

## Wholistic Development Organisation, Cambodia

### Equipping the local church to mobilise communities for holistic development

#### Summary

The goal of the Wholistic Development Organisation (formerly known as FAITH) is to develop in each community in Cambodia a core group of local Christians who are able to work with their communities in facilitating transformational development.

Wholistic Development Organisation (WDO) staff work with the local church in selecting and training a number of Christians from the local community. These Christians form a core group which then mobilises the wider community to identify and address poverty issues. The work has seen significant attitudinal, spiritual, physical and social changes in communities.

#### Level of intervention

The WDO process is carried out at local church and community level, facilitated by a national Christian NGO.

#### Potential users of the practice

Christian NGOs, national-level church denominations, district and diocese-level church structures and denominational development departments who have a commitment to envisioning and empowering the local church to mobilise their communities are all potential users of this practice.

#### Problem addressed

The problems that the WDO project is trying to address are:

**Community disempowerment.** Part of the legacy of the Khmer Rouge era has been a reduction in people's ability to care for their families, and a reduction in communities' decision-making abilities and participation in activities.

**Limited church responses to needs.** Church expressions of compassion are often relief-orientated, which can create dependency and result in 'rice Christians'.

#### Purpose of intervention

The purpose of the WDO process is to establish Christian core groups which have the capacity to implement a process of holistic development, by facilitating community initiatives that contribute to food security, income generation, literacy and health.

#### Context

From 1975-79, under the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodia experienced genocide and deliberate, state-sponsored destruction of economic and social structures. Communication and trust were eroded at all levels, as were qualities of self-reliance, social co-operation, organisational ability, creativity and innovation. Any meaningful response to poverty in Cambodia needs to help rebuild hope, trust and confidence, and enable the empowerment and participation of communities in their own development.

#### History and process

The WDO Project was established in 1999 by Southeast Asian Outreach UK, which then became a partner of the International Cooperation Cambodia in 2000. The WDO Project is also a partner with the Evangelical Fellowship of Cambodia, which comprises approximately 85% of all registered churches in Cambodia.

Preliminary research began in April 1999, and the WDO Project was officially launched in November 1999. Activities during the first year focused on writing proposals for funding, networking to learn from others, setting up offices and policies, staff recruitment, and training of staff.

Partnerships with local churches were gradually introduced, starting with two churches in two provinces in 1999 (as a training ground for the WDO staff), four in 2000, eight in 2001, 15 in 2002, and increasing to 20 in 2004.

## Steps in implementation

**Selection and training of WDO staff.** WDO recruits staff who are committed Christians who are actively involved in their own local church and who have a passion for serving poor people. They are formally provided by their church to work with WDO. Previous development experience or development qualifications are not required. They are then trained as Community Development Facilitators. This includes training in community development, leadership, management, dealing with trauma, creative ways of facilitating group meetings, and significant character and values development through weekly Bible studies.

**Selection of target communities.** WDO identifies communities to work in on the basis of need (taking into account a number of factors such as presence of water resources, distance to the nearest health centre and school, availability of rice throughout the year, availability of jobs, and the presence of other NGOs in the village) and on the basis of the maturity of the local church and its leadership.

**The formation of village-based Christian Core Groups.** The Community Development Facilitators begin work in a village by working with the local church. They use Bible study and discussion to help church members to identify their vision for the future of their community and how they can facilitate this. The church elects a group of 5-7 committed Christians (the Christian Core Group) to act as the main catalysts and organisers of the process. The Community Development Facilitators help the church to identify structures and roles for this group. The church pastor is encouraged to be an advisor to, but not a member or chair of, this group.

**Community needs analysis and action planning.** The Christian Core Group, facilitated by the Community Development Facilitators, bring the whole community together (rich, poor, young, old, village leaders, widows, etc) to discuss and identify the root causes of the challenges and problems in their community. Together, they then begin to identify possible solutions. This includes identifying what local resources are available, and what contributions members of the community can make (including time, labour, materials and money).

**Taking action.** Facilitated by the Community Development Facilitators and the Christian Core Group, the community begins to take action to address these issues. Such actions may include the digging of wells, the building of latrines, the development of vegetable gardens, and the setting up of rice banks. Some funding for these initiatives is provided by WDO in the form of loans. Repayments are kept in the community to act as a community revolving fund. However, funding is given only when the community themselves show a willingness to make a significant contribution.

**Developing capacity of the Christian Core Group.** The Community Development Facilitators invest significant time in developing the capacity of the Christian Core Group throughout the process. The aim of this is to enable the Christian Core Group to eventually facilitate and manage development initiatives in the community without the support of WDO staff. The training provided includes training on leadership skills, character development, resource mobilisation, fundraising and financial management. When this is achieved, the Community Development Facilitators gradually withdraw from the community, although they make themselves available if the Christian Core Group need advice.

**Prayer.** Prayer underpins the whole process, and is recognised as a key factor in the effectiveness of the process.

## Duration

From initial contact with the church and community through to the withdrawal of Community Development Facilitators at the end, the process takes approximately three to five years.

## Resources required

### *Expenditure for Year 2004*

#### Community development

Seed funding for initiatives in 20 village communities:	£16,252
Staff field costs to service the Christian Core Groups:	£ 2,678
Formal training for the Christian Core Groups:	£ 6,213

#### Organisation and project development

Localisation preparation and management:	£ 3,739
Finance training consultancy:	£ 685
Ongoing capacity building of WDO staff:	£ 2,436
Internal strategic planning and M and E:	£ 316

#### Operational costs

Capital:	£ 7,366
Personnel:	£17,964
WDO overhead costs:	£ 7,534
Admin charge:	£ 1,250

**Total:** £66,433

In addition, key resources required are:

- The time and commitment of the voluntary Christian Core Groups
- A community contribution of 5% to the total cost of materials needed for community initiatives.

## Indicators for monitoring

- Communities seeing improved relationships at all levels, such as less domestic violence; greater co-operation and task-sharing within the home between husband and wife; higher levels of community involvement and participation in community initiatives, particularly amongst the poor and marginalised; the formation of stronger, more effective community based organisations.
- Christian Core Groups facilitating the whole WDO process independently of WDO staff: problem identification, analysis of the root causes, formulating the solution, planning the initiative, monitoring and evaluation, and spiritual input.
- Christian Core Groups extending the process beyond their own village, and working independently of WDO staff in other villages.
- Neighbouring villages expressing interest in being in partnership with local Core Christian Groups in establishing initiatives in their own communities.
- Christian Core Groups writing proposals and raising some funding independent of WDO project funds.

## Impact

In 2003, WDO, with a staff of 12 people (including seven Community Development Facilitators), worked in 16 villages, with almost 10,000 target beneficiaries.

In 2004, 6 rice banks, 64 boreholes, 17 irrigation pumps, 20 wells, 3 hand pumps, and 125 latrines were all developed as a result of community initiatives.

Most villages report a significant change in relationships, values and behaviour as a result of the WDO process. In almost all communities where WDO is working, there are reports that people in the community are loving each other more, working together and helping each other. The Village Development Committee of Samlow Chao, for example, identified 'more caring and less quarrelsome behaviour in the village' as a major change since WDO started working with the church. Trust has been built. Where previously poor people just accepted the decisions of the powerful, they are now participating in community processes and making decisions for themselves. Women are much more involved in decision-making, and a good proportion of the Christian Core Group members are women.

Women and men work more closely together, such as co-operating with each other when planting rice. In some families, the husband will cook and look after the children, which would have been unusual previously. There has been a reduction in drunkenness, smoking and gambling in many communities.

Attitudes towards the church have also significantly changed. Local churches report that there is less conflict between Christians and non-Christians because communication has improved and they have learnt to respect each other. People in the community who were suspicious of WDO, because it was Christian, have now seen its good work and are happy to get involved. There is less persecution of Christian groups, and many of the churches have grown in number as a result of the church's witness and practical action.

The impact of the WDO process has gone beyond the targeted communities. Neighbouring villages have seen the impact of the process and have invited the Christian Core Groups to come and facilitate them as well.

## Challenges

The WDO process has had a few challenges:

**Dependency culture of communities.** There is a strong dependency culture within most Cambodian communities, reinforced by the hand-out approach of many development agencies and churches. This means that there is often an initial resistance to approaches that stress the importance of community involvement and responsibility. People will rarely attend meetings or leave the powerful people in the community to make the decisions. This challenge has been overcome by WDO staff by investing a great deal of time and patience in each community, building relationships and sharing the vision of the work, so that gradually the community begins to welcome the different approach.

**Existing power structures can feel threatened.** Another challenge for the process is that local power structures, such as Village Development Committees, can feel threatened by it. The process gives poor people a voice and actively engages them in decision-making, where previously they may have been marginalised and unheard. Also, WDO often achieves more in a community in a few months than the development committee has achieved in years, which makes the development committee look ineffective. In some communities the powerful are benefiting from the unjust structures that the WDO process challenges. For example, the commune chief of Trapeang Keh tried to block the work of WDO because he was making a lot of profit out of the poverty of the village. He was lending money or rice to poor people at high interest rates, which meant they would eventually lose their land and cattle to him. The rice bank initiative started by the WDO project offered far lower interest rates than he did and threatened his unjust income.

**Weaknesses of the church.** Working with the local church also presents challenges. Communities are suspicious of Christian groups, and building trustful relationships takes time. Many churches in village communities are young and immature, and cannot take on the responsibility of being the catalyst for the WDO process. They sometimes see the process as an opportunity to grow the church by offering aid as an incentive to people to convert. They may also be motivated by personal gain, and lack transparency in the use of funds.

## Critical issues and lessons learned

**Staff values and attitudes.** A critical factor for success of the WDO process is that the Community Development Facilitators model transformative Christian behaviour. Staff who are: prepared to 'go the extra mile' in the community; highly committed; able to explain what they believe and why they believe it; and show humility, willingness to learn and compassion for those in need, are accepted and listened to by the local church and community alike. Staff willingness to spend time in the community and, in contrast to other development workers, stay overnight in the community, has led to deep and profound relationships that have formed the basis of successful church and community mobilisation processes.

**Staff selection.** WDO has found that those Christians who are motivated and envisioned to serve the church and poor communities, and who have themselves experienced poverty, make the best Community Development Facilitators. They may not have any formal development experience or qualifications. In fact, those with formal qualifications tend to be less willing to stay in communities or travel to remote areas, and have not stayed long with WDO.

**Gradual growth of target communities.** Developing the capacity of staff in church and community facilitation skills takes time. Therefore, in the early years of a project, the number of communities that the Community Development Facilitators work with will be quite low. As the Facilitators become more experienced, the number of communities that can be facilitated will grow. It is important for the facilitating organisation to have a clear focus in terms of the type of target communities. The mid-term evaluation of WDO in 2002 found that the impact of widening its scope to work in urban as well as rural areas had left WDO staff having to learn too many skills and approaches at once.

**Church leadership.** Strong, humble church leadership committed to integral mission is key to the process. Where this is present, the church as a whole is encouraged to embrace the process and play an active part in mobilising and serving the community, and the Christian Core Group are mentored and supported. Where such leadership is absent, the process is much weaker, and the Christian Core Group can struggle for lack of local accountability. WDO has now made strong church leadership a key factor in determining whether to work or not in a community.

**Christian Core Groups.** Developing the capacity of the Christian Core Groups in each community is essential. The long-term sustainability of the process is dependent on their ability to continue to facilitate the church and community after the Community Development Facilitators withdraw. Furthermore, competent and skilled Christian Core Groups are likely to be able to respond to requests from neighbouring villages to facilitate similar processes in their communities. This means that the process can be replicated without the direct involvement of WDO.

**Community participation.** The whole community should be involved in decision-making, planning and implementation of development initiatives whenever possible. Initiatives that benefit the majority of the local population (Christians and non-Christians) help to take away jealousy, factionalism and discrimination. In particular, women have a crucial role to play in decision-making and implementation and should be fully involved at all points in the process.

## Further information

- FAITH Annual Report 2003
- FAITH Project Annual Report 2004
- FAITH Project Proposal 2004-5
- FAITH Mid-Term Evaluation (David Evans; 2002)
- Mobilising the Body of Christ for Holistic Community Transformation (Milet Goddard; 2004)

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