedness, civil life skills, personal life skills and safety.³ Four global aspirations were identified that focused the organisation on the well-being of children in the communities World Vision serves: children enjoying good health; children being educated for life; children being cared for, protected and participating; and children experiencing the love of God and their neighbours.

At the same time, World Vision has invested substantially in evidence and learning to improve transparency and accountability to supporters and communities. Programmes are now routinely evaluated, and since 2011, national offices prepare annual reports that synthesise programme data to provide a portfolio perspective on the progress towards child well-being targets. Work is also under way to improve our understanding of the way in

¹ Gnärig, B. *The Hedgehog and the Beetle: Disruption and Innovation in the Civil Society Sector*. Berlin: International Civil Society Centre (2015).

² Ibid.

³ A study of the Children in Ministry Working Group, 'Focused especially on the well-being of children. An integrated paradigm for Transformational Development', World Vision International (2002).

which our Christian faith identity influences our development work through the holistic development of children, including their spiritual nurture and our work with churches and interfaith partnerships. The sponsorship research project seeks to contribute to this learning journey.

We are pleased to share with you the insights from this initial phase of the Child Sponsorship Research, which leveraged internal programme evaluations. We look forward to the next steps, where we will

partner with external research institutions to build on the findings that are presented in this report. Please join us on this journey. We welcome any feedback on this initial report.

Kathy Currie

Partnership Leader, Child Sponsorship

Charles Owubah

Partnership Leader, Evidence & Learning

Executive summary

Globally, investments through child sponsorship are substantial. Sponsors contribute about US\$1.2 billion annually through their World Vision child sponsorships, and these represent a large proportion of the sponsorships implemented globally by large INGOs. Despite this level of investment, rigorous academic assessment of sponsorship has been limited.

The Child Sponsorship Research project was established in response to this evidence gap. It seeks to explore the contribution of World Vision's sponsorship programmes to the well-being of children; the ways in which a community-based approach supports communities to improve the well-being of their children; how World Vision's Christian identity informs the way it works; how effective its sponsorship support activities are in creating life-enriching experiences for children, communities and supporters; and finally, how its programmes enable communities to sustain improvements in child well-being.

As a first step, these questions were investigated through an exploration of the experiences of sponsors in five countries (UK, Australia, US, Germany and Canada) and through evaluations in eight World Vision programmes (two in Sri Lanka, two in Bolivia, two in Uganda, one in Armenia and one in Cambodia).

Child well-being

The eight programme evaluations highlight positive outcomes on several important indicators on child well-being in a range of areas. For example, the **Pottuvil** programme in Sri Lanka recorded substantial increases in enrolment of children in pre-school education (up from 70 per cent in 2011 to 86 per cent in 2014), as well as improvements in completion of secondary schooling (up from 59 per cent in 2011 to 67 per cent in 2014).

Positive health outcomes were also recorded. For example, in **Weeraketiya**, Sri Lanka, the prevalence of children under 5 that were wasting was 7 per cent in 2014, when district data suggests this was 43 per cent when the programme began in 1998.⁴ In **Samaki Meanchey**, Cambodia, 84 per cent of guardians agreed or strongly agreed that the children in their household were healthier at the time of the evaluation in 2014 than they were before.

Several programmes also sought to improve access to water and sanitation. In **Weeraketiya** access to safe drinking water was 94 per cent in 2014, compared to 35 per cent in the broader district in 1998. In **Nabiswera**, Uganda, this was 83 per cent at the time of the evaluation in 2014, when the 2011 baseline measured this at 23 per cent.⁵

Results with regards to improvements in livelihoods were mixed. In **Vardenis**, Armenia, there was a very significant improvement in the ability of caregivers to provide three basic needs (up from 10 per cent in 2010 to 70 per cent in 2014). In **Arani**, Bolivia, caregivers who participated in the economic development project reported greater ability to feed their children than those in comparison groups. Moreover, a higher proportion of women reported they have control over the use of household income than in the comparison group. In **Masaka Kaswa**, Uganda, the level of food insecurity was 23 per cent in 2014, while this was assessed (using a different measure) at 62 per cent in 2011. In **Samaki Meanchey**, on the other hand, only 37 per cent of caregivers reported they had the ability to address their children's clothing, food, school and healthcare needs from their own income.

With regard to child protection, spiritual nurture of children and life skills of children, findings were very encouraging. In six of the eight programmes positive correlations were found between participation in children's clubs and adolescents' scores on hope, resilience or social competencies. In **Colomi**, Bolivia, 111 out of 153 surveyed youth indicated they had benefited from participation in the youth network, most notably by developing a positive sense of self, improving social competencies, improving

⁴ 1998 data for Weeraketiya is drawn from secondary district data, while evaluation findings comprise primary data from programme target areas.

⁵ Data for Nabiswera was collected from 10 parishes in 2011, while evaluation data was collected from only four target parishes in 2014.

peer relationships, developing positive values and growing in their spirituality.

Community feedback highlights important ways in which World Vision programmes have contributed to these outcomes. Moreover, on several measures, findings are positively associated with participation in World Vision programmes.

Findings also provide insight into areas that need attention in subsequent phases of programmes. For example, in Nabiswera, the programme needs to strengthen its focus on hygiene and sanitation practices. In Vardenis, the next phase of the programme needs to address a decline in hygiene behaviours, diarrhoea management and vaccination rates.

In areas where World Vision is preparing to exit, remaining gaps are of some concern, despite important gains. For example, antenatal care for pregnant women continues to be below national standards in Weeraketiya. In Samaki Meanchey, only a minority of guardians report they have the ability to address their children's basic needs.

Community-based approach

Findings indicate how the eight programmes were designed to contribute to child well-being through a community-based approach. World Vision's community-based, child-focused development model recognises the profound relationship between investing in communities for the well-being of children and investing in children for the long-term benefit of communities.

The evaluations highlight that while programmes are very diverse in the contextual issues they seek to address, the types of activities are surprisingly consistent across programmes *and* technical projects. They seek to build local capacity and foster local leadership, collaboration, social cohesion and availability of resources and technology, with a view to promoting solutions that enable communities to sustain improvements in child well-being long after World Vision leaves. The evaluations assessed the programmes in terms of characteristics of community-based approaches that have been defined in the literature:



The eight programme evaluations highlight positive outcomes on several important indicators of child well-being. Photo: Sopheak Kong/World Vision

- **Community reach.** Findings reveal that the eight programmes reach not only registered children but also other children and the broader communities in which they live.
- **Ecology of the child.** All eight programmes implemented several technical projects to respond to the range of contextual challenges that affect the well-being of children – in other words, on the ecology of the child. In most programmes, many households participated in multiple sectoral activities. The evaluations do not provide evidence of intentionality around sectoral integration to ensure synergistic effects across the technical projects.
- **Community participation.** Evaluations highlight several examples where effective community participation appears to support the change process. They also indicate substantial scope for improvement in facilitating child and community participation.
- **Local partnering.** Successful examples across the eight programmes suggest that partnering with local organisations, including government, has the potential to support change processes in important ways. Yet local partnering efforts

were inconsistently applied and were mostly driven by short-term implementation objectives, rather than long-term sustainability goals. Several programme partners report ongoing dependence on World Vision. This raises questions about the extent to which local partners are sufficiently enabled to sustain local change processes.

Christian identity

The evaluations clarified the ways in which World Vision's community-based approach is informed by its Christian faith. Activities tended to be premised on a relational view of poverty that is informed by World Vision's Christian faith. Poverty is considered to be the result of broken relationships – with self, community, God and the environment. Therefore, many activities seek to restore or transform relationships in communities. This is manifest in three ways: a focus on Christian witness through a grassroots presence, a focus on inter-faith relations and partnerships with faith-based organisations to promote the rights and well-being of the most vulnerable children and their families, and a focus on the spiritual nurture of children.

The ways in which these themes are operationalised varies, responding to the diverse contexts of the programmes. For example, in Uganda, Christian and Muslim communities are mobilised to promote prevention of HIV and care of people affected by HIV. In the Pottuvil programme in Sri Lanka, the focus is on restoring relationships in a post-war context. In Armenia, World Vision partners with the Orthodox Church to build its capacity in promoting issues of social justice and spiritual nurture of children since its decline during the Soviet era.

Sponsorship support activities

In terms of how sponsorship supports World Vision's community-based approach, findings reveal that more needs to be done to ensure that child sponsorship support activities are leveraged to galvanise community-based care and protection of children, and strengthen children's voice and participation. The evaluations reveal encouraging examples of how child selection and community monitoring for child sponsorship achieve this, but these practices are not yet widespread in the evaluated programmes.

Findings also provide insight into the ways in which sponsorship creates life-enriching experiences for both sponsors and sponsored children and their families. Responses from sponsors indicate they find the experience rewarding. A large majority of children also report they enjoy being sponsored. Those who experience a strong relationship with sponsors report feeling cared for and loved, and connected to the wider world. However, many children yearn for a stronger connection with their sponsors. Of concern are reports of jealousy. Interestingly, interview data suggests that jealousy is linked to the practice of providing individual gifts – a practice that is contested within World Vision, with differing country perspectives on the value of gifts as an optional expression of personal support. Overall, the many positive examples with regard to sponsor engagement and the experiences of sponsored children point to opportunities to better leverage sponsorship for child well-being by ensuring promising practices are more widespread.

In conclusion, the evaluations highlight substantial diversity in World Vision programmes yet also reveal consistent themes. A subsequent research phase with external partners will build on these findings to investigate the contribution of World Vision's sponsorship model to improvements in child well-being, taking account of the complexity and contextual variation of programmes.

Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Foreword	ii
Executive summary	iv
Child well-being	iv
Community-based approach	v
Christian identity	vi
Sponsorship support activities	vi
Introduction	1
The sponsor survey	2
The programme evaluations	2
Research sites	2
Child well-being outcomes	4
Sri Lanka	4
Uganda	5
Armenia	7
Cambodia	7
Bolivia	8
Conclusion: Child well-being outcomes	10
World Vision’s community-based approach	11
World Vision’s Christian identity	14
Christian witness	14
Spiritual nurture of children	14
Working in partnership with faith-based organisations	15
Child sponsorship support activities	16
Sponsorship implementation in programmes	16
Community perceptions of sponsorship	17
The experience of sponsored children and their families	17
Sponsor engagement	18
Conclusion	20
For more information	20

Introduction

Child sponsorship is a common way for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to engage support from donors in efforts to alleviate child poverty. Sponsorship programmes foster a long-term personal connection between sponsors and the children they support through letters, cards and sometimes even visits and gifts. In their book about child sponsorship, Matthew Clarke and Brad Watson estimate that as many as 8 to 12 million children are sponsored worldwide.⁶

Globally, investments through child sponsorship are substantial. Sponsors contribute about US\$1.2 billion annually through World Vision child sponsorships, and these represent a large proportion of the child sponsorships implemented by large INGOs.

Child Sponsorship in World Vision

Child sponsorship provides the main platform for World Vision's child-focused development work in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In 2014, World Vision was working in 95 countries, implementing programmes in 1,614 communities that reached an estimated 120 million children, including 4.2 million children registered for sponsorship.

Despite this level of global investment, rigorous academic assessment of child sponsorship is limited. Watson and Clarke note that questions about sponsorship are mostly raised through journalistic exposés. They point out that '[s]cholarly scrutiny of [sponsorship] interventions has been very limited and there is an acute shortage of quality research regarding the impact of historic interventions.⁷ Moreover, research tends to focus on sector-specific approaches (e.g. in education or health). Very little has been done to assess the ways these sectoral approaches are integrated within a community-based

programme to improve child well-being, and how this is supported by sponsorship.

The Child Sponsorship Research project was established to address this evidence gap by exploring the following research questions:

1. What contributions do World Vision programmes make to the well-being of children?
2. How does World Vision's community-based approach support communities to improve the well-being of their children?
3. How does World Vision's Christian identity inform the way it works?
4. How effective are child sponsorship activities (i.e. sponsorship communications and child monitoring) in creating life-enriching experiences for children, communities and supporters?
5. How do World Vision programmes enable communities to sustain improvements in child well-being?

As a first step, these questions were explored through programme evaluations and an investigation of the experiences of sponsors. This report summarises the findings from the technical reports that were produced from this phase.

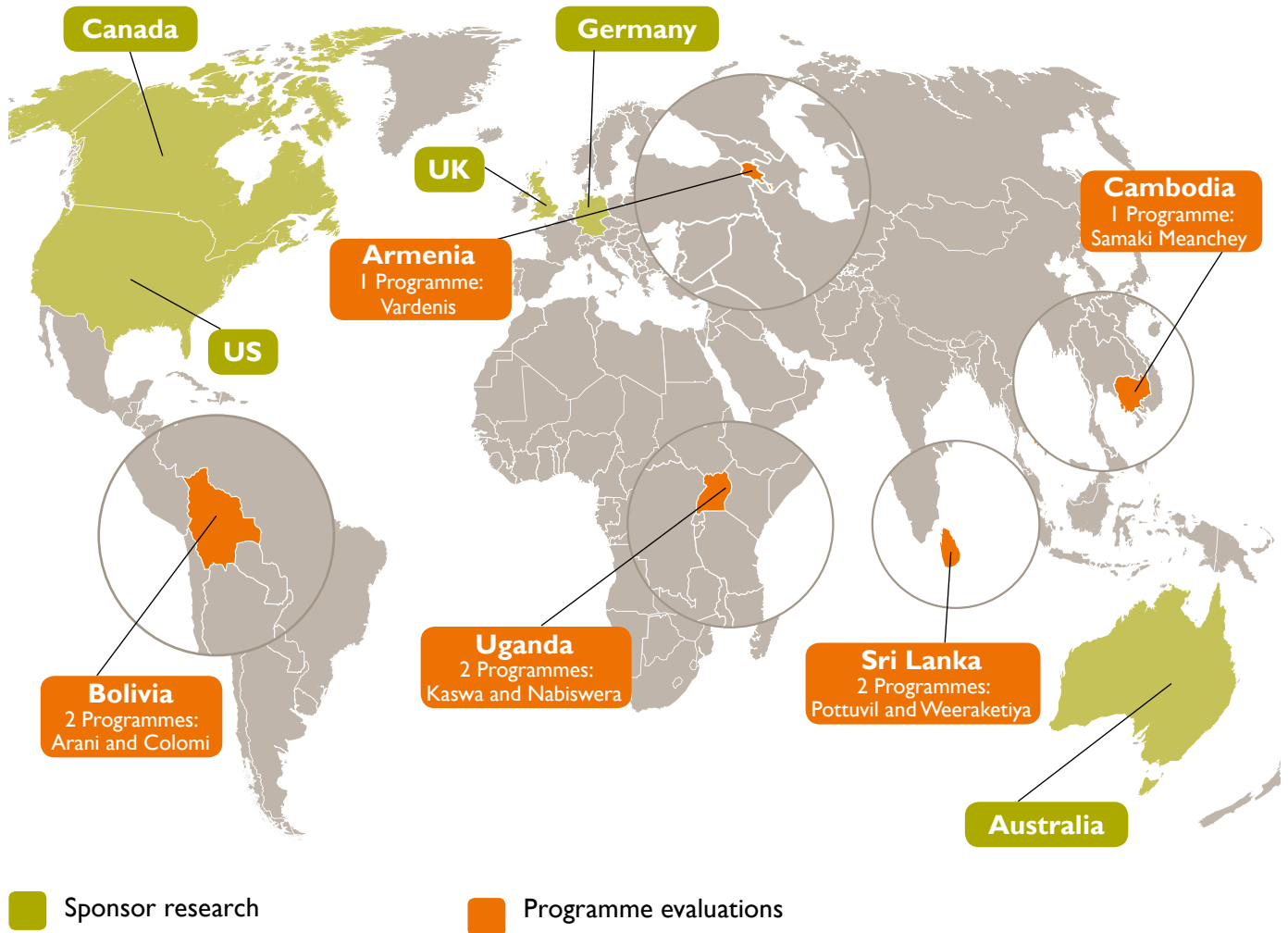
Findings are encouraging – they reveal positive outcomes for children in each of the eight programmes that were evaluated. Community feedback provides important insights into the ways in which programmes have contributed to those outcomes. Moreover, findings highlight that World Vision's contribution to child well-being hinges on the effectiveness of its community-based approach. They further clarify how World Vision's community-based approach is defined by its Christian faith and how sponsorship mechanisms support the development process. Findings also reveal uneven programming practices and highlight points of leverage for the organisation to improve its impact on the well-being of children.

⁶ Watson, B., & Clarke, M. (Eds.). *Child Sponsorship: Exploring Pathways to a Brighter Future*. London: Palgrave Macmillan (2014).

⁷ Ibid.

Research sites

Figure 1. Map of programme evaluations



The sponsor survey

An online survey targeted sponsors from four English-speaking countries (Australia, Canada, US and UK) that together represent more than half of all World Vision's sponsors. Just under 4,000 surveys were completed. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with 55 sponsors from these countries as well as Germany.

The programme evaluations

Eight programmes that were due for an evaluation in 2014 were selected from five countries for inclusion in the Child Sponsorship Research. Selection criteria ensured geographic spread and contextual diversity of programmes that were deemed typical of programming in each of the five countries in terms of the issues they dealt with; they also ensured that baseline data was available and that the national offices were not involved in other research or change initiatives.

Table I. The eight evaluated programmes

Programme	Phase	Focus	Funding Source
Nabiswera (Uganda)	Phase I	Health (HIV and AIDS, malaria); water, sanitation and hygiene; child protection	100% Child sponsorship
Masaka Kaswa (Uganda)	Transition	Agriculture and livelihoods; health (HIV and AIDS, malaria); water, sanitation and hygiene; food and nutrition; education; child protection	100% Child sponsorship
Vardenis (Armenia)	Phase 2	Economic development; health and nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene; education; child protection; disaster preparedness	79% Child sponsorship
Pottuvil (Sri Lanka)	Transition	Health and nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene; education; child protection; economic development; agriculture	84% Child sponsorship
Weeraketiya (Sri Lanka)	Extended transition	Economic development; health and nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene; education; child protection; environment and conservation	95% Child sponsorship
Arani (Bolivia)	Transition	Economic development, health and nutrition, education, child protection	86% Child sponsorship
Colomi (Bolivia)	Phase I	Health, education, child protection, economic development	99% Child sponsorship
Samaki Meanchey (Cambodia)	Transition	Food security and livelihoods; health and nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene; education	93% Child sponsorship

The eight programme evaluations combined qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys with youth and caregivers, in-depth interviews and group discussions with children,

caregivers, programme partners and stakeholders. Detailed methodologies, limitations and data are described in the technical evaluation reports.

Child well-being outcomes

Sri Lanka

The **Pottuvil** programme operated in Eastern Sri Lanka from 1999 until 2014 in an area affected by the long-running civil war (1983 to 2009) as well as the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Over the course of the programme, 3,025 children were registered for child

A snapshot of findings from Pottuvil, Sri Lanka

- Pre-school enrolment increased from 70 per cent in 2011 to 86 per cent in 2014.
- Completion of secondary school improved from 59 per cent to 67 per cent.
- While no changes were observed in rates of wasting and low birth weight, the percentage of children aged 5 and younger who were stunted decreased from 32 per cent in 2011 to 24 per cent in 2014.
- The programme successfully mobilised children and adolescents into clubs, with adolescents reporting high levels of hope and resilience, family and social support.
- The percentage of adolescents who reported acceptable levels of safety and protection increased from 57 per cent in 2011 to 85 per cent in 2014.
- The percentage of households engaged in farming, livestock rearing and/or fishing that reported that they were able to meet the food, clothing, schooling and health needs of their children without borrowing money increased from 6 per cent in 2011 to 17 per cent in 2014. However, the percentage of households with a formal means of savings decreased from 79 per cent in 2011 to 62 per cent in 2014. The data does not provide insight into why this is the case.

sponsorship. The programme served two divisions – one with a majority Hindu population and the other with a majority Muslim population. The evaluation was conducted at the conclusion of the programme in 2014, and findings were compared to baseline data collected in 2011.

Evaluation findings indicate that between 2011 and 2014, child well-being improved in all sectors that were covered by the programme: maternal and child health, communicable disease prevention, WASH, education and child protection, as well as household economic development. Such progress is remarkable given the communities' exposure to chronic war and natural disasters.

The **Weeraketiya** programme is located in the south of Sri Lanka in a primarily Buddhist area that is largely comprised of Sinhalese people. The programme began operating in 1998 and concludes in 2015. A total of 4,452 children were registered for sponsorship. Given the absence of baseline data, the Weeraketiya evaluation findings are presented with reference to secondary data reported for the district in 1998.⁸ The positive findings at the conclusion of this programme are encouraging:



Evaluation findings were positive with regard to health and nutrition in Weeraketiya. Photo: Hasanthi Jayamaha/World Vision

⁸ 1998 data provides a reference point only; direct comparisons should be avoided given differences in sampling strategies.

A snapshot of findings from Weeraketiya, Sri Lanka

- Prevalence of children under 5 wasting was 43 per cent in 1998 and 7 per cent in 2014.
- Prevalence of children under 5 stunted was 18 per cent in 1998 and 5 per cent in 2014.
- Prevalence of children under 5 underweight was 41 per cent in 1998 and 9 per cent in 2014.
- Household access to safe drinking water was 35 per cent in 1998 and 94 per cent in 2014.
- Household access to sanitation facilities was 65 per cent in 1998 and 95 per cent in 2014.
- Enrolment in primary school was 62 per cent in 1998 and 98 per cent in 2014.
- Secondary school completion was 22 per cent in 1998 and 84 per cent in 2014.
- Poverty levels, measured using the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI),⁹ were low. Most families were able to meet basic needs at the conclusion of the programme.
- A large majority of adolescents reported they have a supportive and loving relationship with their parents, and that they are treated well within their families. Furthermore, the majority of adolescents are hopeful about their future, and moderate to high scores were recorded in terms of resilience of adolescents.
- Some gaps remain. The proportion of children receiving minimum dietary diversity is lower than the national statistic; similarly, access to antenatal care for pregnant women is still below the national level. Also of concern is the fact that many households reported they do not have access to formal savings, which increases their vulnerability to future shocks.

Uganda

World Vision is one of many INGOs that operate in Uganda, a country that has suffered from high poverty rates and was significantly affected by the HIV and AIDS crisis. Uganda's 2013 Millennium Development Goal (MDG) scorecard documented the nation's achievement of halving the number of people living in extreme poverty.¹⁰ Uganda was also on track to achieve many of the other goals by 2015, including reductions in child mortality, gains in gender equality and women's empowerment, and improvements in sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Nevertheless, progress is slowing in efforts to curb maternal mortality and prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS.

World Vision's **Nabiswera** programme is a relatively new programme established in rural Uganda in 2010. In the programme's first phase, 1,994 children were registered for sponsorship, and the programme focused on two areas: health; and water, sanitation and hygiene. The 2014 findings for the six parishes that were the focus for the programme's first phase are presented in the text box 'A snapshot of findings from Nabiswera, Uganda'. These reference baseline data that was collected in 2011 for the 10 parishes that cover the entire ADP area.¹¹

The **Masaka Kaswa** programme in Uganda operated in a primarily rural area that includes one urban centre. It began its operations in 1991. At the height of programming, 4,000 children were registered for sponsorship. In Masaka Kaswa, 87 per cent of the population reported they are Christian and 13 per cent Muslim. At the time of the evaluation in 2014, World Vision was preparing to exit from Masaka Kaswa. The findings highlight positive outcomes for children; however, areas remain where adequate levels of well-being have not yet been reached.

⁹ Alkire, S., Roches, J., Santos, M., and Seth, S. 'Multidimensional Poverty Index 2011: Brief Methodological Note'. Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) (2011).

¹⁰ Republic of Uganda. *Millennium Development Goals Report for Uganda 2013*. Kampala, Uganda: Republic of Uganda. Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (2013).

¹¹ 2011 baseline data is provided for reference; 2014 findings are not directly comparable due to differences in sampling strategies.

A snapshot of findings from Nabiswera, Uganda

- In 2011, access to clean water was measured at 23 per cent. In 2014, 83 per cent of respondents reported access to clean water.
- Access to sanitation was 10 per cent in 2011, while this was 71 per cent in 2014.
- Findings suggest only modest gains with regard to hygiene and sanitation practices.
- The prevalence of malaria among children under 5 was measured at 65 per cent at the baseline in 2011, while the evaluation measured this at 47 per cent in 2014.
- Findings with regard to HIV and AIDS prevention were mixed. The use of one HIV prophylaxis method was high in 2014, but awareness of three prevention methods for HIV remained low compared with regional levels.
- Community feedback points to improvements in community awareness of child protection issues and child rights as a result of World Vision programme activities.



In the programme's first phase, health was a key focus area for Nabiswera. Photo: Simon Peter Esaku/World Vision

A snapshot of findings from Masaka Kaswa, Uganda

- The level of food insecurity was 23 per cent in 2014. In 2011, this was measured at 62 per cent.¹²
- 92 per cent of guardians agreed or strongly agreed that the children in their household were healthier than they were five years prior.
- HIV knowledge among youth who participated in the quantitative survey was generally high. Nearly all (92.8 per cent) of surveyed youth knew at least one way to prevent HIV.
- School enrolment patterns among youth in 2014 were well above the national average: 90 per cent of sampled youth were attending school at the time of the evaluation, while national data from 2011 indicates that only 16 per cent of age-eligible children were attending secondary school.
- Youth survey respondents tended to score well in terms of their commitment to learning and a positive sense of self. Responses from youth on a range of questions also suggest they enjoy positive relationships within their families and communities.
- Findings with regard to child protection are mixed. While most children reported that neighbours, leaders and parents could be relied on to help children, nearly half of youth respondents reported a lack of safety outside their homes. This was especially true for girls.
- Findings also suggest scope for improvement in terms of child participation in decisions that affect them.

¹² The 2011 data is provided as reference only. Direct comparisons should be avoided given a different measure of food insecurity was used.

Armenia

The **Vardenis** programme in Armenia began operations in 2004. Now at the end of its second phase, the programme has 3,910 registered children. It is situated along Armenia's border with Azerbaijan and comprises a small town within a predominantly

A snapshot of findings from Vardenis, Armenia

- Access to antenatal services for pregnant women increased; infant and young child feeding practices improved. The percentage of children receiving minimum dietary diversity was up from 23 per cent at baseline to 75 per cent at the evaluation, and early initiation of breastfeeding was up from 37 per cent at baseline to 73 per cent at the time of the evaluation.
- Access to safe drinking water increased from 80 per cent in 2010 to 89 per cent in 2014, although this is still below the national average.
- Access to sanitation facilities was high at 95 per cent, which is 5 per cent higher than the national average.
- While the programme focused on infrastructure development, the findings suggest a decline in hygiene behaviours, diarrhoea management and vaccination rates, and access to health services remains below the national average.
- A large majority of adolescents reported that they feel loved and supported by their parents and are treated well in their families. Moderate to high scores were recorded in terms of hope and resilience amongst adolescents.
- Substantial improvements were observed in the percentage of caregivers reporting they are able to provide three basic needs for their families (up from 10 per cent at baseline in 2010 to 70 per cent in 2014). However, many households do not have formal savings, and have had to borrow money in the past 12 months.



Hope and resilience were positively correlated with participation in programme activities in Vardenis.
Photo: Nune Hayrapetyan/World Vision

rural district. Vardenis is characterised by general decay due to the combined effects of post-Soviet de-industrialisation and war. The collapse of the Soviet Union saw unemployment soar as the area was hit by significant de-industrialisation.

Where possible, findings from the 2014 evaluation were compared to baseline data collected in 2010. The evaluation highlights important improvements in each of the sectors; in some areas, a decline was observed. This needs attention in the final phase of the programme.

Cambodia

In Cambodia, national data highlights important improvements on a range of child well-being indicators since 2000. Child protection issues persist, especially among the rural poor – with child trafficking and child labour of particular concern.

The **Samaki Meanchey** programme was established in 1997 and, at the time of evaluation, was preparing to exit in September 2015. At the height of operations, the programme included 4,000 children. The programme focused on child protection, water, sanitation, education, health, livelihoods, nutrition and leadership development. While no longitudinal data is available, the 2014 evaluation found evidence suggesting that many children and families were doing well on a number of measures. Some concerning gaps remain in economic status.

A snapshot of findings from Samaki Meanchey, Cambodia

- 84 per cent of guardians agreed or strongly agreed that the children in their household were healthier at the time of the evaluation than they were five years prior.
- Rates of vaccination coverage were high among young children. Most (87 per cent) surveyed mothers of children under 24 months said that their child had received a DTP vaccination, while 92 per cent of those with a child age 10 months or older said that their child had received a measles vaccination. Moreover, 88 per cent of children 6 months and older reportedly had received a Vitamin A dose.
- All but one surveyed mother reported that they had breastfed their children. Most (94 per cent) reported initiating breastfeeding within the first 24 hours after birth. Among surveyed mothers with a child under 6 months of age, 86 per cent practiced exclusive breastfeeding, compared to 91 per cent in 2011.
- Primary school enrolment has improved over time. Data collected in 2006, 2011 and 2014 showed that enrolment trends for secondary school students in Samaki Meanchey remained consistently between 70 and 80 per cent. This is higher than the national average.
- A variety of indicators suggests that youth enjoy positive relationships with their peers and families, with some scope for further improvement.
- Levels of child birth registration were exceptionally high (92 per cent) compared to national levels (50 per cent). This is encouraging, given that proof of identity is essential for children to gain access to basic services and to exercise their fundamental human rights.
- Youth scored in the “fair” range in a series of measures related to their social and emotional development, including commitment to learning, social competencies, positive values and sense of identity, sources of support, and degree of empowerment. Scores trended

higher among youth who had participated in learning groups or activities to promote child rights.

- Most youth reported that they trust their guardians and that adults care about child well-being. However, only 41 per cent indicated that they felt safe when leaving their home.
- Of concern is the finding that only 37 per cent of guardians reported they had the ability to address their children’s clothing, food, school and health-care needs from their own income.



Primary school enrolment has improved over time in Samaki Meanchey. Photo: Vanneth Um/World Vision

Bolivia

Bolivia’s challenges include deep-seated poverty, social unrest, illegal drug production and climate change. Despite being one of the poorest countries in South America, the current president – and first democratically elected indigenous leader – has succeeded in making positive economic and social changes over the past decade.

The **Arani** programme began operations in 2001, and World Vision was preparing to exit from this community at the time of the evaluation in 2014. A total of 2,755 children in Arani have been registered for sponsorship during the course of the programme.

A snapshot of findings from Arani, Bolivia

- Reports of family functioning among participants in pastoral counselling were relatively high across guardians and children. Reported levels of child neglect were low, with higher participation in counselling linked to lower neglect. Male and female guardians highly valued being a parent and having children. Participants in pastoral counselling tended to have higher marital satisfaction, and be less afraid of their partner.
- Households that participated in the Economic Development Project reported greater ability to feed their children milk, eggs, meat and/or cheese than those in the comparison group. However, food insecurity levels were similar between households that participated in the programme and those that did not. Households that participated in the Economic Development Project also raised on average more ducks and chickens per year and sold a larger proportion of their harvest, milk, eggs and meat production than households in the comparison group. Qualitative data suggests that this translates into greater disposable incomes for households participating in the project.
- A higher proportion of women who participated in the Economic Development Project reported they have control over the use of income than women in the comparison group. Interview data supports this, with many female participants reporting on the financial independence they gained from rearing their own ducks and chickens, and being able to sell those.

The evaluation focused on three projects:¹³ the Youth Network, the Pastoral Counselling and the Economic Development Project. No baseline data was available for these projects; however, the evaluation compared findings for respondents who participated in the

¹³ The evaluations of the Bolivian programmes were limited in scope and focused on projects that had not already been evaluated as part of a recent national study.

Economic Development Project with data from a comparison group that had not been exposed to programme activities. Evaluation findings suggest that the programme made positive contributions to children, adolescents and families who participated in the Youth Network, Pastoral Counselling and the Economic Development Project.

The **Colomi** programme in Bolivia was established in 2010. In its first phase, 3,645 children were registered for child sponsorship, and the programme focused on child protection, improving livelihoods, reducing malnutrition, improving school performance and creating strong networks of children. The 2014 evaluation assessed outcomes for youth who participated in the youth networks and children's clubs. They indicate that at the end of the first phase, high levels of vulnerability persist among youth in Colomi. Nevertheless, the programme appears to have made an important contribution to their well-being.

A snapshot of findings from Colomi, Bolivia

- Responses from 111 out of 153 surveyed youth indicated that they had benefited from participation in the youth network, most notably by developing a positive sense of self, improving social competencies, improving peer relationships, developing positive values and growing in their spirituality. Moreover, participation in the youth network positively correlated with youth reporting spiritual growth and optimism about their lives.
- Assessment of developmental assets among participants in the youth network and the children's clubs found youth continue to be vulnerable, suggesting more needs to be done in subsequent phases of the programme.
- Findings also noted the ongoing unsafe environment for children in Colomi, highlighting a vital need to focus on improving child protection and safety in the next phase of the programme.



Many youth indicated that they had benefited from participation in the youth network in Colomi. Photo: World Vision staff

Conclusion: Child well-being outcomes

Overall, important improvements in the well-being of children were observed in the eight programmes. In some areas, evaluations also highlight ongoing vulnerabilities and gaps that require attention in subsequent phases of the programmes.

Findings often mirror broader positive trends in the country, reflecting the fact that World Vision's programmes are part of broader local, national and global efforts to improve the well-being of children. Given these complexities, it is difficult to statistically discern World Vision's distinct contribution to

improvements in child well-being from other factors that also contribute.

Nevertheless, many positive correlations were found between participation in World Vision activities and positive outcomes. Moreover, feedback from community members and stakeholders highlights many positive ways in which children and their communities have benefited from World Vision programme activities.

'We have been trained on how to improve the breeding of ducks and rabbits. That's why our families are eating healthy now ... We have improved our lifestyles very much, thanks to the training.' – Community member, Arani, Bolivia

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

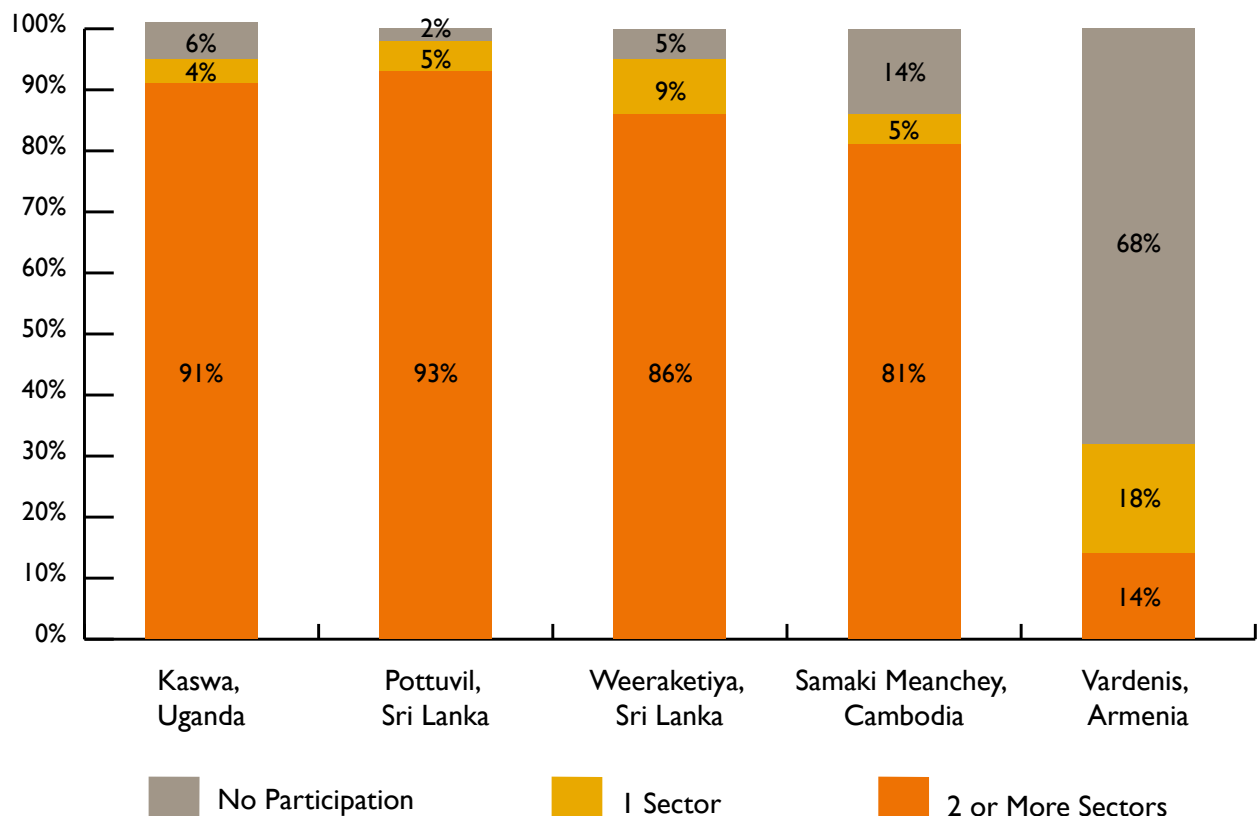
World Vision's community-based approach

Findings show how the eight programmes contributed to child well-being through a community-based approach. World Vision implements a community-based approach to improve the well-being of children because it recognises the profound relationship between investing in communities for the well-being of children and in investing in children for the long-term benefit of communities.

Critical insight: Diversity of programmes and consistency of community-based activities

- Programmes are diverse in the particular contextual issues they seek to address.
- The types of activities are surprisingly consistent across programmes *and* technical projects.
- Activities seek to build local capacity and foster local leadership, collaboration, social cohesion and availability of resources and technology, with a goal of promoting solutions that enable communities to sustain improvements in child well-being long after World Vision leaves.

Figure 2. Active participation by households across sectors¹⁴



¹⁴ The graph shows only reports of participation in activities that target individuals and households. It does not include exposure to community-wide infrastructure improvements implemented by World Vision. In Vardenis, Armenia, there was substantial investment by World Vision in infrastructure improvements that likely reached a much larger percentage of households than reflected here.

The evaluations assessed programmes in terms of key characteristics that have been defined in the literature as characteristic of community-based approaches:

Community reach. Findings reveal that programmes reach not only registered children, but also other children and the broader communities in which they live. This is consistent with World Vision policy that programmes include the broader population of children in the target areas; participation is not dependent on registration or sponsorship status. In most programmes, very high levels of household exposure to activities were recorded in target areas. A surprising variation of geographic scale was also evident, with some programmes focusing their activities on target areas, and others seeking to reach the entire geographic area of the programme.

Community participation in Weeraketiya, Sri Lanka

With the prospect of World Vision's departure in 2015, the federation of community-based organisations took on a coordination role for development in Weeraketiya during the transition phase. It established several mechanisms to generate income to sustain development activities. For instance, the federation manages water projects, and the community members pay fees for water usage and maintenance of the water project facilities. The federation has also set up economic development projects, including a brush-making business, a revolving milk cow programme, a small credit and microfinance investment programme, pottery projects and savings clubs. While World Vision assisted in establishing these projects; they now continue independently and generate their own income, which contributes to financial stability of the federation and its work.

'[If] World Vision can stay, it is good; even if they leave now, we are stable now because of them. All we have to do now is to continue with what they have taught us and they encouraged us ... We are in a position to move forward without any fear.'
– Community member, Weeraketiya, Sri Lanka

Ecology of the child. All eight programmes implemented several technical projects to respond to the range of contextual challenges that affect the well-being of children – in other words, on the ecology of the child. In most programmes, many households participated in multiple sectoral activities (Figure 2). Evidence of intentionality around sectoral integration to ensure synergistic effects across the technical projects was limited and this needs further exploration.

Community participation. Evaluations highlight several examples where effective community participation appears to support the change process, for example, in the Weeraketiya programme in Sri Lanka. They also indicate substantial scope for improvement in facilitating child and community participation.

Partnering with government in Nabiswera, Uganda

The Nabiswera programme was intentional about building partnerships with local governments and government-supported groups. It targeted these partners to work with from the outset, reviving existing village health teams established by the government. The programme trained these teams on various health issues. Despite some of the village health teams suffering functionality problems at the time of evaluation, this approach shows promise.

The Nabiswera programme also applied aspects of a local advocacy approach called Citizen Voice and Action (CVA), which brings communities and government service providers together for dialogue to improve essential services. The CVA dialogue between communities and duty-bearers regarding a dysfunctional health facility, which resulted in resolution of the issue:

'... [W]e also [participated in] Citizen, Voice and Action. We are bearing fruit [from this approach] because people listen to us. Our suggestions are respected by the community and district officials.'
– Parish development committee member, Nabiswera, Uganda

Local partnering. Successful examples across the eight programmes suggest that partnering with local organisations, including government, has the potential to support local change processes in important ways. However, on the whole, findings reveal that local partnering efforts are inconsistently applied, and mostly driven by short-term implementation objectives, rather than long-term sustainability goals. In several programmes, partners report ongoing dependence on World Vision, which raises questions about the extent to which local

partners are sufficiently enabled to sustain local change processes. This is particularly concerning for programmes where World Vision's exit was imminent, especially given the significant gains in child well-being that were observed.

Overall, the evaluations have provided important insights into the ways in which programmes are designed to implement a community-based approach to effect positive change.

World Vision's Christian identity

The evaluations explored how World Vision's community-based sponsorship programmes are informed by its Christian faith identity. Findings reveal that activities in the eight programmes tend to be premised on a relational view of poverty that is informed by World Vision's Christian faith. Poverty is considered to be the result of broken relationships – with self, community, God and the environment. Therefore, many activities seek to restore or transform relationships in communities. This is manifest in three ways: a focus on Christian witness through a grassroots presence, a focus on inter-faith relations and partnerships with faith-based organisations, and a focus on the spiritual nurture of children.

The ways in which these themes are operationalised varies from context to context. For example, in Uganda, Christian and Muslim communities are mobilised to promote prevention of HIV and care of people affected by HIV. In Sri Lanka, the programming focus is on restoring relationships in a post-war context. In Armenia, World Vision partners with the Orthodox Church to build its capacity in promoting issues of social justice and spiritual nurture of children since its decline during the Soviet era.

Findings suggest that World Vision was able to operate effectively in these very diverse communities. Community perceptions of World Vision as a Christian organisation were predominantly positive. Programmes were successful in overcoming initial apprehension or misunderstanding where these emerged when World Vision began operations. An oft-cited characteristic of World Vision in research sites is that World Vision is inclusive, works without bias and is respectful of all people.

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

Christian witness

Through its grassroots presence and long-term engagement with a community and local partners, World Vision seeks to be transformative in building and restoring relationships. Staff is encouraged through their daily activities to identify with and live alongside the poor and vulnerable. This 'ministry of presence' motivates World Vision to operate in some of the most difficult places in the world. It is explicitly inspired by a desire to bear witness to God's unconditional love and recognises the equality of all human beings. It requires depth of engagement and time.

Findings highlight that all eight programmes sought to have a grassroots presence, with staff living in or close to the communities they serve.

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

Maintaining a grassroots presence can be challenging, particularly in remote locations. Moreover, at times, the scale of operations (for example, in Armenia) and the practice of national offices to locate staff at the district level (for example, in Uganda), mean that staffing levels in the community are insufficient to enable an adequate level of in-depth engagement.

Spiritual nurture of children

World Vision's Christian faith informs the way that child well-being is defined. It does not just focus on survival and basic needs, but also emphasises spiritual nurture, social connectedness, civil life skills, value formation, personal skills and safety. Programmes are designed to build resilience and hope, and to

empower children, enabling them to experience the love of God and their neighbours, even if activities are not explicitly Christian or religious in nature. In addition, the experience is not necessarily understood by children through a Christian framework.

Both qualitative and quantitative findings highlight that in most programmes, youth exhibited good to excellent levels of confidence, self-awareness, support from those around them, hope and resilience. In six of the eight programmes, these findings positively correlated with participation in World Vision activities, such as children's clubs and leadership training.

Youth network in Colomi, Bolivia

In Colomi, Bolivia, approximately 300 adolescents participated in 12 networks in schools and churches that organised workshops, campaigns, theatre festivals, spiritual retreats and exchanges with other networks, as well as fun activities such as a soccer tournament. Activities focused on child rights, prevention of drug and alcohol abuse, and issues of child protection and communications.

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

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

Channels of Hope in Masaka Kaswa, Uganda

In Masaka Kaswa, World Vision partnered with all the churches and mosques within its geographic boundaries to promote HIV prevention, care and support through the 'Channels of Hope for HIV Initiative'. The programme mobilised and trained local religious leaders from Christian and Muslim faith communities on HIV prevention and care. Religious leaders were also encouraged to form Community Hope Action Teams within their own congregations to promote voluntary counselling and testing, promote advocacy, and provide home monitoring and support for members affected by HIV and AIDS.

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

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

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

Working in partnership with faith-based organisations

Formal and informal partnerships with churches and other faith-based organisations were evident in all of the eight programmes. Findings suggest that mobilisation of faith leaders may be an effective way to address local social norms to improve child well-being, and enhance the change process.

Child sponsorship support activities

World Vision's community-based approach is underpinned and defined by its sponsorship model. Sponsorship aims to create conditions for long-term commitment to and engagement with communities and to enhance programming by providing an on-going social platform of community engagement. The way in which sponsorship is implemented with communities as well as the engagement with sponsors is intended to contribute directly to child well-being.

Sponsorship implementation in programmes

In recent years, efforts have been made to improve the way sponsorship activities, business processes and systems are implemented to ensure that they galvanise community-based care and protection of children, and enhance child participation and voice. As part of that, programmes are encouraged to ensure that child selection and monitoring activities are integrated into the development process, contributing to education, protection and other child well-being outcomes. These changes respond to criticism that sponsorship activities can be an administrative burden for programmes to serve donor requirements. While these better practices are not yet universally applied, they have commenced in an increasing number of programmes.

Activities to support the implementation of sponsorship include child selection, child monitoring and maintenance of sponsor relations. In terms of child selection, global criteria are established to ensure that the most vulnerable children are identified by community stakeholders and, with the consent of their caregivers, are registered for sponsorship. From this pool of registered children, children can be selected for sponsorship.

Participation in broader programme activities (e.g. in health, education) is not dependent on registration status.

All eight programme evaluations reveal that context-specific selection criteria or local vulnerability factors were considered alongside the global criteria. Furthermore, all programmes involved community members in child selection. The way in which this occurred varied. Some programmes collaborated with community leaders (Nabiswera, Arani, Samaki Meanchey), others with local government and/or local school and health officials (Vardenis), some with community-based organisations (Pottuvil, Weeraketiya) and others with general community members (Masaka Kaswa). Despite these efforts, findings indicate substantial scope to improve community engagement to ensure more widespread understanding and satisfaction with the process of selecting children for registration and sponsorship.

Child monitoring is an important part of sponsorship as it seeks to ensure that every registered child participates in and benefits from World Vision programmes.

Historically, child monitoring was done through visits to the home of the child only. More recently, programmes have been encouraged to better integrate monitoring with other community and programme activities. The eight programmes included in this study reflect a range of practices.

In Samaki Meanchey, Cambodia, the monitoring was particularly well structured, and this was encouraging



Programmes are encouraged to ensure child selection and monitoring activities become part of the development process. Photo: David DuChemin/World Vision

given the age of the programme. The initial monitoring visit occurred in the home, giving an opportunity to observe the family's living conditions while also enabling a discussion with parents about the child's education, health and hygiene. Subsequent monitoring took place alongside broader sectoral activities through plenary sessions held both with children and their guardians to allow for mass sensitisation on issues important to the well-being of children, such as managing fever or diarrhoea.

'In the past our sponsorship focused only on sponsorship operations, but now it's [evolved]. It's now integrated with community development. It's connected to child protection and education and health through youth.'
– World Vision programme staff, Samaki Meanchey, Cambodia

In terms of utilisation of monitoring data, findings reveal some promising examples of the use of child monitoring data to improve programming, as well as the practices of government service providers. For example, in Vardenis, Armenia, programme staff brings relevant stakeholders (including regional child protection units and medical institutions) together twice a year for round table discussions, where they reflect on monitoring data. These meetings aim to identify joint solutions around the issues facing children in the community, including registered children. These solutions are integrated into programme and government activities. Some evidence suggests that involving partners in child monitoring strengthens the monitoring and care of children.

'Now I am more responsible, in the past I could take [child growth] measurements, say, once a year; now we do it more accurately.' – Health-care worker, Vardenis, Armenia

While child monitoring data is used to determine case responses for individual children by programme staff, their use for informing broader programme and community action was not widespread in the eight programmes evaluated.

Maintaining sponsor relations is another important part of child sponsorship. Programmes foster relations through a wide range of communications, activities and interactions. Sponsor visits were facilitated on request in all eight programmes included in this research. The number of children

that were visited by their sponsors, varied widely, as did the percentage of children that received personal letters from their sponsors. Monetary gifts were evident but not widespread in the eight programmes.

Community perceptions of sponsorship

There were widespread positive perceptions of child sponsorship. For some, sponsorship tended to be associated with gifts and letters. For others, the benefits of sponsorship were understood in terms of broader changes observed in the community.

Several programmes struggled with unrealistic community expectations of individual direct benefits from sponsorship. These were often influenced by sponsorship experiences with other organisations, by what was happening in a neighbouring area (where a different support office might fund programming with different policies) or from past experience in older programmes.

Furthermore, many people reported that sponsorship caused jealousy in the community. In interviews, jealousy seemed to be linked mostly to gifts, and this was not just an issue for non-sponsored children but also evident among sponsored children and within families. Interestingly, jealousy may be linked to the magnitude of the gifts in relation to household income levels. These findings warrant further investigation.

The experience of sponsored children and their families

A large majority of sponsored children report they enjoy being a registered child; a small majority of registered children who are not sponsored report the same.

Findings highlight that sponsorship generates a range of experiences, including children feeling cared for and loved, children feeling more connected to the wider world and children feeling more secure. Children describe feeling joyful when they received letters from sponsors.

'[I feel] safety, that I have a friend, relative, in a faraway country.' – Sponsored child, Vardenis, Armenia

Many children do not receive such letters and yearn for a deeper connection with their sponsors.

Sponsor engagement

Sponsorship allows sponsors to engage actively and regularly with the development process in the communities where INGOs operate. By fostering personalised connections with children and their communities, sponsorship not only promotes long-term commitment, but also seeks to be transformational for the supporter as well as the beneficiary.

The vast majority of surveyed sponsors (91 per cent) found sponsorship to be a rewarding experience. A high proportion thought sponsorship was an effective way to make a difference in a child's life and were aware that World Vision worked with whole communities, not just sponsored children.

'[Sponsorship is] a practical, pragmatic expression of my faith on a world-wide stage.' – UK sponsor

'My father was talking to a colleague who was rather critical of the whole [child sponsorship] concept, like, "You'll help one individual, but wouldn't it make more sense to change the structures altogether?" And then I said, "According to what I've been reading, that is actually the case [with World Vision], that you help on a large scale."' – German sponsor

What it means to 'have a connection with a sponsored child' varied among participants in the study. Regardless of how a participant defined 'connection,' the study found that two-thirds of survey respondents did feel connected. There was a significant association between feeling kept up-to-date on progress and feeling connected to the sponsored child. In light of that, it is concerning that

only 45 per cent of sponsors agree strongly that World Vision keeps them up to date.

Findings also suggest that visiting a child was powerful for sponsors who had the opportunity. Several interview respondents mentioned that just the possibility of a sponsor field visit played a significant role in their sponsorship experience, even if they never go.

Interestingly, the strength of connection that sponsors felt with a child did not seem to be strongly linked to the depth of the relationship. In interviews, some sponsors described the feeling of connection with their sponsored child as 'deep' but had no regular communication with the child. Conversely, some expressed feeling deep love for a child, but would still describe their relationship as 'tenuous.'

'I have three sons and a daughter, and that's why I sponsored three boys and a girl.' – US sponsor

'I hoped that [my sponsored child] would get kind of a sense of confidence in who she is and know that she's loved and that she's special.' – US sponsor

'I had never had [a sponsored child] grow [up] and be on their own ... I thought it was amazing. It ... inspired me to keep [sponsoring] because I thought there is an end to this, there is a moving on; this person is going to be self-sufficient. It's not like a hand-out for the rest of their lives. She was going to be a nurse and she was going to move on and get a job. She has been educated, she has been helped, and now she was going to go back and give to her community.' – Australian sponsor

The data suggests that sponsoring a child affects participants in a variety of ways. Sponsoring a child inspires many to act beyond their regular financial contributions.

Sponsor survey results indicate that many sponsors are inspired to take action

52% reported they share something about their child sponsorship with family and friends.

42% reported they take a more active interest in issues of poverty and injustice.

40% reported they pray for their sponsored child.

38% reported they educate their children on issues of global poverty and injustice.

36% reported they reflect on Christ's concern for the poor.

Overall, research findings suggest that if a child sponsorship programme is responsive and accommodating to sponsors' specific needs and preferences, there is great potential for sponsors' lives to be transformed and enriched as they partner with World Vision in improving children's lives. As sponsoring a child inspires sponsors to act, they become advocates and partners for change. Moreover, findings highlight that a strong personalised connection between a sponsor and the sponsored child can contribute directly to the well-being of children.



Visiting a child was powerful for sponsors who had the opportunity. Photo: Le Thiem Xuan/World Vision

Conclusion

Overall, findings from this phase of the research are encouraging; they reveal positive child well-being outcomes in each of the eight programmes that were evaluated. They also highlight there is scope for further improvement in some areas, and a decline on a small number of indicators. Community feedback provides important insights into the ways in which programmes have contributed to the observed changes. Moreover, some correlations were found between participation in World Vision programmes and positive child well-being outcomes.

Findings further indicate that World Vision's contribution to child well-being hinges on the effectiveness of its community-based approach. They clarify how World Vision's community-based approach is defined by its Christian faith, how sponsorship mechanisms support the development process. Findings also reveal uneven programming practices, and suggest points of leverage for the organisation to improve its impact on the well-being of children.

The findings from eight evaluations shed light on issues World Vision needs to grapple with as it repositions sponsorship as part of a broader programming portfolio that seeks to connect grassroots engagement with national and global imperatives. World Vision national offices are establishing national technical programmes to coordinate and connect activities across a portfolio of local programmes. This focus on scale raises questions about the role of World Vision's

community-based sponsorship programmes, and how these best intersect with national technical programmes. The evaluations highlight the importance of nurturing and leveraging World Vision's work at the grassroots level effectively as it aims for greater impact at scale.

The exploration of sponsor transformation highlights the importance of strengthening the connection between sponsors and sponsored children as a way of enriching the lives of sponsors and engaging them as agents of change, but also to enhance the contribution of the sponsor-child relationship to the well-being of children.

The findings from this phase of the research provide a platform for further investigation into the effectiveness of World Vision sponsorship programming. In a subsequent phase of the Child Sponsorship Research, a realist evaluation approach will be implemented with external research partners to explore what works for whom, in what context and how, in a way that takes account of the complexity and contextual variation of World Vision sponsorship programming that was evident in the evaluation findings.¹⁵

For more information

This report summarises findings from nine technical evaluation/research reports (eight programme evaluations and one research report on sponsor experiences). These reports contain detailed descriptions of methods and their limitations. For readers seeking more details, please contact James Addis, Communications Officer, Child Sponsorship: james_addis@worldvision.org.

¹⁵ White, H., and Phillips, D. 'Addressing attribution of cause and effect in small n impact evaluations: towards an integrated framework'. International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3IE). Working Paper 15 (2012).

World Vision International Offices

World Vision International Executive Office

1 Roundwood Avenue
Stockley Park
Uxbridge, Middlesex
UB11 1FG
United Kingdom

World Vision International New York and United Nations Liaison Office

919 2nd Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10017
USA

World Vision International Geneva and United Nations Liaison Office

7-9 Chemin de Balexert
Case Postale 545
CH-1219 Châtelaine
Switzerland

World Vision Brussels & EU Representation

18, Square de Meeûs
1st floor, Box 2
B-1050, Brussels
Belgium



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

