

NO SMALL CHANGE

Christian Aid's understanding of how change happens



Poverty is an outrage against humanity.
It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope,
of power over their own lives.

Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty –
and we believe that vision can become a reality.
We urge you to join us.

Our overarching aim is both very practical and very ambitious: to change the lives of some of the poorest people in the world. We want to see change happen; and we want to know that it is tangible.

Christian Aid's work is based on our fundamental identification with the aspirations and rights of the poor and the oppressed. We act in situations of suffering and injustice because we believe that they violate God's standards, and devalue us all. For us, responding to what is wrong is not just an option: it is a mandate. We have an obligation to speak with and for the poor. We are obliged to act if there is injustice. We are not neutral: we take sides.

Our overarching aim is both very practical and very ambitious: to change the lives of some of the poorest people in the world. We want to see change happen; and we want to know that it is tangible. At the end of each year, at the end of each major campaign, after a major emergency appeal, we need to know that we have helped move more people out of poverty, helped more people challenge the big issues keeping them down, and done a little more to shift the balance of power.

As staff, our collective understanding of change is expressed in myriad ways, – for example, how we choose an international partner, identify a project or make funding decisions. It is expressed in which issues we choose to raise publicly and in the tactics that underlie our lobbying, campaigning and use of the media. It is shown in what we say to our supporters, to our sponsoring churches, sister agencies, donors, official agencies and the general public. As spelled out in Turning Hope into Action, we have three interlocking objectives: to expose the scandal of poverty, to help in practical ways to root it out from the world, and to challenge and change systems which favour the rich and powerful over the poor and marginalised.

As the world grows more complex and interrelated, so too does Christian Aid. With a presence in many countries, we can no longer assume that we all know what other parts of the organisation are doing. Our different assumptions, left unspoken, could lead us to become many organisations, rather than one strong global one. If our work in different areas is not joined up, our efforts will be diffused. We'll miss opportunities. We'll have less impact. Joining up – no matter how diverse our efforts – is vital.

How do we address this complexity? A first step is to create a shared understanding of how change happens, and Christian Aid's role within it.

This paper sets out some of the thinking behind Christian Aid's approach to social change. It looks at what we believe makes change happen, where we think the focus of change is, and at the 'drivers of change' for us as a global organisation. We

look at the 'mechanics of change' – the principles that inform our decisions – and at the institutions and organisations with which we work and who we lobby. We examine briefly some of the challenges that face us in this not-so-humble task. The aim of this paper is not to articulate a unique theory of change, nor to offer a comprehensive explanation of our understanding of change. Instead, we aim to draw together the lessons we've learned over recent decades, and to use this learning to create an inclusive, shared framework within which to work, to make clear choices and decisions, and to create change. This paper should give us all the tools to do this.

What is social change?

There are no cast-iron laws about how social change happens, no agreed 'models'. If there is agreement, it is that change is context-specific. Structures, geography, institutions and histories matter. How a society changes is specific to its time, its class structure, the distribution of power, its cultural and social norms.

When communities and societies are relatively stable, the main driver for change is the process of learning from ideas and experiences internal or external to those societies. The 'logical framework' (log-frames) planning approach, for instance, is an example of a crystal ball approach to change – in other words, an attempt to bring about desired change through linking measurable goals and objectives to specific activities and resources over time.

But, as we all discover, the results are rarely what we anticipate, and differ from place to place. Much depends on the nature of any given society and its underlying conditions. The challenge to us in our international work is to recognise the limitations on our ability to promote change, but also to see the importance of investing in knowing the communities and partners we support in order to improve their, and our, chances of contributing positively to social change.

Planning as a means of bringing about change is more difficult under situations of turbulence and violent conflict. Self-evidently, these tumultuous events upset and displace underlying power structures, relationships and norms. While the turbulence they unleash may be difficult and costly, it may also bring about significantly transformed relationships. Examples include the bloody struggles against Latin America's dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s, the civil rights movements in the US and Europe, the orange revolutions in Eastern Europe, 'people power' in the Philippines, the anti-

colonial struggles in Africa and Asia and the struggle against apartheid. We can perhaps all tell stories about upheavals – big or small – that contributed to transforming societies before our eyes.

Turbulent and unstable situations pose several challenges for our work. The first is the difficulty of anticipating the nature of change so that we can more effectively accompany the poor to take advantage of this change. The second is the analytical capacity we need to both understand the change process as well as the type of support necessary to support the poor to benefit from transformational change.

Wider change is also driven by global power relations, and the national and international structures that define and shape them. How Christian Aid, as an international humanitarian agency, understands its role within this complexity is pivotal. This understanding determines how, and how much, we mobilise for change, the weight we give to campaigning over programme work, how strategic our funding is – and, ultimately, how much impact we have in challenging poverty.¹

Change agents

Agents of change can be individuals, groups of individuals joining together into a social movement or organisations such as Christian Aid or our partners, pressing for change by acting in the market place or in the political sphere. We believe that change happens because people fight for it, individually or collectively. As Christian Aid, our ‘agency’ expresses itself in the structures and institutions through which we exist and operate. In the market, agents may be individuals or corporate entities, acting as producers of goods or services or consumers. As consumers, we can influence the market through our decisions on what to buy or not. If we did so collectively, such as buying fair-trade goods, we not only make an ethical statement about what social conditions associated with goods are acceptable, we can also force distributors to sell fairly trade goods. As citizens, we can shape the political process by taking advantage of rights and responsibilities conferred on us, eg through voting, our taxes and so forth. We are more effective when we act together as social movements, as protest or interest groups. As an organisation, we see ourselves as part of a rich and diverse ecosystem of organisations, allies, networks and forums working for common causes. Collectively, like individuals, we can influence the market through our consumption behaviour or help shape the political system through our networks, our ideas and our campaigns.

Structures and change

Structures equally matter. The rules and norms that form the market economy or that regulate political authorities and the state shape the opportunities for the poor and are principal causes of their lack of freedom.

Markets, for example, are really a set of rules, norms and structures that regulate what and how people can buy and sell goods, labour, capital and land. They are the result of bodies of laws, organisations and structures that stipulate what people can and cannot do as they seek to generate wealth or consume products. The rules underpinning markets determine the nature of that market, the balance of interests they serve and the resulting social outcomes. That is why no two market economies are exactly the same; compare the United States’ market economy with Norway’s. One builds equity into the rules, the other does not. Similarly, a democratic system which protects rights is based on a system of laws (the rule of law), traditions and organisational bodies with defined responsibilities, authorities etc. Without these, it is hard for people to exercise agency because it is difficult to know what one can or cannot do.

Christian Aid works with a certain theory of the state. We believe that states have the obligation to uphold and enforce fundamental human rights, including civic, political, social, cultural and economic rights. Our engagement with the state in the UK and Ireland is underpinned by a reformist theory of the state – that is, we believe the state can change.

Our understanding is also based implicitly on an idea of the state as a relatively neutral actor (as opposed to a benign power), capable of being influenced by multiple, if competing, interests. We cannot necessarily make the same assumptions for all countries, where states may not be easily subject to public pressure or where the procedures, practices and channels of influence are not so well developed. How we engage with governments such as those in Zimbabwe or Burma involves very different considerations than how we engage in Britain or Ireland. There is a need for further discussion in Christian Aid about the role of the state in ending poverty and human rights abuses.

For us, social change is about both ‘agency’ and ‘structure’ – about the right combination of political action and fundamental shifts at the right time. For example, South Africa would not have abandoned apartheid had it not been for the combination of mass mobilisations, strikes, the military resistance of the 1980s and early 1990s, international sanctions and the support

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of the frontline states and the then-USSR. But the success of these political movements, in turn, depended on an economic climate in which apartheid was becoming simply too costly to continue.

Our strategic plan for 2005-10, Turning Hope into Action, compels us to work on both the symptoms and the causes of poverty and injustice. This is why we have an equal commitment to funding projects that provide direct practical benefit to the poor, to holding people in authority to account, and to exposing the root causes of poverty.

Where does change happen?

Christian Aid works within a framework of international standards and universal values. We have a long and brave history as a campaigning organisation; the anti-apartheid movement and the debt campaign were only the most prominent of many powerful campaigns of which we were a part. We have spoken out on issues as diverse as forced labour in Burma, oil companies in Sudan, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the defence of human rights in Central America, labour conditions in Brazil and Bolivia, structural adjustment in Zimbabwe, child labour in India. We have always stood in solidarity alongside others.

This internationalism underpins our role as a 'bridge' between the UK and Ireland, and poor people and their representatives around the world. It is based on our conviction that all are equal in the sight of God – that everyone deserves a decent life. We reject the idea that life is a lottery: fair to a few, unjust to the majority.

Our supporters take action on behalf of poor people halfway across the globe on the basis of empathy, Christian commitment and a sense of common humanity. They reach out to people they've never met and to causes whose success isn't always guaranteed. It is part of their faith, and ours, that we take seriously our biblical injunction to 'love our neighbour'.

So internationalism – in our campaigning and in our sense of mutuality – is fundamental to the way we work, especially as a UK and Irish agency. But it is not enough.

Complementary campaigns

Change can be driven by powerful external pressures. But individuals and their societies are ultimately the engine of their own development. Whether the product of opportunity or circumstance, the dynamism for change needs to come from

within. Enduring social change rests on people's mastery of their environment, their cultures, the assimilation of ideas and their ability to apply these to improve their lives and those of their communities.²

Positive change results from the desire by a people to free themselves from hardship, including poverty, oppression or indignities, and to preserve or pursue what they perceive as valuable and fulfilling. They may bring this about individually, by acting consciously to take advantage of opportunities, by trying things out or by working together with others in an organised fashion. Often their success will be boosted by external efforts – as South Africans were helped by the international anti-apartheid movement and as Palestinians can be helped by advocacy directed at the EU and UK and Irish governments.

The important thing, from our point of view, is that these efforts are complementary – so that the international action backs up the local demand, and the local campaign and local views are heard globally.

Complementary campaigns require mutual trust and respect, mobilisation both north and south, and shared goals. Tactics and channels of communication will often vary. They take place within a solidarity context. Given the reality of unequal resources, complementary campaigns impose a special challenge to organisations like Christian Aid – to come up with the resources (information, ideas, shared tactics and tools, and money) to support the development of capacity and a complementary voice in developing countries. Examples of where we've succeeded in achieving genuinely complementary campaigns include our work on Economic Partnership Agreements, the World Trade Organisation, structural adjustment and child labour.

But there are other examples in which we have either not sought, or have not been able, to deliver a truly complementary campaign. And here we can see that – with the exception of situations of extreme repression and human rights violations – one-sided campaigns do not work in the long term. If we assume 'leadership' in the UK and Ireland without being truly based in overseas realities, we will not only make a political mistake, we will fail in achieving a lasting impact.

Positive change – a two-way process

Christian Aid believes in change that has a positive and sustainable impact on the lives and realities of people in need.

But change is not a one-way process. We should always aim for holistic change, where the person or institution giving the resources – not just the person or organisation receiving them – is transformed in the process. As our essential purpose affirms, the scandal of poverty is rooted in unjust systems and an imbalance of power between the rich/powerful and the poor/marginalised. It would be wrong, therefore, to expect that the transformation only takes place on one side of the equation.

Through listening carefully to people with the first-hand experience of poverty and injustice, and by bearing witness to their reality, we not only hope to motivate people to share their material gifts, but also aim to make people and institutions reflect on their own behaviour and change it where necessary. This takes a highly organised form in lobbying and advocacy, where changes in policy or practice are the ultimate aim – not garnering financial or other donations. It is through such a 'cycle of solidarity' that true transformational change can happen.

Drivers of change

Ultimately social change is about **power** – what form it takes, how it is distributed and used, the people it affects, and how people react to it. Power may be seen as being held by institutions, and as something that can be seized, influenced or abused by people to bring about or prevent change. Power may also be seen relationally, for example as a flow of knowledge or influence between networks or institutions (ie the concept of 'social capital'). The rules governing this flow include or exclude some people, thereby diminishing their relative influence in society. Power is exercised in various forms:

- authoritarian or top-down (power over)
- discursive (power of knowledge)
- collective or bottom-up (power with)
- functional and skilful (power to do).

It may do harm, or even evil. It may do good. But it is hardly ever neutral. Power may express itself economically, politically, artistically or socially.

Empowerment is a process of accumulating or increasing access to power. Poverty and poor human development

are themselves a reflection of disempowerment and marginalisation – inadequate influence and access. This is true from the micro- to the macro-level, where factors such as age, gender, caste, religion, race, ethnicity, disability and sexuality often have a direct relationship to the degree of control an individual or a group has over its ability to develop or effect change. This applies to the local, the regional and the national level, and also holds true in international relations whereby powerful nations limit the space for the less powerful nations to develop.

We subscribe to the theory that development stands the best chance where power is used accountably and for the social good. The preconditions for accountable political power are that:

- power is derived from the mandate of ordinary people
- policies are arrived at and implemented transparently
- people have access to the process of decision-making
- these processes allow for the voices of the most marginalised to be heard
- power is exercised within the confines of the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights.

In this context, the state has obligations and responsibilities towards people, and people in turn have rights as well as obligations. It is in the framework of rights and obligations that accountability of political power ultimately expresses itself.

The preconditions for accountable economic power include:

- the introduction of rules and policies that allow the socio-economic potential of poor people to be realised
- equal opportunities and access to productive assets
- adequate protection of the poor from the damaging impact of economic and social policies
- the social and environmental costs of economic activity must be met by those who profit most.

Development is also about other forms of power – culture, including the creative use of art, music; the cohesiveness of community; and the role history plays in self-belief. Culture, like

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any form of power, can be misrepresented or abused to justify exclusion and oppression. It is therefore important to understand its liberating potential as well as its potential for abuse.

Religion has the capacity to express a collective worldview and the deepest hopes and aspirations of large groups of people. Like any form of organised human activity and power, it has the capacity for abuse and doing harm but it also has the capacity to be a force for good.

As a Christian agency we take our inspiration from the Gospel and seek to apply our own power, influence and resources according to the values of the Christian faith for the benefit of people and communities of all faiths and none. Our statement of belief, 'We believe in life before death', reflects our conviction that everyone should enjoy all that is good in this life (John 10:10).

Mechanics of change

The need to bring about positive change, and the opportunities to do so, are virtually infinite, but resources are finite. For this reason we need to be realistic about what we can achieve – and sometimes the best way to do this is by harnessing some of the mechanics of change.

1 Scale

Christian Aid has never lacked ambition; our essential purpose talks about 'exposing the scandal of poverty' and 'to help in practical ways to root it out from the world, and to challenge and change the systems which favour the rich and powerful over the poor and marginalised'. Such statement cannot be applied selectively: it doesn't say 'in location x' or 'in country y'; it talks about a global issue that needs concerted global efforts. It follows therefore that in making the difficult choices about where to allocate our resources we do consider scale and potential impact as critical factors. Small may be beautiful, but only insofar as it lends itself to scaling up or genuinely has the potential to signal the possibility of change at a wider societal level.

2 Leverage

Leverage is critical. While change may happen for individuals, families and communities, in reality substantial change that improves the lives of significant numbers of people is primarily brought about by the application of leverage. What we mean by 'leverage' is an intervention made at the right place and

right time, whose impact is far greater than the size of the intervention would suggest. The principle of leverage is critical in achieving anything of real ambition and scale.

So, for instance, we do not merely fund a well-building project; we fund a water project that involves women, so that women begin to have the right to decide where the well is, don't spend hours every day carrying heavy tins of water, and can start planting kitchen gardens – in other words, we ensure that there is wider political change in the balance of power. Or, to give another example, we don't just support the buying of fair-trade coffee; we encourage people to introduce fair-trade coffee to their employer, or press their local council to start buying it. The circle of tens of thousands of protestors around the building where the G8 were meeting in Birmingham at the time of the millennium didn't just gather in a routine protest; by doing just the right thing at the right moment, they focused world opinion on the need for debt relief.

Leverage should be applied only when it restores the balance of power or moves power into the hands of those that previously had little or none. We do not speak of positive leverage where power is applied from a position of privilege or from one of disproportionate control over money or resources and where it is not accountable to those on whose behalf it claims to be applied. (In those cases it is not leverage, but extortion or coercion.)

This means that to make substantive contributions to change, we need to identify levers – those things that can transform small efforts into big results, much like moving a big stone with a relatively small pole. These levers may be organisations or ideas, or ways of working which result in a substantial impact on power and outcomes.

Effective leverage by external agents of change such as Christian Aid requires a clear understanding of institutional obligations, especially the relative roles of localised institutions, the state, the private sector and organisations in civil society.

Leverage potential is a critical element in our choices of partners and projects. It is also of critical importance for our advocacy, lobbying and campaigning. We should not spend time and resources on projects or activities where leverage cannot be applied in one form or another.

3 Speed

Christian Aid's 62 years' of existence should not blind us to the fact that we should always view our role as a temporary one;

that is, we're here only until the job has been done. People who experience poverty or oppression deserve more than a promise that their issues will be resolved some time in the distant future. The scandal of poverty is here with us today and our actions should be informed by a sense of urgency about tackling it. Climate change has put this need for urgency and speed into sharp perspective; we may only have a window of ten to 20 years to head off catastrophic developments. Our theory of change should therefore be informed by the notion that we haven't got time on our side. Time is critical.

Allies

Apart from our partners, Christian Aid often enters into alliances, some temporary, some long-lasting, for very specific reasons. In international negotiations, such as trade or debt or climate change, we sometimes find ourselves allied with others we may not usually work with – or may even oppose on some issues – in order to promote the interests of the poor. These may be other faith-based groups, celebrities, progressive companies or even developing-country governments.

Make Poverty History was an example of entering into alliances with individuals and groups we would normally not work with on a day-to-day basis. The I-Count coalition brings together an alliance of development, environment and faith groups on climate change. The same can be said of various alliances on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories that Christian Aid has entered into in Britain and Ireland. There are examples of our partners entering into broad alliances with trade union groups, local businesses, traditional authorities, different caste groups and trade associations as a broad coalition to protect, say, water or land rights. Alliances tend to be issue-specific. Choosing allies and managing alliances can pose challenges, not least managing messages to reflect positions each organisation is comfortable with, and managing relations. We have much to learn from partners on this and perhaps much to offer. We need to learn our lessons and discover our own strengths and weaknesses to know how to accompany partners better and make our work more effective in Britain and Ireland.

Governments: At least in principle, governments and political institutions are obliged to put in place and maintain democratic checks and balances, and to uphold legal frameworks that advance the rule of law and people's rights. In our view, governments also have a key role to play in the delivery of basic social services such as health and education, and in

regulating economic and social relations, to the extent that no single group or interested party thrives at the expense of others.

Governments should also ensure that no groups or segments of the population are excluded from the development process.

Our work with developing-country governments can be schizophrenic. In the north we often take their side when we campaign for the end to conditionality, for debt relief, more and better aid, trade justice and a development approach to climate change. We do so by targeting individual governments or inter-governmental bodies. On these issues, we are effectively allies. In our international work in developing countries, we approach these governments largely through our partners, or directly in exceptional cases. However, in situations of human rights abuse, extreme corruption and the collapse of democratic accountability and the rule of law, such as Zimbabwe, we are obliged to speak out. Indeed, we are often expected by our partners to speak out.

We can therefore be allies as well as adversaries. We are allies in the common effort to address development and end poverty and abuse. We are adversaries when governments are the principal obstacle to the dignity and rights of the poor. Our challenge as Christian Aid is to be better companions to empower the poor and developing countries as well as to be better at judging when and how we can be effective voice for and with the poor.

Non-governmental groups and civil society: Making governments fulfil their obligations to their people is the task of local political parties and of non-governmental groups, including the media and human rights bodies. Many of our partners lobby their governments, local and national, to fulfil their obligations to people with whom they work. And, of course, NGOs and civil society organisations, including our partners, deliver a wide range of practical services, from HIV prevention to the organisation of sex workers, from adaptation to climate change. The best – and the ones with which we work as partners – are concerned about delivering both immediate, practical benefits and the wider change that comes when power relations are challenged – and change becomes lasting.

Business community: Business exists to make a profit. This is true of small and large businesses alike. The vast majority of poor people engage in their own businesses; even small subsistence farms try to generate surpluses. However, when referring to private enterprises and the wider business

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community we refer to larger-scale enterprises which, because of their size and relative power, have the potential to do both good and bad. Those businesses that aim to meet the demands of a 'triple bottom-line'¹ not only seek to maximise profits but also seek to achieve social and environmental sustainability goals. Businesses potentially have an important contribution to make to the eradication of poverty by paying their fair share of taxes, by using their power and influence wisely, by providing employment and by investing their profits in a way that contributes to the 'greater good', their communities and the wider environment.

Because of its control over financial resources, technology and information, its role as employer, purchaser and supplier of goods and services, the business sector exerts far greater influence over our lives than do governments or NGOs. Business also tends to have privileged access to decisions of state and wields a disproportionate level of power. To leverage the benefits that this sector brings will often require a countervailing influence to protect the assets of the poor and public/common good. For example, our campaign on supermarkets gave birth to the Ethical Trading Initiative, through which companies sourcing their own-label goods have taken on voluntary commitments to ensure there is no use of child labour and exploitation of workers. Similarly, Christian Aid is a pioneer of the fair-trade initiative, which arose from a campaign for decent prices and treatment of communities along the supply chain of goods sold in Britain and Ireland. Our partners continue to struggle for land rights and the protection of workers in many mining communities around the world. Finally, the growing concern that mining companies in particular do not pay source countries a decent share of profits has led to the re-negotiating of mining contracts in Zambia and Bolivia (to mention but two examples). Countervailing pressure is essential for companies to balance the profit motivation with social and environmental protection.

Churches and faith-based organisations: In some contexts, for instance in Africa, faith-based organisations and churches are among the most influential of any institutions. It's a vital part of our mission and our remit, as well as a practical response to who is doing important work, that, where appropriate, we work with faith-based organisations and churches where they are involved in important development projects. As part of ACT International, we ensure that our partners uphold international humanitarian standards of neutrality, independence and impartiality.

What we can do

1 Solidarity actions

Solidarity actions are based on a common cause and values, and tend to operate on principles of equality. They take many forms: people-to-people exchange, championing a cause from afar or giving practical help. Acting on the basis of solidarity requires, above all, mutual trust, mutual respect and humility. Solidarity actions provide those involved with local struggles the courage, energy and resilience needed to sustain the struggle and bring about change. In these cases, people internationally join together with local organisations to ensure that they are working towards the same end. Where a country or a community faces severe oppression – for instance, in the case of Burma – leadership might be taken internationally.

Unfortunately, there are situations where the chance of positive and sustainable change may not be immediately available. In places like Zimbabwe or Burma or countries where the state has collapsed such as Somalia, we see that only radical change at a much wider level – possibly out of our reach – has the potential to make a real difference. Apart from solidarity actions, immediate change may not be an option. However, at the most basic level, every human being – no matter how hopeless their situation may appear – has the right to nurture hope for a better future for themselves and their children. In some situations, we may have to admit to our own powerlessness but we will be called upon to keep hope alive. This is, strictly, speaking, not about initiating change but about ensuring that – when critical conditions change – people will have survived with sufficient hope and dignity.

2 Demonstration effect

Non-governmental organisations, including international charities, can also leverage the practical actions of governments through a 'demonstration effect'. This may involve supporting practical interventions that show a different way of doing things – for instance, new technology or new forms of social protection – which can then be adapted by the state or the corporate sector for scaling up.

3 Voice and visibility

We can support poor people and their associations to amplify their voice and visibility in their political environment through collective actions – or through solidarity – and carry those voices to the international sphere. Collective and innovative

actions create a power to counter to top-down, authoritarian power, or power-based on economic privilege.

The role of external players like Christian Aid is to stand on the side of the poor, and for social and environmental rights. External groups can leverage this process by supporting the growth and development of local structures and capacity, and by standing by them in solidarity.

4 Money and resources

These examples of leverage can involve an element of funding. But for the sake of making a comprehensive case, we ought to list ways by which funding can contribute to leverage. External funding can generate a scale beyond what could be accomplished by our partners trying to raise money locally, thereby having the potential to create a momentum and maximising the impact of local efforts. Similarly, the very fact of funding coming from overseas for key local initiatives can inspire people in the causes they are pursuing, whether this is girls' education where there was previously none, care for children orphaned by AIDS or the ability to monitor government budgets.

5 Local/international connections

No longer is it possible to regard a problem as merely 'local'. From fertile land in Mali turning to desert to the driving down of wages in Indian garment factories, local conditions are shaped by the wider environment and economy.

Highlighting the connections between the local and the international may be one of the greatest benefits of solidarity to poor people, given their inability to access power and influence. Enabling poor people to understand and make those connections can often be an important contribution to poor people's knowledge and courage. International organisations such as Christian Aid are ideally placed to challenge institutions outside the immediate domain of poor people. At the least, this takes the form of development education and good communications, but making the connections between the widest global institution and its impact on the ground can also inform our campaigning and advocacy.

6 Independence

We recognise the potential power of various external actors in bringing about social change and are open to the opportunities of greater synergy (and hence leverage) with

them. But we must be mindful of the danger of creating another concentration of power, with the potential to squeeze people out of their own development process, or of muffling the voices of those we are seeking to support. Nonetheless, there is not such a multitude of voices speaking for justice that we can afford to keep silent. As long as our efforts to push for change are truly collaborative and complementary, there is always room for more than one voice, whether that is 'external' or 'internal' to a country.

With this in mind, we should particularly value our own independence from donors, governments and others who hold power. We defend our right to an independent stance; we aim to minimise the risk of being swayed by more powerful institutions.

Challenges

We face many challenges in arriving at a shared concept of social change – because of its complexity, the diversity of disciplinary perspectives, and the difficulties of communicating from diverse contexts, countries and professional backgrounds. But we need not be overwhelmed. This paper outlines a number of ideas around which a discussion can be organised. In thinking about the issue, we may wish to be guided by the following steps:

1. Understanding contexts – historical, geographic, contemporary social/economic as they affect the nature of change sought.
2. Understanding barriers to change.
3. Taking an inter-disciplinary perspective in analysing drivers of change.
4. The relative roles of structures and agents in change.
5. Looking at situations and issues from a 'change mechanics' point-of-view.
6. Examining Christian Aid's own agency in the change context, underpinned by our essential purpose.
7. Drawing links between different change environments, from the local to the global, and our role in connecting the dots.

More than anything else, we hope that the paper stimulates many in Christian Aid to ask the essential 'So what?' questions and to apply these to different aspects of our work.

Christian Aid's role

How do we sum up our role in the complex, challenging, ambitious process of creating change? We have five key principles to offer.

- Our role is, by definition, a supportive and empowering one.
- Because of who we are, what we represent and the resources we control, we have power and influence. We need to use these wisely and strategically.
- By definition, we need to focus our work on activities and initiatives that have the potential to reach a greater number of people, in a time-span that recognises the urgency of the task at hand, and all of this with the greatest potential leverage – the greater the leverage, the greater the 'multiplication' or 'wow' factor.
- In communications and campaigning, we need to be sensitive to how we amplify and reinforce the power, influence and voice of those on whose behalf we speak out and act. We must be clear in our analysis of how power and leverage are applied. We need to engage with theological issues raised by our church-based supporters, and report honestly to our supporters about our successes and failures in achieving change.
- While always pursuing potential for synergy in working with others, we must safeguard our independence from donors, governments and those who hold power.

Next steps

This paper is not the end-point of a discussion but the beginning. It is meant to stimulate essential conversation - between and among staff; between staff and supporters; and between staff and partners. It is about being explicit about what we know from more than six decades of trying to bring about positive change in the lives of people in poverty. We have sought to raise these issues, not in an effort to deny the reality of other experiences, but in order to clarify where we come from and what we bring to the table.

More than anything else, we hope that the paper stimulates many in Christian Aid to ask the essential 'So what?' questions and to apply these to different aspects of our work. If this is done with integrity and a real desire to make a critical

difference, we will collectively arrive at a higher level of clarity about our individual roles, our role as an organisation, and those of others in the development process.

Endnote

¹ There is substantial and important academic debate over the relative importance of 'agents' and 'structures' in bringing about change. By 'agents' we mean people acting as individuals or groups in the market, in the community, in national or global politics. 'Structures' refer to historical or contemporary institutions, rules and norms that shape the parameters in which actors operate. Christian Aid believes that change is created by the interaction of people and structures.

Christian Aid is a Christian organisation that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.

We work globally for profound change that eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality, dignity and freedom for all, regardless of faith or nationality.

We are part of a wider movement for social justice.

We provide urgent, practical and effective assistance where need is great, tackling the effects of poverty as well as its root causes.

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