

# When social capital pays off

A synthesis evaluation of the child centred community development programme



## **Management response**

to the 'Synthesis Evaluation'

March 2019

## Introduction

This is the management response to the findings of the synthesis evaluation of Help a Child with the title ‘When Social Capital pays off, A Synthesis Evaluation of the child-centred community development programme.’ The synthesis evaluation was conducted in 2018; the year that Help a Child (HaC) celebrated its 50th anniversary. The objective of this management response is to communicate the decisions taken by the Management Team (MT) to further improve the impact and sustainability of the Help a Child community projects. These decisions are based on the synthesis evaluation and reflections of the evaluator, partners, HaC country offices and HaC International.

## Synthesis Evaluation report

The external evaluator, Wouter Rijnveld of Resultante, conducted the synthesis evaluation. The methodology of the synthesis evaluation consisted of a desk study of external mid-term and end-term evaluations of community projects, a review of all monitoring results of these projects, and a field visit to four former project sites. The evaluation resulted in a [full report](#) in English and a ten pages leaflet with [infographics](#) in Dutch, English, and French.

## Process

The synthesis evaluation report was published in April 2018. Between June and August all local implementing partners, HaC country offices, and HaC International organized a reflection session to discuss the findings and recommendations of the evaluation. A discussion paper was written by HaC; this discussion paper summarized key reflections and proposed a way forward. During a Strategic Consultation Week in September 2018, the Management Team (MT) with the country program directors (CPDs) identified the issues that required follow-up. Between September and December 2018, the MT worked on translating these issues into five projects. These five projects that aim to improve our program, taking into account the main findings of the synthesis evaluation, are further explained in this management response.

## Response of HaC Management Team

Help a Child is very grateful for the critical and thorough synthesis evaluation done by Wouter Rijnveld. It has given us great insights and new perspectives on how to further improve the impact and sustainability of our community program. We are very proud to read that the evaluator notes that many of our projects make a sustainable impact on the wellbeing of children and that our key strength is that we substantially contribute to social resilience in communities. HaC is very passionate to learn and to continuously increase the impact of our work. Therefore we are embracing the more critical remarks of the evaluator. As explained below, these have resulted in five projects aiming for further improvement of our program

## Project 1: Revision Theory of Change

During reflections by partners, HaC country office and HaC International it became clear that there is some misunderstanding on the application of the Theory of Change (ToC). Is the ToC a blueprint that needs to be followed precisely and consequently do projects need to cover all

elements mentioned, or is it a framework that can be used to pick and choose applicable elements depending on the context? Secondly, questions were raised on the ‘hope and dignity’ element in our vision of holistic child wellbeing, as it is often not made explicit in our projects. Thirdly, the role of the family in our community approach is not clear. The ToC directs projects very well to focus on child wellbeing and community empowerment. However, the level of families, the link between these two, is not addressed sufficiently. Fourthly, the ToC is not explicit about the two expertise areas of HaC; Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Youth & Work, causing misunderstanding in the application of these expertise areas.

The main objective for this project is to revise the ToC of HaC to become a well-understood framework that guides the implementation of our projects. More explanation will be given to elements like the role of the family, the role of ECD and Youth & Work, and more emphasis will be put on ‘Hope and Dignity’. In this way, the ToC will function as a framework instead of a blueprint. In addition to re-writing the ToC itself, some supporting forms and documents need adjustments as well. In addition, two sub-projects will work towards a more clear definition and approach of ECD and Youth & Work and their link to the ToC of Help a Child.

## Project 2: Increased sustainability

Sustainability has been one of the most important points of attention in the synthesis evaluation. The mixed findings, with both positive and critical remarks, show that Help a Child in theory and practice is capable of sustainable community development, but that further improvements are needed to ensure sustainability of all of our projects.

Currently, there is too little dialogue between HaC International, HaC country offices, partners and communities on the philosophy of sustainability. With ‘philosophy of sustainability’ we mean the theory on how sustainability can be best achieved, and the reason why Help a Child considers sustainability in itself to be of crucial importance. It also includes a reflection on the ‘slow’ and ‘fast’ way of development and the preferred approach for Help a Child. Not every project needs to follow a blueprint on how to ensure sustainability, but each project does need to have a common understanding of the underlying philosophy on sustainability.

The main objective of the project ‘Sustainability’ is thus to increase the sustainability of all Help a Child projects. For this, the project will:

- develop a clear description of our ‘sustainability philosophy’;
- develop/fine-tune processes and formats of HaC that reflect the sustainability philosophy, including requesting seven years’ work plans for each program with a focus on phase-out and sustainability from the start;
- develop materials/resources for the capacity building of staff and partners to ensure the sustainability of projects;
- disseminate a plan to ensure that HaC philosophy of sustainability is shared and endorsed by HaC & partner staff and (indirectly) beneficiaries.

## Project 3: Hope and Dignity

In Help a Child’s Theory of Change ‘with Hope and Dignity’ is explained as ‘spiritual development: to live a life with purpose, hope and dignity’, and is further described as one of the four aspects of child wellbeing that needs to be developed in a balanced way together with the other three aspects. HaC believes that strengthening the spiritual wellbeing of

children is valuable for improving the overall wellbeing of children. At the same time, it is clear that Help a Child is not a missionary organization and that it works in different contexts, including where Christianity is a minority.

The synthesis reports shows that HaC did not monitor or evaluate the impact of the projects on children's 'Hope and Dignity'. This is caused by the way HaC has defined and operationalized the concept of Hope and Dignity.

The main objective of the project 'Hope and Dignity' is therefore to get a better insight in the meaning of Hope & Dignity (for Help a Child) and to have adequate tools to use our Christian identity/our interpretation of Hope & Dignity to contribute to the spiritual wellbeing of children, especially in contexts with a Christian majority.

For this, the project will:

- develop a clear definition of Hope & Dignity for Help a Child;
- develop a guideline on how to use this definition in our communication towards our constituency;
- develop a Hope and Dignity brochure for our staff and partners that explains our definition of Hope and Dignity, that shows the application of this concept in programs, elaborates on the challenges and explains good practices;
- provide input for Terms of References for future external evaluations in order to ensure that they will contain a section on evaluating Hope & Dignity.

## **Project 4: Inclusion of men and families in interventions**

The synthesis evaluation shows that attention is needed for the role of men and families.

Focusing too much on women empowerment might have unintended negative consequences for the position of men and gender-balances. Since men, women, youth, and children live together in households, giving more attention to the role of families is a good way to link and harmonize various specific interventions aimed at children, youth and/or parents.

The main objective of this project is to contribute to the overall objective of Help a Child to promote supportive and loving families with balanced participation between men and women towards the achievement of positive outcomes on the wellbeing of children. For this, the project will perform literature research and a survey amongst staff and partners will be conducted. The gathered information will be used to develop a position paper on the inclusion of men and families in our community approach. This position paper will also include good practices and practical solutions.

## **Project 5: Knowledge dissemination**

Although not specifically mentioned in the evaluation as a point of attention, the evaluation made Help a Child more aware that an important part of our success is related to the question whether we succeed in strengthening the capacity and knowledge of the staff at all levels.

For example, if a field-officer does not have a good understanding of the philosophy on sustainability, it will be hard for him or her to work towards a sustainable project. Sharing knowledge and learning throughout the organization is a challenge for Help a Child. It is acknowledged that writing a policy document and sending this around is not an effective manner to facilitate exchange of knowledge and policies. Additional measures are needed to facilitate a culture of learning and a conducive environment for constructive dialogue.

This project will, therefore, focus on developing a knowledge sharing and dissemination plan that can help bring back a dialogue with partners and staff at all levels. The aim is that all staff regardless of their position or geographical location have the capacity and knowledge to maximize sustainable impact for children and communities.

## **Never stop learning**

Help a Child's vision is to support children and communities to grow out of poverty. To achieve this we continue to strive maximum program quality. HaC is proud of the learnings identified in the synthesis evaluation. It is a deliberate decision to active follow-up on the findings as we are committed to further improve our program. This also reflects our ambition to be a learning organization. HaC will investigate whether it is possible to conduct a similar learning-focused evaluation in the near future to keep the learning alive. We always have to keep learning, as Eric Hoffer inspired us by stating;

*“In a world of change, the learners shall inherit the earth, while the learned shall find themselves perfectly suited for a world that no longer exists.”*