Theological Foundations on Food and Livelihood Security

INTRODUCTION

Our Christian faith compels us to take action to promote resilient livelihoods so that families and communities are able to sustain their own well-being and care for their children. Families experience fullness of life when they are able to care for themselves, one another and their children, and face the future with hope and security. Today, approximately one billion people go to bed hungry everyday, and over 15 million children die each year from hunger.¹ But that is not God’s design for this world. World Vision wants to see every child have the opportunity to live a full life.

To contribute to World Vision’s goal of the sustained well-being of children within their families and communities, especially the most vulnerable, we partner with others to empower children and communities to be agents of change. World Vision developed the Child Well-being Aspirations (CWBA) and Child Well-being Outcomes (CWBO)² and defined the targets for national and regional offices to guide our contribution to this goal. World Vision’s CWBAs and CWBOs describe a good life for children, affirming our vision for children to experience life in all its fullness.

For children to enjoy good health is one of the CWBAs and is a core component of World Vision’s work on food and livelihood security (F&LS). Good health is the foundation on which a promising future for children is built. To achieve this, the outcomes that support this aspiration specify that children are well nourished and that they are protected from infection, disease and injury.

Our Christian mandate compels us to be good stewards of the environment in order to leave an inheritance for our children and to share food with the hungry. To support this work, World Vision set up the F&LS Cluster³ in October 2010; the cluster brings together the overlapping and complementary disciplines present in the following F&LS Cluster teams: Agriculture and Food Security; Food Assistance; Economic Development; Disaster Risk Reduction and Community Resilience; and Natural Environment and Climate Issues. The F&LS Cluster collectively focuses on the food and livelihoods needs of the communities and households, which will ultimately lead to the sustained well-being of children.

In light of our vision and mission to follow Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed, especially the most vulnerable, this theological reflection outlines some of the biblical foundations that inform and shape World Vision’s work on F&LS. Offices implementing F&LS projects should read these theological foundations together with the F&LS Strategic Guidance Documents.⁴ Knowing this material will broaden staff’s understanding of why they should implement F&LS projects.

Food should not be understood only as part of our physical sustenance. It is part of a story that calls us to act as grateful recipients of God’s bounty. Food is a life-sustaining gift of God intended for all people.

OUR HOPE

When creating the world, God abundantly provided everything needed to sustain life. God also gave humans dominion over the environment and entrusted us with the responsibility to weed, prune and inhabit the earth (Genesis 1:28–30, 2:15).

Today, as a result of human sin (which happened after the fall when judgement was given to humanity in the form of toiling in the fields and battling with weeds [Genesis 3:17–19]), the production, distribution and consumption of food are no longer based on equality, socially and environmentally sustainable agriculture, and economics which prioritise the welfare of all people (Jeremiah 2:7).

In light of this challenging situation, what do World Vision staff and leaders have to offer, and how can we live out our vision and mission? In the case of the feeding of the 5,000 hungry people in Matthew 14:15–21, Jesus was capable of feeding the 5,000 on his own, but he invited others to take part in meeting the needs of the people. He said to his disciples, ‘You give them something to eat’ (Matthew 14:16). In John’s version of this

¹http://www.wfp.org/hunger/stats
²Additional information available on the Child Well-Being page on wvcentral: https://www.wvcentral.org/cwb/Pages/Overview.aspx.
⁴Ibid.
event (6:1–14), it was a boy who offered the food. Jesus then fed the crowd with five loaves and two fish, and the leftovers filled twelve baskets. Despite the meagre resources available, all were well fed. Jesus asks each of us, ‘How many loaves do you have?’ This is an important question. If God is the creator, human beings are co-creators, and people’s participation is very much necessary.

The question Jesus asks us in our work is, ‘How many loaves do you have to contribute to child well-being?’ To pursue long-term well-being for families and communities, we at World Vision ask ourselves questions like, ‘What is working, and how can we do more of it given the available resources?’ The best practices we have now as an organisation can illuminate a roadmap for action to address hunger. Just as in the feeding of the 5,000, the F&LS Cluster encourages staff to trust God and use the available resources to address the underlying causes of hunger and poverty, thus contributing to the sustained well-being of children.

We should seek to bring food to the hungry, sowing a seed of joy and hope to those who are suffering. God intends the fullness of life for the human community to be a present goal, not the endpoint of history, which calls us to action as God’s stewards.

**CALL TO ACTION**

As a Christian organisation, World Vision is called to do the following:

1. **Care for the Poor/Hungry:** ‘Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land”’ (Deuteronomy 15:11). This is a command for us to take action to provide food for those in need. Living in a broken and sinful world, wherein we see hunger all around, our immediate response as compassionate people of faith is to offer food. After all, Jesus commends those who give food to the hungry, declaring that ‘just as you did it to one of the least of these members of my family, you did it to me’ (Matthew 25:40). We do this with care, ensuring that we do not create dependency but instead work towards families and communities sustaining their own well-being. This is the core of the FLS food assistance programme, which contributes directly to the CWBAs, helping ensure children are well nourished.

2. **Care for the Environment:** ‘God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it’ (Genesis 2:15). In as much as humanity was given dominion over the earth, we were also given the responsibility to take care of the environment as God’s stewards and not to exploit it. This is at the core of the approach we refer to as the Foundation for Resilient Livelihoods. It is not enough to work the land to produce a harvest. We must simultaneously care for the resources placed in our care. We are not to be content with the world as it is. Rather, we pursue its restoration and recovery by intentionally working to rebuild the foundations of healthy landscapes, households and communities. This is done through intentional efforts such as re-establishing forests and trees, rebuilding soils and soil carbon, and improving water resources. This core of the Agriculture and Food Security and Climate Issues programmes supports the CWBA, ‘children enjoy good health’.

3. **Achieve Sustainability:** ‘The good leave an inheritance to their children’s children’ (Proverbs 13:22). Through our Economic Development programmes, we work towards building up the financial resources (savings) of households to help in times of weather shocks, and we encourage communities to be connected so that they help one another through difficult times (social capital). As such, the F&LS Cluster promotes livelihood strategies that are resilient, do not negatively affect others or the environment, and enable parents to provide for their families through Disaster Risk Reduction and Community Resilience programmes, contributing to the CWBA, ‘children are cared for, protected and participating’ and ‘children are educated for life’.

4. **Promote Justice:** ‘Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice…to let the oppressed go free?… Is it not to share your bread with the hungry?’ (Isaiah 58:6–7). While providing food in times of want is commendable and necessary, the first and foremost vocation is that we loose the bonds of injustice and let the oppressed go free. This vocation requires that we reflect on, critique and act against unjust systems and structures that lead to hunger and poverty. F&LS is not only about ‘equitable distribution’ of resources. It is also about creating just systems, structures and practices that enable all people everywhere to provide for their families and to contribute to the sustained well-being of children, supporting the CWBA, ‘children are cared for, protected and participating’.
5. ** Seek Transformational Development:** ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’ (Matthew 4:4). This passage makes it clear that well-being is more than food alone. For this reason our F&LS work is set in a broader context of World Vision’s holistic approach to development that addresses the needs of the entire person and community. This includes, as this passage alludes to, the person’s spiritual health and well-being, contributing to the CWBA, ‘children experience the love of God and their neighbours’.

The F&LS Cluster has created a working group on Christian commitment in F&LS work. This working group will continue to develop and share theological reflections on F&LS in order for World Vision staff to gain a better understanding of why we do the work that we do.

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