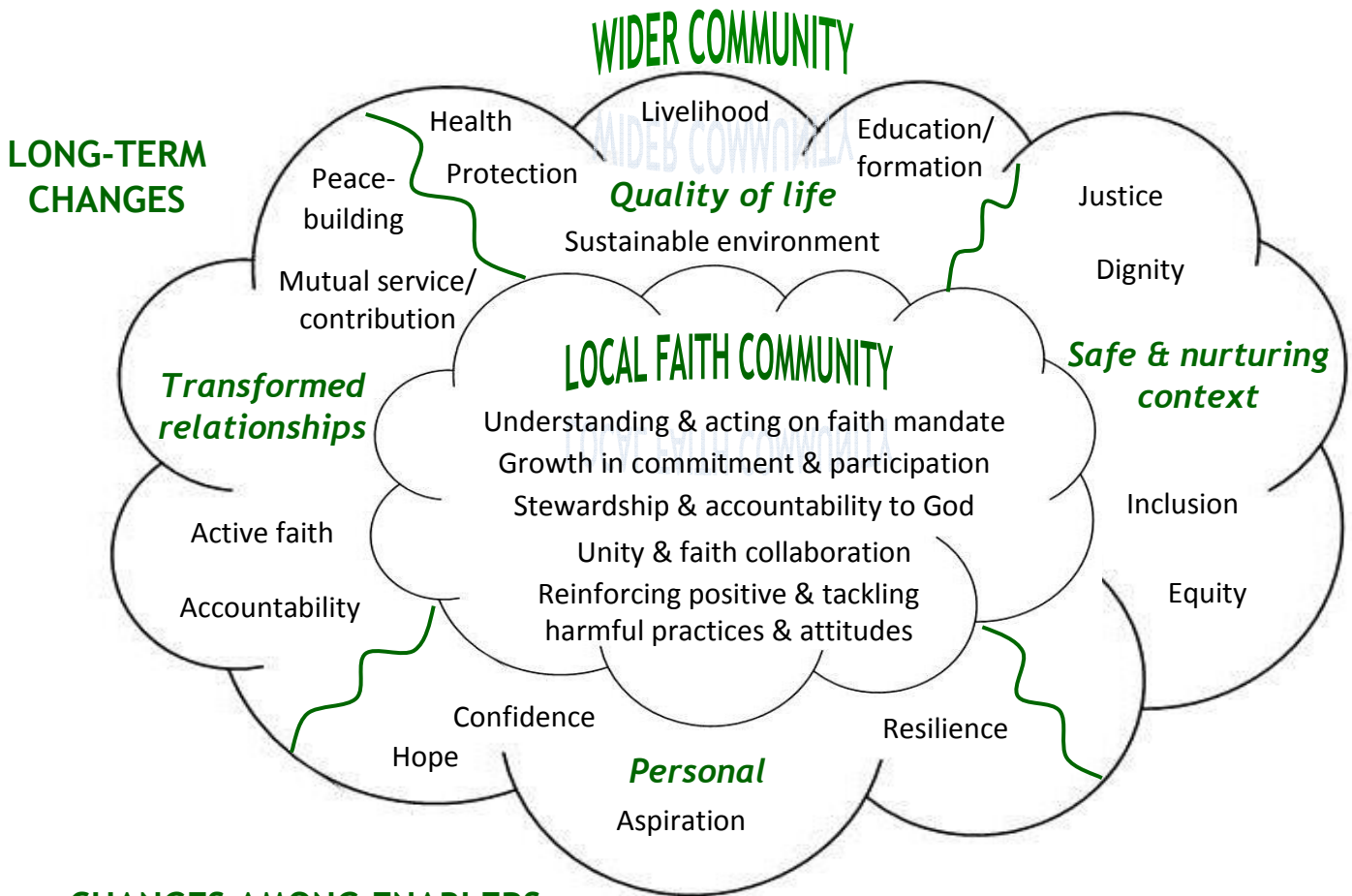


JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE ON FAITH & LOCAL COMMUNITIES - THEORY OF CHANGE

IMPACT: Empowered communities where all people, including the most vulnerable, enjoy well-being in just and caring relationships with God, each other and all creation.



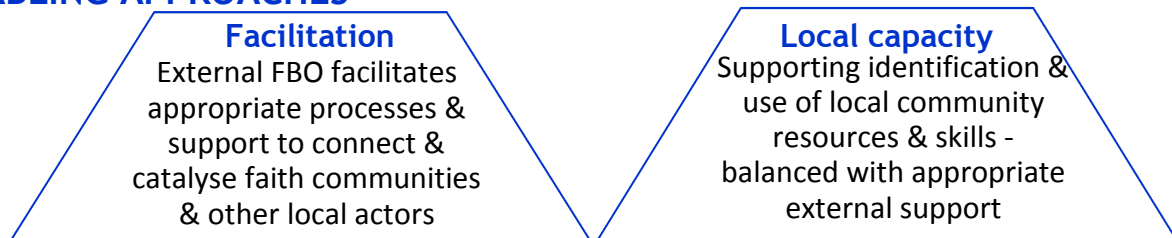
CHANGES AMONG ENABLERS

<p>Local faith institutions</p> <p>Leaders Relationships between groups Structures</p>	<p>Community systems, practices & beliefs</p> <p>Community leaders/ gate-keepers CSOs & dynamics</p>	<p>Local & national government policy, structures & services</p> <p>Political leaders Policy-makers Service providers</p>
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CORE APPROACHES



ENABLING APPROACHES



UNDERPINNED BY

Faith, prayer and the power of God

Faith group and community mobilisation theory of change

1. Background

In December 2013, representatives from 12 faith-based organisations came together to explore and articulate a theory of change for faith group and community mobilisation. The process examined assumptions about what success looks like and how we contribute to change; and specifically analysed the role of faith, drawing on any existing evidence base.

Prior to the two-day theory of change workshop, the facilitators reviewed external evaluations, research and case studies and interviewed key informants. They compiled the learning into a summary document that participants used to feed into their discussions and analysis. At the end of the workshop, two groups of participants drafted a summary theory of change diagram.

A small working group then met together in July 2014 to draw together the theory of change. Throughout the process, the group was careful to surface both similarities and differences. The theory of change diagram captures the core underlying beliefs that the group hold in common, while the narrative explains the diagram, fills in more detail and highlights areas of debate and that need further learning and testing.

2. The theory of change

2.1 Long-term change

Who benefits? The statement at the top of the diagram articulates the legacy to which faith based organisations (FBOs) aim to contribute through their faith group and community mobilisation processes. All the participants aim to work with communities as a whole, not only individuals, but with particular attention to the most vulnerable people. For many of the FBOs, changing the more wealthy 'northern' communities is part of this inter-dependent legacy.

What long-term changes do we help to bring? We contribute to changes in the community in:

- Improved quality of life: in health, livelihoods, protection, education and environment.
- A safer and more nurturing context: increased dignity and a shift in power dynamics.
- Personal change: increased confidence, resilience, hope and ambition.
- Transformed relationships: increased service/ contribution; and reduced conflict.

The first three areas are often similar across secular and faith based organisations, so the group identified a need to develop a shared understanding of wellbeing from a faith perspective. But one area where we believe FBOs add particular value is by also contributing to improved relationships. Yet this is not a change that we are good at measuring, so needs more attention.

For many FBOs, changes in the local faith group is a core part of the 'success' we are working towards – hence its position in the centre of the community. The changes in the wider community are also important for everyone in the faith community, but there are some distinctive areas of change for faith groups that are vital both to achieving wider change and as an end in themselves. However, for other FBOs, the local faith group is mainly a mechanism to achieve change in the community – or is inseparable from the community.

2.2 The context for change

Who and what influences change already? In analysing the context for change, the group found that it is critical to ensure that change happens in the beliefs, structures, and processes in local faith institutions, communities and government so that they become stronger allies in achieving the desired long-term changes. While there is external evidence that local faith groups have a major influence on communities, this assumption needs testing in each context. FBOs also may sometimes put too little emphasis on influencing government, which could impede success and therefore could be a gap that needs greater attention.

What changes need to take place at other levels? If we are to contribute to long-term change in the local community and faith group, then we need to define what changes need to take place in each context among local faith groups / institutions, communities and government in their attitudes, services, structures and policies so that they become better 'enablers' of positive change. Two areas of change that emerged as important across different contexts were: increasing cooperation between local faith groups and among civil society organisations; and gaining or improving support from the leaders of faith institutions (or even one leader).

2.3 Ways in which change happens

What are the core approaches to achieving change? The group identified three core approaches that are critical to achieving change in faith group and community mobilisation processes and two 'enabling' ways which support change and help to sustain it in the long-term.

- *Scriptural, technical and heart dialogue*: one of the critical success factors to achieving change that only faith groups can contribute is a dialogue and reflection process that combines this mix of theological, attitudinal and technical input. Faith groups are uniquely placed to enable people to engage holistically in a change process and so address underlying beliefs and attitudes. This necessitates creating safe spaces where people can express themselves and involving them in participatory design and monitoring of activities.
- *Strengthening community structures and dynamics*: Strategies to build community dynamics help create a momentum for change, such as peer to peer showcasing of work; identifying activists/ champions within local groups and then training and supporting them to influence others; creating support groups; and targeting community leaders.
- *Holding government to account*: Faith groups sometimes place little emphasis in this area and yet we believe it is critical to achieving change. It is also somewhere we can add value by mobilising networks from grassroots to international level to influence government. It is part of stewardship of resources – a critical principle that runs through everything we do – from change in our faith groups to care for the environment to holding others to account.

One area of debate that needs further learning and testing is how to work with local faith groups in this process. Some FBOs have found that it is vital to envision and train the local faith group first so that they then go and carry out the same kind of processes with their communities. Others are finding evidence in some contexts that change may come through a much less linear process which does not follow timelines or sequences. This demands a high level of skill and makes it crucial to invest in training and supporting the right facilitators.

How do we support and sustain change? Two enabling approaches are also vital.

- *Facilitation*: Evidence shows that external facilitation and support from the FBO are important in supporting and sustaining change, though it has to be carefully balanced with encouraging local capacity (see below). Identifying, training and supporting these facilitators is critical so that they are able to adapt processes to the local context.
- *Local capacity*: Core to much of the faith group and community mobilisation work is a belief in the importance of helping local communities identify their own assets – in terms of resources and skills. This involves both using what they have and linking up with other local government and NGO schemes. This is still an area of some debate, though, and needs careful testing in each context to determine the right balance of support.

What is the role of faith in underpinning change? Additional to those already mentioned are:

- ✓ *Beliefs/ values*: A scriptural foundation provides the motivation for our work, a preference for the most vulnerable and a framework for continuous re-envisioning. It transcends culture and enables a genuinely holistic approach based on stewardship, trust and hope.
- ✓ *Access and reach* to more remote and marginalised communities and groups through existing infrastructure, local faith groups and relationships with local leaders.
- ✓ *Legitimacy, credibility: and acceptance*: In many communities, faith groups already have influence and trust that can be built on.
- ✓ *Long-term footprint*: As faith groups have a mandate to work with the poor and are part of the local community, they are there in the long-term, making change more sustainable.
- ✓ *Prayer and the power of God*: A belief in a responsive God underpins our work with amazing stories from different faith groups of how prayer has influenced change.

3. Implications for monitoring, learning and evaluation

3.1 Building evidence of change

This theory of change provides a framework for developing common indicators to measure the changes to which we contribute; and thus develop a better evidence-base for our effectiveness. We need to explore how to measure less tangible changes, such as transformed relationships.

We need to strengthen the quality of our evaluations: better addressing core theory of change questions; and with better methodologies to triangulate and validate evidence.

3.2 Underlying assumptions that need testing/ areas of learning

The theory of change also highlights some key assumptions that need further testing:

- a) Faith groups make a distinctive contribution by transforming relationships: is this true and how else should we define other aspects of well-being from a faith perspective?
- b) Faith groups add value by mobilising networks at all levels to hold government to account.
- c) Approaches may be differently sequenced or happen together, depending on the context: how important is it to envision and train local faith groups first or is investing in training and supporting the facilitators to manage the process appropriately more important?
- d) Faith groups add value through effectively mobilising local capacity; skills and resources: when and how is appropriate to give more external resources?