

Unders

rstand

Understanding ‘Celebrating Families’ contribution to family well-being

KEY FINDINGS FROM AFGHANISTAN, MYANMAR AND TANZANIA CASE STUDIES

SEPTEMBER 2019

Prof Hazel Barrett, Ms Laura Payne & Dr Pascal Niyonkuru, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, UK



In 2018, the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) at Coventry University was contracted by World Vision to conduct three in-depth, qualitative analyses of Celebrating Families, focusing on implementation in Afghanistan, Myanmar and Tanzania. These were commissioned to build the evidence base for understanding how Celebrating Families is effective in supporting parents and caregivers to develop nurturing environments for children. Data collection for the Afghanistan and Myanmar case studies took place in July and August 2018 led by Research Fellow Laura Payne. The data collection for the Tanzanian case study took place in May 2019, led by Professor Hazel Barrett with Dr Pascal Niyonkuru. The data was collected using qualitative methods, including individual interviews, focus groups and an arts-based workshop with children. A total of 338 children, parents, faith and community leaders, child protection personnel and World Vision staff took part across the three countries.

About Celebrating Families

Celebrating Families seeks to ensure that all families enjoy positive and loving relationships and have hope for the future. It supports families as places that allow children to experience the 'love of God' by addressing the beliefs, convictions and cultural norms that contribute to harmful practices in child rearing. Through Celebrating Families, participants are equipped with the knowledge, skills and tools to create safe and nurturing environments within the family home and community, enabling children to experience positive and peaceful relationships.

Delivery is through a three-day reflective workshop, which encourages parents and caregivers to reflect on their childhood experiences and understand how these influence their approach to parenting. It invites participants to envision a different future, breaking with practices and forms of communication that caused them pain. The workshops support parents and caregivers to make changes in how they behave towards and communicate with children, inviting

them to make commitments through a religious or spiritual commitment. This is supported by extra-curricular activities to support families' holistic development, such as themed sessions at parents' meetings and women's and men's groups.

Target participants include parents and caregivers, religious leaders, community leaders, schoolteachers, social service personnel, local family focused organizations and local government units. Activities undertaken by parents and caregivers with children support their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual development, and increase bonding and understanding with parents.

Celebrating Families is implemented alongside other programming and is often integrated within activities on child protection, education and livelihoods. The curriculum can be contextualized for use in multi-faith and non-Christian contexts and additional guidance supports implementation in fragile and conflict-affected places.



Evaluating Celebrating Families: the three case studies (Afghanistan, Myanmar and Tanzania)

The focus of this evaluation was 'how, and to what extent, does Celebrating Families contribute to the creation of a nurturing environment for children?' The evaluation adopted a theory-based and process-tracing approach, testing the validity of the project model's Theory of Change through the results chain. This approach has been shown to be effective for the assessment of child and family-centred programming.

Afghanistan, Myanmar and Tanzania were selected by World Vision International to be case studies for this evaluation in order to understand the contribution of Celebrating Families to family well-being, as they represent the range and diversity of the countries in which Celebrating Families is implemented. Table 1 shows the key characteristics of the three case study countries. These were highly contrasting case studies that enabled the evaluators to assess the effectiveness of Celebrating Families in diverse geographical, political and faith contexts.

- Afghanistan is a post-conflict insecure country that is 100% Muslim. The data collection was undertaken in urban areas with teachers and child protection professionals who had already had some training in child protection issues as well as Faith Leaders, *Shura* Members and parents and caregivers. All had received Celebrating Families training. All were Muslim.

- Myanmar is a majority Buddhist country that is slowly emerging from military rule. Data collection was undertaken in urban centres under the observation of a government official. The sample was taken from the Christian minority population, as Celebrating Families has not yet been adapted for use in Buddhist contexts. The sample consisted of parents and caregivers as well as Church Leaders who had undertaken the Celebrating Families workshop.

- Tanzania is a low-income country that is politically stable. It is home to Christians of many denominations, Muslims, as well as those following traditional beliefs. Data was collected in rural areas of high deprivation where agriculture was the main livelihood and where the majority of the population were Christian. Parents and caregivers, Church and Community Leaders all had completed the Celebrating Families training.

In each country World Vision Staff and a sample of children aged 12 to 18 years, from families that had received Celebrating Families training were also invited to participate in the evaluation.

More information about each case study can be found in World Vision's *Understanding Celebrating Families contribution to family wellbeing: Key Findings*. There is a briefing for each of the three case study countries.

Case Study Country	Year when Celebrating Families implemented	Religion of the country	Classification of country	Names and characteristics of sampled APs	Participant types (Number in brackets)
Afghanistan	2014	Muslim (100%)	Low Income, Post Conflict, poor security	Badghis and Herat Poor conflict affected urban areas, suffering insecurity Muslim	Parents/Caregivers, Children, Muslim Leaders, School Teachers, Members of Local <i>Shuras</i> , Child Protection Action Network Staff and World Vision Afghanistan Staff (#87)
Myanmar	2015	Buddhist (89%)	Low Income, Politically transitioning from military to military-backed civilian government	Mandalay and Yangon Large cities Minority Christian	Parents/Caregivers, Children, Church Leaders, World Vision Myanmar Staff (#99)
Tanzania	2013	Christian/Muslim/Traditional Beliefs	Low Income, Politically Stable	Endabash and Kisongo/Makuyuni Poor rural districts dependent on subsistence farming Majority Christian	Parents/Caregivers, Children, Church/Faith Leaders, Community Leaders, World Vision Tanzania Staff (#152)

Table 1: Key Characteristics of Case Study Countries.

The analysis of the information collected for the case studies suggests that there are many different types of family structure (including nuclear, multi-generational, polygamous, female headed and child headed households) in all three countries and that these are impacted by a complex ecology of social, political and economic factors. In each case study, family structures, relationships and parenting were constructed by deeply ingrained widespread cultural, social and economic factors that were reinforced by communities that expect families to conform to strict social, gender, political and faith based norms. In turn, these are sustained or exacerbated by the wider regional or national context, including poverty, lack of infrastructure, government policy, personal security concerns, as well as international issues such as climate change, health shocks and conflict.

World Vision has long understood the importance of family as a catalyst for improving children's lives. They stress that child protection starts within the family, as children are closer to their parents than they are to others. World Vision staff and community influencers also understand the centrality

of faith and spirituality, which underpin the social norms that dictate family and community structures, gender norms as well as attitudes and behaviour towards children and parenting. Whatever their faith, be it Christian, Muslim or Traditional, spirituality is central to the communities evaluated in all three case studies and therefore working with Faith Leaders to bring about behaviour change, particularly on sensitive issues related to the family, gender and parenting is essential. Celebrating Families, which is deeply rooted in faith, and designed to engage participants on a deeply spiritual level, is thus well positioned to engage families and communities in diverse contexts, providing the training material is adapted to the local cultural context as is the case in Afghanistan (Muslim), but not yet for Buddhist Myanmar.

There is strong evidence in all three case study countries that Celebrating Families is having a positive effect at the family level, and is challenging cultural, social and gender norms that are harmful to family relationships, particularly parenting and the physical and spiritual nurture of children.

Celebrating Families helps deepen family relationships and increase spiritual nurture

Following attending Celebrating Families workshops, parents and caregivers in all three case studies reported that they had learned about good parenting and the harm they had done their children. This had motivated them to change their behaviour towards their children and this in turn had strengthened family relations. Many reported improved spousal relationships, especially a reduction in domestic violence and abuse. This was particularly evident in Tanzania, but was also mentioned by respondents in Myanmar.

Many parents reported that violence against children within the home setting had been reduced with the use of corporal punishment decreasing. Whilst most parents wanted to discipline their children in a positive loving way, many, especially in Afghanistan and Myanmar, were struggling to find alternatives to corporal punishment. In both Afghanistan and Tanzania, formidable gender norms combined with an intense patriarchal system, meant that some female participants were struggling to negotiate the gendered power dynamics within the family to protect their children from harm. In both Afghanistan and Tanzania, this situation was reported as an issue within households. In Tanzania a number of mothers found it difficult to challenge the traditional harmful practices of female genital mutilation and child and forced marriage, which are powerful social norms enforced by the community.

Due to economic and political insecurity, most parents reported that they were not always able to deliver the physical care they wanted to their children, such as providing a balanced diet and suitable clothing, including school uniforms. However, they all said that there had been changes in their attitudes and behaviour concerning the emotional care of their children. Following Celebrating Families training parents in all three countries were able to articulate children's rights. Knowledge of holistic child development was patchy in Myanmar and Tanzania. Whilst in Afghanistan there was greater understanding of holistic child development, many parents felt unable to provide this due to the security situation.

In the communities sampled, it was evident that the spiritual nurture of children was not a priority for many parents and caregivers. In Afghanistan, parents were more concerned about security and the precariousness of life, in particular how to deal with conflict induced trauma of their children. In Tanzania patriarchal practices and coping with poverty in most families appeared to be prioritised over spiritual nurture, with fathers determining if children could attend church or Sunday School, often dictating that their children should undertake domestic and agricultural work in preference to attending faith based meetings. However, in Myanmar, parents

and caregivers reported that children's early encounters with God occurred within the home, particularly through praying. A number of respondents stated that children learn through imitation and thus parents must embody their spiritual values in order to impart these to their children. In all three case studies, parents and caregivers confirmed that Celebrating Families had strengthened their faith and the spirituality of themselves and their children.

Local stakeholders support empowering environments for children

Faith Leaders

In all three countries, Celebrating Families has been very successful in engaging Faith Leaders. Many Faith Leaders have been able to integrate Celebrating Families within their current work using existing structures. This gives them a natural platform from which to leverage scripture in support of social change. All Faith Leaders were able to recount examples of how they had used the scriptural resources from Celebrating Families to tackle harmful child rearing practices, including traditional harmful practices and violence at the family level. However, in a number of cases, particularly in Myanmar but also in Tanzania, Church Leaders articulated a perceived incompatibility between the lessons of Celebrating Families on the corporal punishment of children and their own theological perspective.

Faith leaders did not offer examples of ways in which they had used Celebrating Families to influence policy. They felt it was important to increase the reach and impact of Celebrating Families, but this was framed in terms of educating families rather than influencing policymakers. In general, Faith Leaders testified that they focused on their own families before disseminating to others in their communities and congregations.

Community Leaders

In Afghanistan and Tanzania, World Vision has successfully incorporated Community (including *Shura* Members in Afghanistan) and Clan Leaders into Celebrating Families and some have become Community Facilitators. In both countries, these leaders have tended to focus on the contextual drivers of poor parenting, including harmful social norms and poverty. In Tanzania Village Councilors explained how the Village Council could fine fathers if their children do not go to school and would mediate in family conflicts, especially those that related to domestic violence and substance abuse. However, they were adamant that they are 'not responsible for faith issues' such as the spiritual nurturing of children. In Myanmar, Celebrating Families has hitherto not engaged with community leaders. This may well be because Celebrating Families has not yet been contextualised for the Buddhist setting.



Teachers and Child Protection Officers

Teachers and Child Protection professionals were not included in the Celebrating Families programme in Myanmar, with few engaging in Tanzania. However, in Afghanistan, both teachers and members of the government's Child Protection Action Network were active participants. The evaluation suggests that teachers' efforts to tackle harmful practices in Afghanistan were reactive to disclosures of child protection and welfare issues, rather than having a focus on prevention. Professionals working in the Child Protection Action Network in Afghanistan had high levels of child protection knowledge and activity due to being exposed to many sources of training. It is therefore hard to isolate the impact of Celebrating Families on their work.

There is clear evidence that Faith and Community Leaders that have received Celebrating Families training in all three case study countries are working hard to support empowering environments for children. However, they act very much as the disseminators of Celebrating Families messages, rather than being significant partners in the project and being consulted on, and having input into, strategic issues. Professionals who had undergone the Celebrating Families training, particularly in Afghanistan, reported being motivated to create change within their professional spheres, which enables them to influence policy. The potential of working with these professional stakeholder groups requires more research, in particular, how such professionals can be equipped with the skills to challenge social norms within the communities they live and work, without causing unintended harm to children or themselves.

Congregations and communities promote strong families

This is the most difficult form of impact to evidence, as it requires behavioural change at the social and cultural levels. Such change generally takes place over a long period of time, often up to a generation, and is very diffuse. However, participants clearly understood that sharing knowledge, in particular acting as role models, was crucial to social change and had enabled them to instigate changes in other families.

World Vision Tanzania has a strong focus on local ownership of Celebrating Families, not only as a moral principle but also as a means to ensuring its sustainability. The strategy of embedding ownership of Celebrating Families within the community has been effective, as many workshop participants have made significant independent efforts to roll out the approach often because they felt the workshop and related activities had been transformational for their families and they wanted others to benefit too.

The participants who made the clearest attempts to educate others about scriptural teachings concerning family life were Faith Leaders. They were also more likely to share Celebrating Families outside of family networks, for instance with their congregations. Only after Faith Leaders had gained confidence with their congregations did some of them reach out to other organisations and groups within their community, including Village Councils and Savings and Credit Groups.

Celebrating Families messages and teachings on family change are also being disseminated through unexpected informal methods, such as child-to-child means and at family and community events. These informal mechanisms are valuable and trusted channels of dissemination. They also mean that people who do not attend faith-based events are being exposed to Celebrating Families messages.



Emerging themes and implications for Celebrating Families as a project model

Change within the family is both personal and interpersonal in nature

Changes within families following implementation of Celebrating Families occur at the personal and interpersonal levels. In Afghanistan, it has primarily affected relationships between parents and children rather than between adult family members. In Myanmar Celebrating Families has also mainly affected relationships between parents and children, but it also improved relations between spouses. In Tanzania it has predominantly affected relationships between parents/spouses, followed by relationships between parents/caregivers and children. In measuring behaviour change at the family level, it is useful to distinguish between the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of parental care and spousal relationships, as this reflects the unique contribution of Celebrating Families as an instigator of holistic family wellbeing.

Spiritual nurture for children

Celebrating Families has contributed to ensuring that children receive spiritual nurturing in all three case study countries. Children get the knowledge and skills to develop their own spirituality from both parents and faith based meetings such as attending church/mosque, Sunday/Koranic School. In Myanmar, parents introduced their children to God by inspiring awe and wonder at creation. In Afghanistan, parents no longer associated spiritual nurture with formal religious instruction, but recognized they must live their spiritual values by showing acts of love and

kindness. In Tanzania, many parents were now beginning to pray with their children and read the scriptures together.

It is not possible to be conclusive as to whether congregations and communities have the knowledge and skills to nurture children spiritually. However, what is clear is that some congregations are creating a more enabling environment for children to flourish, and thus have paved the way for children to develop spirituality. There appears to be a need for child friendly materials and training in appropriate pedagogy for those, such as Sunday/Koranic School teachers, who regularly teach the scriptures to children.

Local stakeholders engaged and empowered

The willingness of Faith Leaders to engage with rolling out Celebrating Families is impressive, particularly in Myanmar and Tanzania. However, these Faith Leaders often rely on their congregations for their income and as they operate in low income and deprived communities there are staffing and other costs that churches and mosques are struggling with, this is proving to be very challenging. If Celebrating Families is to be sustainable, this issue must be addressed. World Vision needs to think strategically about how faith communities can be empowered, capacity developed and funded, to be able to continue the work of Celebrating Families. Faith Leaders should become major partners in Celebrating Families, empowering them to challenge harmful social norms and practices that adversely affect children rather than being 'passive' disseminators of the curriculum.



By contrast, in Afghanistan World Vision have recruited to Celebrating Families through professional networks rather than Faith Leaders. This has had a number of benefits such as increasing the ownership and engagement of local stakeholders and embedded learning within child-focused institutions. This has created Celebrating Families advocates within communities; however, there is a discussion to be had in terms of the accessibility to Celebrating Families by non-professional parents and those living in rural areas. This example demonstrates the benefits of identifying and engaging community influencers from different backgrounds in the Celebrating Families project.

Communities and congregations engaged and empowered

Most participants in the case study countries spoke of lessons from Celebrating Families being disseminated first by role models influencing family members and neighbours. Secondly by Faith Leaders engaging with their congregations. Only after Faith Leaders had grown in confidence did they feel able to address the broader community. Many referred to this two-pronged dissemination as 'an organic form of diffusion that rippled out across the community'. However, this does restrict the Celebrating Families message to those who attend faith related meetings. Informal dissemination mechanisms were also found to be effective, such as Celebrating Families being raised at family and community events and celebrations, and importantly the messages being shared by child-to-child contact whilst playing and in school. These informal methods of dissemination were likely to capture parents who do not attend faith related meetings. It is therefore suggested that World Vision support and encourage both formal and informal systems of dissemination of Celebrating Families messages, in line with cultural sensibilities.

In Afghanistan and Myanmar participants commented on the opportunity cost (time and lost income) of attending Celebrating Families training. This was not the case in rural Tanzania where the workshops took place in the low agricultural season. There clearly needs to be flexibility in the timing and delivery of the workshops to ensure as many people benefit from the training and that attending the training is not adversely affecting the poorest families, particularly in urban areas.

Understanding the nature of how Celebrating Families messages are being diffused through communities and how social change is initiated is important. A tool for capturing this information in diverse communities and through time would strengthen the MEAL component of Celebrating Families.

Views of Children: the ultimate beneficiaries of Celebrating Families

In all three countries the children that participated in the evaluation were able to describe the 'sad' elements in their family lives prior to their parents or caregivers participating in Celebrating Families. In Afghanistan, as would be expected, children particularly focussed on violence and security issues within and outside the home and expressed a desire for home lives that were peaceful, non-discriminatory and free from violence. Children who participated in the evaluation in Myanmar were generally positive about their families and home lives but raised issues associated with alcohol abuse by parents, family arguments, financial difficulties, the migration of siblings and death of family members. In Tanzania the main issues raised by children was pervasive violence in the home, in particular intimate partner violence and abuse, excessive use of corporal punishment, pervasive poverty and highly controlling fathers.

The majority of children involved in the Celebrating Families evaluation reported improvements in their family lives and relationships after one or both parents or caregivers had attended Celebrating Families workshops. Most were able to identify the importance of faith and religiousness in their family lives and all had high hopes and aspirations for the future. The testimony of the children involved in this evaluation is clear evidence of the positive impact of Celebrating Families on their lives and spirituality.



Recommendations

Adapt Celebrating Families to local context and culture

Wherever Celebrating Families operates, it is important that family challenges and social norms are analysed in detail at a local level as most families draw on forms of resilience that are embedded within culture, tradition and faith. This should be a qualitative data gathering exercise that complements the existing key performance indicators. Qualitative data at a granular level will elicit detail that illuminates family cultures and relationships, allowing changes in these to be measured alongside more obvious changes in family practices.

Participants requested advice, training and refresher courses on how to contextualise Celebrating Families, to ensure they are not alienating local people and communities as well as confirming they are doing 'no harm'. They also asked for training on giving psychosocial advice to family and community members, as well as access to such support for themselves.

Provide parents with tools for positive discipline

One important aspect of Celebrating Families is that it seeks to eliminate violence in the home, particularly as a form of discipline against children. However, it is clear that domestic violence and abuse between parents must be addressed at the same time as tackling severe forms of punishment of children. A caring, loving family life is the foundation of good parenting and spiritual nurture. It was suggested that the Celebrating Families curriculum be extended to incorporate the youth, who are the next parents, who without the support of Celebrating Families may well perpetuate the violence common in family life for another generation.

Invest in lasting social and cultural change

Creating impact in the wider community and society requires change at the social and cultural levels. This takes place over a longer period of time and is very diffuse. The Celebrating Families Theory of Change hypothesises that local stakeholders such as Faith Leaders, faith-based organisations and local agencies will be instrumental in instigating wider social and cultural change, working with and through congregations and communities. There is early evidence that some social and cultural change is occurring in the case study countries, but additional progress can be made through empowering local stakeholders, contextualisation and planning for follow-up discussions and activities as well as expanding the range of partners involved in Celebrating Families, such as relevant government departments and perhaps large private employers.

Integration

Family life is impacted by a whole array of challenges and harmful social norms, which affect all aspects of family and community relations. These challenges are highly complex, interrelated and dynamic and thus affect all aspects of family and community interactions, livelihoods and well-being. Thus, when Celebrating Families is integrated within other World Vision technical areas or programmes it stands the best chance of addressing root causes of dysfunctional family life, poor parenting and lack of spiritual nurture, in tandem with other issues such as increasing livelihoods, addressing gender equality issues and improving health and education levels. A caring, supporting family life underpins all aspects of human development, and therefore Celebrating Families should be included in all World Vision programmes. This integration with other programmes will also ensure the rollout and sustainability of the messages of Celebrating Families so that social norms can be transformed to give the next generation a better start in life than their parents had and to break the intergenerational cycle of family violence and poor parenting.



World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision is dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. World Vision serves all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity and gender.

Research Centre
Trust, Peace and
Social Relations



The Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) at Coventry University undertakes innovative, impactful, world-class research that enables dialogue and builds trust in order to foster peaceful relations and strengthen human security. Drawing on a strong track record of research in integrated peacebuilding, trust and social and community relations, the Centre exemplifies Coventry University's long-standing commitment to research that makes a strong impact on the security and quality of life of ordinary people worldwide.