

## PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT PROCEDURE

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### 1 BACKGROUND: FROM PROJECT APPROACH TO PROGRAMME STRATEGY

For most of its grantmaking history, the Bernard van Leer Foundation applied a 'project approach' to its mission of achieving lasting improvements in the lives of disadvantaged young children – working through individual partner organisations to undertake specific activities directly serving children.

The project approach proved its value in terms of applying and testing good practices. It was project-based results – with complementary investments in studies and publishing – that established the Bernard van Leer Foundation as an internationally recognised leader in the field of early childhood development.

However, the project approach has its limits. Over the years, the experience we gained led us to understand that the most significant improvements in young children's lives come through connected and structural change. The project approach, with separate initiatives and a focus on service delivery, is not enough. Demonstrated practice must be turned into knowledge and evidence that is then targeted at the key decision makers who do have the power to achieve structural change.

It was in the early 2000s that the foundation first attempted seriously to leverage the work of partners to achieve broader impact, through investments in Jamaica, Kenya and Colombia. However, these demonstrated that merely adding up the results of projects that were not originally conceived as parts of an integrated strategy for change is not effective. The whole is less than the sum of its parts.

As the decade went on, the environment for philanthropists became more demanding, with growing emphasis on accountability and results. The financial crisis put extra pressure on private philanthropy. We recognised the need to strive for greater impact even with reduced resources.

That's why we have adopted a comprehensive programme strategy approach, involving long-term thinking at national and regional levels. This encompasses funding research and innovative projects which are constantly monitored and assessed to demonstrate their effectiveness in achieving outcomes for children; forging multiple forms of partnership with a wide range of stakeholders who have the power to influence structural change; and communications with targeted advocacy to reach key decision-makers.

Our working hypothesis now is that if we start with a comprehensive programme strategy, the whole will add up to more than the sum of its parts.

We have the advantage that, as a private philanthropic organization, we can be both patient and innovative. We can take risks by encouraging and testing new ideas, as it can be just as valuable to learn – and communicate to others – when an idea does not work as when it does. And we can commit to working over the long time periods that are required to achieve structural change.

## 2. THE FOUNDATION'S GOALS

In 2010, the Bernard van Leer Foundation started working toward three global goals identified through a strategic planning process as addressing problems that are urgent and under-addressed and that impact many young children around the world. These are:

- taking quality early learning to scale;
- reducing violence in young children's lives; and
- improving the health of young children through improvements in the physical environments in which they grow up..

## 3. OPERATIONALIZING GOALS AT COUNTRY LEVEL

The foundation's goals are also implemented at national level in eight focus countries. Not all goals are pursued in all countries – it depends on which are relevant to the country context. The goals at country level are more narrowly defined through a country analysis involving extensive data collection and dialogue with local partners and stakeholders and global experts.

### Baseline data

To refine country-level goals, the foundation's programme officers start by systematically gathering baseline data from existing global and national sources on children aged under eight. Who are they? Where do they live? What are the circumstances of their lives? Ideally, baseline data includes demographic information disaggregated by ethnicity, race, religious background, gender, household income, situations of parents or caretakers and local geography.

With this basic information, programme officers then look systematically at how BvLF's global goals manifest within the country. Are there barriers to quality early learning opportunities? What forms of violence impact very young children? Are there environmental health hazards that impede children's development? Data sets are analyzed and stakeholders consulted to determine which groups of children are most impacted and which problems are the most under-addressed.

The decision on which goals to pursue at national level, and how to formulate them, comes down to: i) the number of kids affected by the problem; ii) the severity of the problem; iii) the value that a BvLF contribution could add to existing efforts to tackle the problem; iv) feasibility and opportunity. The rationale for goal choices is included in the final country strategy document.

### Theory of Change

To develop strategies to meet the country-level goals, programme officers develop a "theory of change", which outlines assumptions and hypotheses on why particular intervention points would be most effective. This is done by considering the situation, baseline data and past experience and making a reasoned analysis of what needs to be done to achieve a desired outcome. Theories of change:

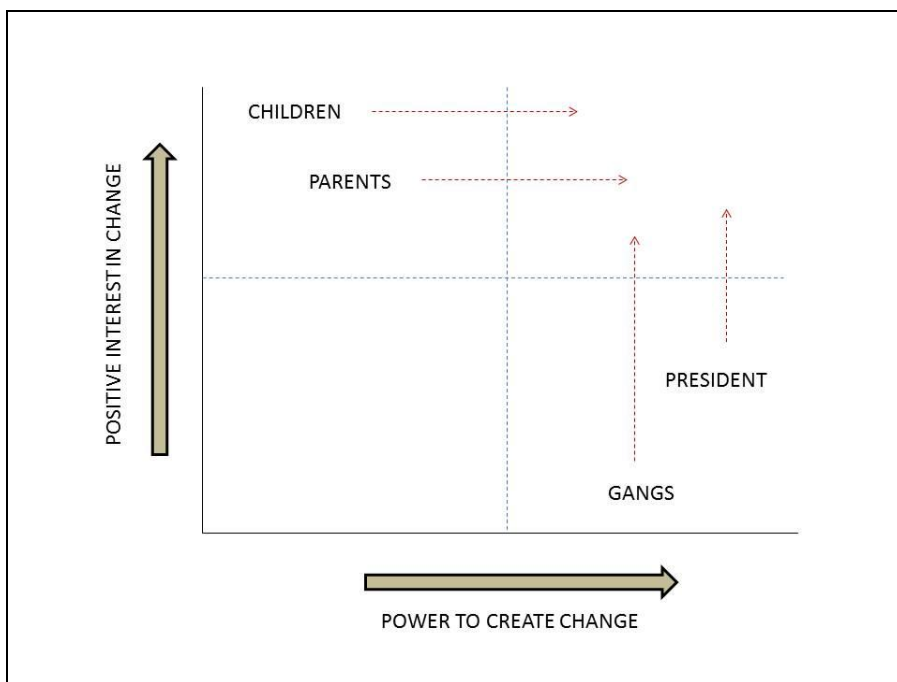
- Comprehensively outline the root causes of any given problem;
- Clearly state the working assumptions;
- Analyse the root causes driving the problem;
- Allow evaluation by specifying how hypotheses will be tested and validated, how change will be measured, and what indicators of progress will be used;

- Specify what evidence will be needed to demonstrate impacts and eventualities for taking corrective action, consolidation, or deciding on a phase-out;
- Address sustainability by explaining what lasting impact should be left behind.

### Stakeholder Mapping (Power and Interests)

Stakeholders are people who can influence change in young children’s lives, and/or will be influenced by such change. Stakeholder analysis typically begins with people close to the child and moves into the community and then the national context. The main purpose of stakeholder analysis is to identify, in relation to each goal, the groups or individuals who have (a) the power to effect change and/or (b) an interest in seeing change.

The analysis focuses on the stakeholders’ actual or potential relationship to the change BvLF wants to create, rather than on their potential relationship to BvLF itself. It allows strategies to be developed which aim to increase the power of stakeholders who have a positive interest in change (for example, children and parents), and give stakeholders who have the power to create change (for example, gangs in a community or a country’s president) more of a positive interest in doing so.



### Resource mapping

Achieving structural change requires an understanding of where resources may be available. Resource mapping involves looking at how much money currently goes into resolving the problems BvLF’s goals address, and where that money comes from – and identifying potential sources of money which could be tapped. It includes assessing the spending priorities of governments, and – especially in developing countries, where they have influence over national budgets – inter-governmental organizations, aid agencies and non-governmental organizations who supply services.

## Strategies

Baseline data, theories of change, and stakeholder and resource mapping feed into translating specific goals for a country into specific strategies to achieve them. The strategy document which results from this process outlines:

- The type and scope of impact we hope to have on children;
- The outcomes we will pursue to have that impact;
- Why we believe achieving these outcomes will be enough;
- The kinds of strategies we will pursue to reach those outcomes;
- Why we have chosen these strategies and not others;
- An analysis of risks: What could happen to make the strategies fail?
- What are we doing to reduce those risks?

## Inclusive Approaches

Throughout the process of developing a country strategy, programme officers are expected to test goals, strategies and assumptions directly with potential partners, colleagues, and experts in the field. Consultations take place in the country with key stakeholders including children, to test assumptions and determine gaps in knowledge. This inclusive approach is intended to ensure that we fully understand:

- What are we sure of?
- What are we assuming, but don't know for sure?
- What will we do to test those assumptions?
- How will we process the findings?
- What may change if our assumptions are wrong?
- How will we gather baseline data and on what?
- What grants will we make this year? Why?

While advisory groups, consultants and experts are used to inform analysis, program officers are responsible for ensuring impact through hands-on support and regular presence in the field. A list of source materials and experts consulted is provided in each country strategy document.

## Budget – How Much Will Structural Change Cost?

Programmes are usually envisioned over the long term, with major categories outlined in the country strategy document. While creating structural change is not an exact science, the programme officer has some idea of the major categories which need financing. Budgets for country strategies set out the broad lines of work and how they will be resourced.

Our starting point is not the available BvLF budget, but the finances required to implement the theory of change. As necessary, BvLF seeks to source funds for necessary activities from other donor agencies, governments, the private sector or even at community level. Budgets may change over time as more resources are needed for one part of the strategy and less for other parts. While budgets can be articulated over the course of five years, they are approved on an annual basis.

General line items for country strategies might include:

- Service Delivery/Demonstration
- Communication
- Campaigns
- Program Related Investments
- Research
- Evaluation
- Advocacy
- Network Development
- Capacity Building

### **Learning through Assessing Impact**

Assessment is a learning activity incorporated into country strategies to help programme officers test strategies and track impact. It aims to determine the effectiveness of strategies and whether goals are being reached.

Assessment should not be confused with monitoring grants, although this is required of all program officers: monitoring ensures that money is being used for the activities stated in the grant letter, and flags any institutional weaknesses of partner organizations. Should financial impropriety be suspected, BvLF is committed to hiring independent investigators and pursuing legal recourse if necessary, along with sharing information with other donor agencies. Independent evaluation is in any case required of all grants above €200,000, and independent audits are required annually of all grantees.

Working from the baseline data and theory of change described above, it is defined in advance what evidence will be needed to assess the success or failure of country strategies in achieving social change, how that evidence will be gathered and treated, and how we will process what we learn to improve our strategies. Assessment methodologies vary depending on the country goals, and draw on a variety of resources including those made available by the Foundation Center through TRASI.<sup>1</sup>

Periodically, formal evaluations will measure efficiency and effectiveness and determine if the country strategy – or a particular aspect of it – is moving towards its stated outcomes, or if adjustments are necessary. Evaluations can be "formative" or "process", carried out to provide feedback on an ongoing initiative; "summative" or "project", which look at outcomes or results; or "developmental", which are useful when a solution is unclear.

Evaluations are publicly reported so they can help stakeholders (communities, caregivers, staff, decision/policy makers) to understand what they can learn from results so far, both intended and unintended, and how to leverage those results for further change.

### **Sustainability**

Structural change needs to be sustainable. BvLF aims to create a situation in which resource flows have been shifted, political will built, institutions strengthened, and educational outcomes sustained. Ultimately, the change we are aiming to create should be able to be sustained by the community surrounding young children.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.foundationcenter.org](http://www.foundationcenter.org)

## Annex I

### The Suggested Procedure for Programme Development:

- Step I: Review the overall goals of the Foundation.
- Step II: Gather all available data through the web on young children, the goals and the country. Analyze data to determine what we know and don't know.
- Step III: Set up a timetable for meeting key resource people to help with brainstorming, sharing, learning and documenting of the country strategic plan. Consider hiring a resource person to help with the document if appropriate.
- Step IV: Consult with stakeholders nationally, including children, partners, key decision makers, organizations that could wield power over children but do not see themselves as advocates, etc.
- Step V: Develop Theory of Change model
- Step VI: Pinpoint strategies to help programming around root cause of problems young children face.
- Step VII: Write assessment strategy; make grants to fill in knowledge gaps. Add budget. Test assumptions with a broad array of stakeholders, experts, kids, and partners.
- Step VIII: Present programme strategy to Programme Director.
- Step IX: Country/regional strategies presented for approval of Ex-D.
- Step X: Write assessment memo every year with updates, changes etc.