

It takes a **community** to
strengthen a **family**

**Ten rules of thumb
for Family Strengthening
Programmes**



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**

A loving home for every child

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**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**
THE NETHERLANDS



Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken

DEAR READER,

The Family Strengthening Programme supports vulnerable families, as well as their children and the communities around them. This is not an easy task and SOS CV is constantly searching for ways to improve its approaches. This booklet wants to be a source of inspiration for this search.

The insights in this booklet are based on an extensive evaluation process carried out by Avance. In 2014, we evaluated 6 SOS Family Strengthening Programmes (FSPs) in Nigeria (FSP Ejigbo and FSP Zawan), Kenya (FSP Kisumu and FSP Meru), and Ghana (FSP Kumasi and FSP Chorkor). The key lessons learnt from these evaluations are presented as “Rules of Thumb” in this booklet. The authors hope these suggestions are useful for programme implementers, managers and policy advisers at all levels within the SOS CV federation. They also hope that this publication comes in handy for anyone working with community-based child protection programmes, even outside SOS CV.

If you would like to know more about the findings, please do not hesitate to get in touch with SOS Kinderdorpen in the Netherlands, to gain access to the evaluation reports and the Evaluation Synthesis report on which this booklet is based.

Happy reading!





TEACH INSTEAD OF GIVING

Gifts create expectations

In the beginning, many FSPs provided hand-outs, like food and direct support for education. This encouraged attitudes of dependency that are difficult to break, and have harmful long-term consequences. Every gift creates expectations, and we all know that tempering these expectations later on is always difficult. In some cases, the support also undermined existing solidarity mechanisms.

Prevention is better than cure



Set repayment conditions

Since prevention is better than cure, it is best to avoid direct hand-outs from the very beginning. If you do need to directly support families with loans, or communities with infrastructure, then we recommend setting repayment conditions. We've seen examples where this creates a more positive mindset, and puts people on the path to self-reliance.



LESS TRAINING AND MORE LEARNING BY DOING

Follow up activities

Many FSP activities include trainings. For example, training mothers in parental skills or in setting up a small business. We found that without follow-up, training has limited effect. Think of follow up activities such as individual guidance, mentoring, (business) coaching by experts, knowledge exchanges, and exposure to other practices.

Learning-by-doing

It's better to do less training, so you have more time to ensure that the training you offer is followed up with learning-by-doing. This applies to all trainings for caregivers, young people, CBOs and FSP staff as well.

Without follow-up, training has limited effect



MAKE MORE USE OF UNIQUE POTENTIAL FOR ADVOCACY OF SOS CV



Seize the opportunity

SOS CV has a friendly image and good working relations with local authorities, who often visit FSP events or support schools where FSP works. However, this potential opportunity to hold governments accountable for what they ought to do -ensuring more and better services for communities, and supporting children's rights- hasn't always been seized.

SOS CV could speak out louder and sometimes be tougher

Set priorities

SOS CV practice provides a unique and strong but so far rather underused evidence base for advocacy. With all its experience, SOS CV is a legitimate partner that could speak out louder, and could sometimes be tougher when it comes to holding duty bearers accountable. This could mean that choices need to be made, and relationships might change. In our view, more and better services for children should be prioritised over being perceived as a friendly organisation by governments.



SOLIDARITY CREATES SUSTAINABILITY

vulnerable family



sister, cousin, ..



neighbour, friend



Strong focus of SOS is now here

church, mosque



community



government



Facilitate sustainable safety nets in the closest possible circle around vulnerable families

Less trickling down than expected

The FSP theory of change is built upon the assumption that benefits will trickle down from community to family, and from family to children and young people. The investments made by SOS in the community, like toilet blocks or financial support to CBOs, are expected to eventually benefit vulnerable families and children. Unfortunately, this is not how the trickling down effect really works. Sometimes even the community itself marginalises vulnerable families: inequality is hard to fight and true inclusion of the most vulnerable has many barriers. Why would people in the community bother?

RULE OF
4
THUMB



People-to-people solidarity

Gladly, some do bother and we've seen good examples of how FSP can focus more on "people-to-people solidarity," which we see as a requirement for sustainable change. Focussing on these highly needed values could also help make more use of, or revive, existing safety nets within (extended) families, religious communities, and between neighbours. These values of solidarity should be included in every FSP activity.

TAKE TIME FOR DEEP COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT. IT'LL PAY OFF!



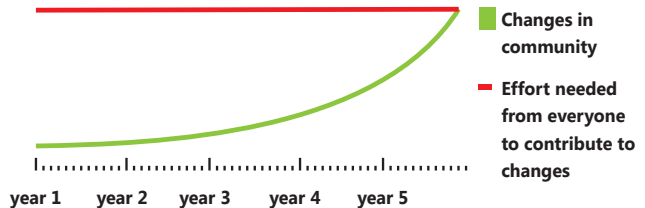
True ownership takes time

It takes time to develop true ownership and to establish deep roots for local structures such as CBOs within a community. Finding the right people and building trust and legitimacy is not a straightforward process. But it is possible!

Finding the right people

We've seen good examples of communities where FSP facilitated this process and especially took the time and courage to:

- Find the people with the right motivation to contribute to community development.
- Go through a selection process where people without inner motivations are allowed to withdraw.
- Allow local initiatives to take on local colours and customs and do things differently.



Changing the community from within is a rewarding process

Don't be tempted for quick fixes

Deep community involvement and contribution are slow and difficult to achieve, but rewarding when they become a reality. Maybe things won't go the way you or the donor planned from behind a desk. So don't be tempted to just start a group in the community, give it a name, and do some training, without studying the existing structures and relations. If you do, you run the risk of creating parallel structures that depend too much on SOS CV instead of relying on the community. Such CBOs are likely to end together with the support of SOS CV. Changing the community from within is the only way to ensure that structures continue functioning beyond the external inputs SOS CV provides.

ONLY PHASE IN IF YOU KNOW HOW TO PHASE OUT

When self-reliant

FSP is based on the assumption that families will become self-reliant, and CBOs will take over at some point. But what is self-reliance and when has support been sufficient to trust that the changes will last?

Tailor-made FDP's

This requires, above all, clarity about the definition of self-reliance. Family Development Plans (FDP) show remarkable similarities, even when family situations are very different. Plans should be tailor-made, and they should serve as a reference to decide whether or not to continue supporting a family. SOS CV should have clear guidelines for defining when enough support has been provided, because nobody will get to the point where they say 'I am ok!'. We haven't yet come across a caregiver who did not want to receive further support from SOS CV.

What would happen if we stop tomorrow?

This question can be helpful in developing phase out plans. Sustainability is not about permanent FSP support, nor about continuing activities and not even about a CBO keeping its office. Sustainability is all about the changes necessary to carry on, without the aid of FSP or other donors to keep things going.





Act as facilitator

Therefore, SOS CV should only phase in when it has carefully planned ahead with key community actors how and when the FSP will phase out so that changes can continue. If SOS acts as a community and family facilitator, instead of a direct implementer or charity, it is more likely to bring about sustainable and systemic changes in the lives of children.

How a phasing strategy looks like

A phasing out strategy should include: a list of activities that must continue, for whom, by whom, with what level of resources, and according to what type of transition. If this strategy is clear from the beginning of the FSP, progress and sustainability can also be monitored and the programme can be refocused as needed.

Nobody will get to the point where they say 'I am ok'

DO WHAT YOU'RE GOOD AT AND INVOLVE THE EXPERTISE OF OTHERS

Can't be good at everything

FSP activities are generally run with the right expertise and know-how. However, economic support has never been the core business of SOS CV. Unfortunately, when it comes to economic interventions, lack of experience carries a high price tag: unprofitable businesses, unpaid loan debt and crushed hopes for future self-reliance.

Use available economic expertise

The good news is that plenty of effective economic interventions for different target groups already exist, including various types of microcredit for those with an entrepreneurial spirit, and savings groups approaches that can work well with people who are less entrepreneurial. We suggest FSP should not reinvent the wheel. Instead of creating parallel schemes, it could partner with already existing structures or organisations that, with their local experience, best know how to support vulnerable families through economic interventions. SOS CV could instead monitor that the economic interventions chosen match the specific target groups and include the vulnerable families.

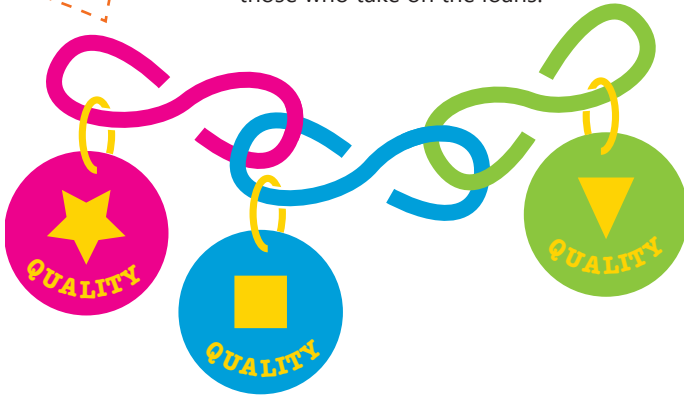
Business interventions require business approaches

Sound market analyses are needed to avoid many caregivers flooding the same market with the same products. Basic business analyses are needed to ensure that gross income from sales will be higher than the costs of inputs. Common sense? Yes! But we've seen examples of businesses in which we would not be willing to invest our savings.



Would you be willing to invest your own money into this business?

This question should always be answered with a yes if we want to use donor money efficiently, and without disappointing those who take on the loans.



Microcredit yes or no

Microcredit can be a good medicine for those with entrepreneurial skills and vision, but it can also act as poison for those who lack the entrepreneurial drive. If a poor person uses the loan for personal consumption instead of investing, he or she will be worse off when repayments and interests become pressing. Therefore, insight into the return on investment is always necessary.

Partner with existing structures or organizations that best know how to support vulnerable families through economic interventions.

CONSIDER SUPPORTING THE CBO TO RUN AS A SOCIAL BUSINESS

A promising concept

A CBO that generates income from running or investing in business adventures can be called a social business, when the profits are used to support a social mission. We see this as a promising concept, provided that:

- Strong business skills are present within the CBO, in order to avoid “loss-generating activities”
- FSP can bring in external expertise to strengthen the CBO in running a social business
- Business investments and business management are done according to business ways of operation: investments, rather than gifts
- There are clear legal arrangements about ownership of the investments (possibly made by SOS) to avoid any misuse or abuse.



Tick the boxes:
✓ Strong business skills, ✓ available external expertise, ✓ investments instead of gifts and ✓ clear legal arrangements

LESS DO-IT-YOURSELF AND MORE DO-IT-TOGETHER

No wall around the community

Historically, SOS CV used to ensure the best care, education and health possible for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. In children's villages, quality standards are best assured when you can take full control yourself. In contrast, in the Family Strengthening Programmes there is no wall around the community and numerous actors are at play.

Avoid parallel structures

SOS CV could enhance cooperation with those other existing actors, small and informal, or big and formalised like UNICEF and (I)NGOs. Just like SOS CV, others have also learnt lessons and built up expertise that you can take advantage of. As mentioned before, not cooperating creates the risk of creating parallel structures, like developing child protection committees or women's groups which may already exist.

Stronger together

At the national level, you may find many opportunities to liaise with existing platforms and contribute to advocacy initiatives. We all know that we're stronger together and that many hands make light work.



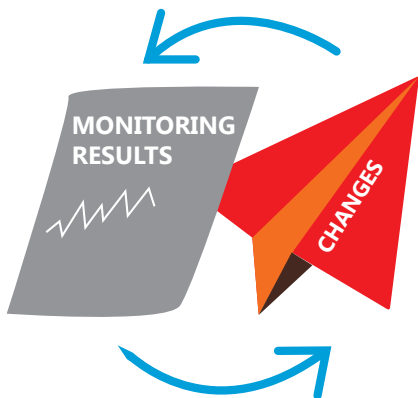
There are many opportunities to liaise with existing platforms and contribute to advocacy initiatives



LESS MONITORING, MORE ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION

Relevant outcomes

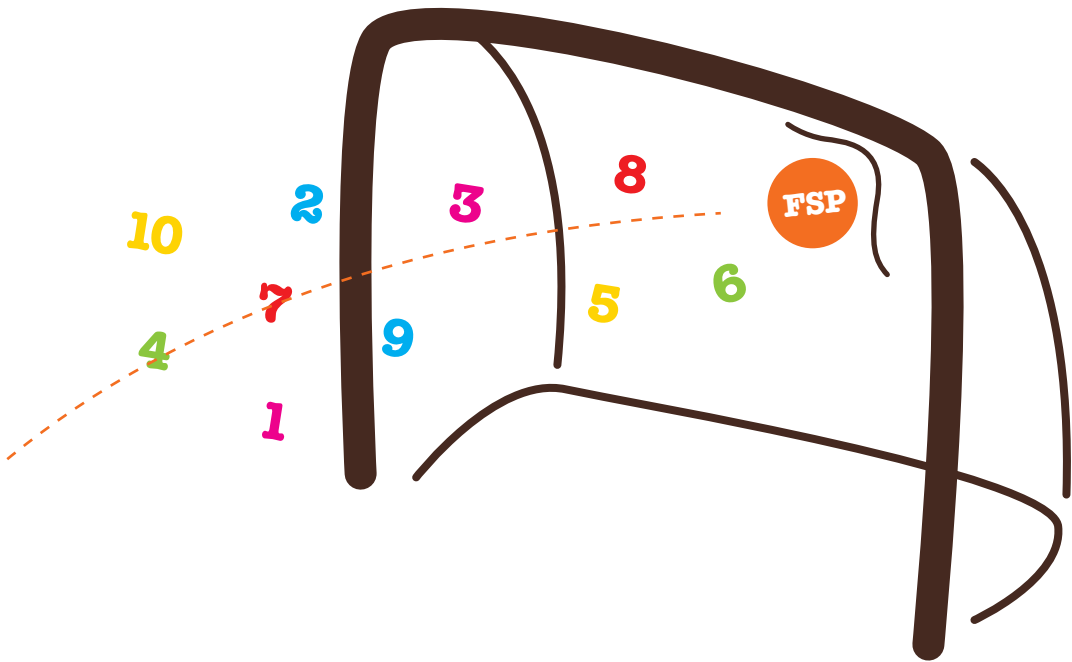
Much time and energy are spent on monitoring, using a large variety of FSP formats. This information is often kept in files, but it is hardly ever used for making programme adjustments. Reports are generally focussed on activities (outputs) and not on outcomes and reasons for observed changes. Also, no comparisons are made between the planned activities, actual activities and the desired outcomes or changes achieved, which makes it difficult to interpret whether the programme is on track and effective or not.



Find what really matters

FSPs need less paperwork, but more relevant monitoring that provides real insight into what really matters.

Often information is kept
in files but hardly used
for making program
adjustments



Teach instead of giving



Less training and more learning-by-doing



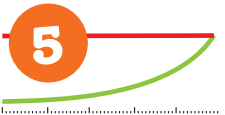
Make more use of the unique potential for advocacy of SOS CV



Solidarity creates sustainability



Take time for deep community involvement. It'll pay off!





Only phase in if you know how to phase out



Do what you're good at and involve the expertise of others



Consider supporting the CBO to run as a social business



Less do-it-yourself and more do-it-together



Less monitoring, more analysis and reflection

DO YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT (CHILD-FRIENDLY) MONITORING AND EVALUATION?

This booklet is based on 6 FSP evaluations conducted by Avance. We've developed a set of tools containing formats for Focus Group Discussion exercises, as well as semi-structured questionnaires and interviews.

The tools can be used for monitoring and evaluation with children and young people, caregivers, teachers, CBOs and other community members.

If you want to know more about the methods used, you can always get in touch with us at Avance.

A Family Strengthening Programme (FSP) seeks to support vulnerable families and allow them to become self-reliant so that they are able to care for their children. SOS CV provides direct educational, health and economic support, as well as child-rearing advice for parents. Community structures are strengthened too, in the hope that community-based organisations (CBOs) continue to support the most vulnerable families once SOS CV is phased out. This booklet answers the core question of what this process should look like. best.

Does it work?

Yes, FSP works and good results have been achieved. But we believe it could work even better if the 10 Rules of Thumb presented in this booklet are applied. So have a quick read and get inspired!

