



Our Theory of Change

The changes we want to see and how we help make them



Introduction

For organisations working to make changes in the world, a Theory of Change helps define long-term goals and map out all of the actions, factors and people involved in achieving them.

This document outlines the changes AfriKids wants to see for children and communities in northern Ghana, all of the people and factors that influence whether those changes can be made, and how we can help make them happen.

Background

AfriKids believes in the rights of all children, everywhere, and exists to improve life for children in northern Ghana, where more than half of all families live in poverty and many children live at risk.

The origins of AfriKids reach back to the late 1990s, when a UK volunteer visiting the Upper East Region of Ghana met passionate and determined local people doing what they could to help children at risk in their communities. With her help to raise funds for this work, they were able to realise their ambitions and expand their projects. By 2002, this collaboration was making such a difference that a fundraising charity called AfriKids was registered in the UK and in 2005, the local team were able to formally register AfriKids as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Ghana.

AfriKids has become a household name in northern Ghana and after more than a decade of work, we wanted to pause and reflect on what we have achieved and what remains to be done. We wanted to understand the impact to which we have contributed as an organisation and the approaches that have worked for us and those that have not.

AfriKids therefore began a Theory of Change (ToC) process with the aim of documenting and streamlining our work now and defining our plans for the future, so that moving forward, we can operate with a clearer purpose and be even more effective.

Developing our Theory of Change

In June 2015, we began our Theory of Change process with support from an external consultant. We followed best practice principles to ensure it was meaningful and effective:

- Drawing on learning from our beneficiaries, stakeholders and internal and external research
- Involving a range of staff and other stakeholders in an open and participatory process
- Acknowledging the complexity of change and our contribution within the wider context
- Building on our existing learning but also challenging it

and analysing our assumptions

- Making the process part of our on-going learning and organisational systems

Consultation with beneficiaries

The first stage of the process involved consulting children and young people from the three key districts of Ghana's Upper East Region that AfriKids has worked in over the years. We aimed to find out what impact AfriKids has had on their lives and communities and what further changes are needed; who and what helps them achieve those changes (including themselves and the most important stakeholders); and which of the approaches we have used have been successful. We used participatory community tools like the 'Journey of life', 'Venn diagrams' and 'Bean ranking' techniques to help them analyse and prioritise. We documented the findings from these exercises.

Review of internal and external learning

In the next stage of the process, the consultant carried out a review of relevant AfriKids and external research documents. She also interviewed a range of stakeholders who could not be part of the planned Theory of Change workshop, including representatives from AfriKids UK staff and Board and AfriKids Ghana Board and external sectoral experts. This review centred on the same core Theory of Change questions as the consultation. The consultant drew the findings together in summary notes.

Theory of change workshop

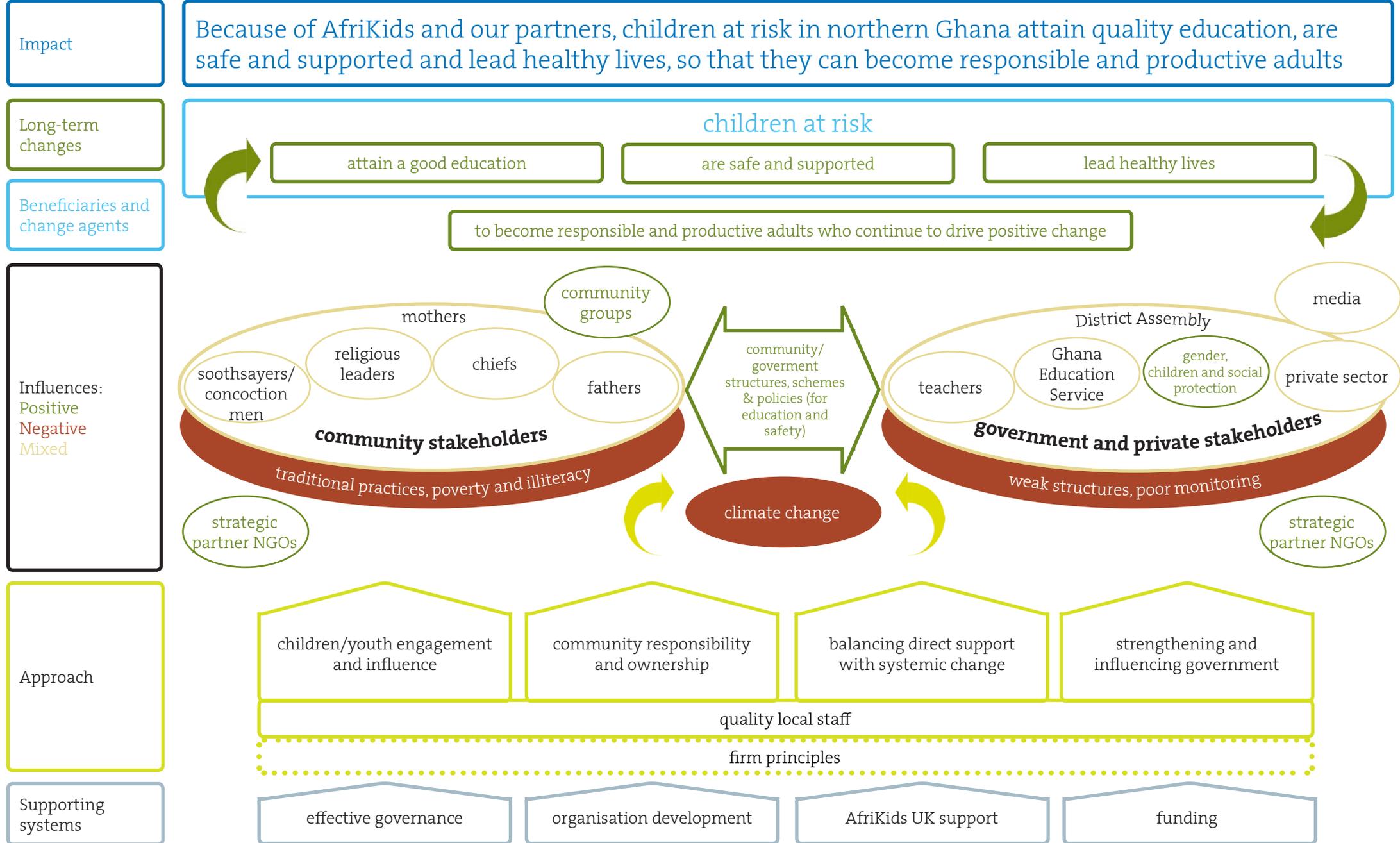
The third stage and climax of the process was a three-day Theory of Change workshop with AfriKids staff and leaders in Ghana. The consultant first visited some of the organisation's projects to acquaint herself with the work and history of the organisation. Workshop participants drew on their experiences, the documented learning and the findings from the consultation with beneficiaries to analyse and prioritise AfriKids' contribution to change. We summarised our analysis in a draft diagram, honed by a working group after the workshop and then in this narrative.

Representing our Theory of Change

Our Theory of Change diagram captures our core beliefs about how AfriKids contributes to change within a complex context where other influences play their part, both negatively and positively. We do not see change as a linear process but as a combination of factors and groups that help to bring about a desired impact. Our Theory of Change highlights the most important aspects amongst these and shows some of the linkages. It does not cover detailed strategies but provides a framework to agree and monitor these.

Our Theory of Change

The changes we want to see and how we can help make them



The changes we want to see

Impact

AfriKids' **vision** is

A prosperous and thriving world without poverty, where the rights of every child are valued, protected and met by all

and our **mission** towards this is

To ensure that every child in Ghana is afforded his/her rights as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to do this by building the capacity and resources of local people, organisations and initiatives to in such a way that they will be able to continue their efforts independently and sustainably in the future.

The **impact** statement in our Theory of Change defines this mission further, determining who we are trying to help, how and why:

Because of AfriKids and our partners, children at risk in northern Ghana attain quality education, are safe and supported and lead healthy lives, so that they can become responsible and productive adults.

We believe ensuring the protection, education and health of all children is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty for good, and so in turn, ensuring the protection, education and health of future generations sustainably.

These basic rights lay the foundations for all children to become productive adults who can provide for their families and responsible citizens who continue to value, protect and meet the rights of the next generation.

For the many children at risk in northern Ghana, these basic rights are not being met, which means children are needlessly suffering and opportunities to break the cycle of poverty here are being missed every day. This is why AfriKids is working with everyone it takes to ensure these building blocks of education, child protection and health are available to all children, whatever their start in life.

Long-term changes

Our impact statement refers to three long-term goals. In order to realise our desired impact, these must be achieved.

Children at risk:

- **Attain a good education**
Increasing access, retention and progression at all stages of education, and improving the quality of education services. A particular focus on attainment of a Basic Education for all, which includes Kindergarten, Primary and Junior High School levels and concludes with completion of the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) at the end of Junior High School.

This long-term goal underlies our Education Programme, which has the specific objective to *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote learning opportunities for children and young adults*

- **Are safe and supported**
Creating an environment that supports the safety and protection of all children, at home and in the community. A focus on tackling child labour and harmful traditional practices like the “Spirit Child Phenomenon” and child marriage, while supporting families and strengthening government and community systems to better protect *all* children and meet their rights.

This long-term goal underlies our Child Protection Programme, which has the specific objective to *Ensure all children are safe and supported*

- **Lead healthy lives**
Improving child health by increasing access to and quality of healthcare services affecting child development, including maternal health. This includes increasing understanding of health in the community and improving public healthcare systems and services, including specialist care for children with disabilities.

This long-term goal underlies our Health Programme, which has the specific objective to *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for child development*



Who we are trying to help

Beneficiaries and change-agents

While our work both directly and indirectly benefits people at all levels of society and across different communities, the priority is to support **children at risk**.

While the United Nations recognises a child up to 18 years of age, for the purpose of our work, AfriKids recognises children up to 21 years of age. This allows for the delayed or slower pace of development commonly experienced by children at risk in northern Ghana.

For the purpose of our work, **children at risk** are defined as:

- Children affected by harmful traditional beliefs and practices (including child, early and forced marriage and the “Spirit Child Phenomenon”)
- Children at risk of dropping out of school
- Children without a safe home or family support: motherless children, street and working children, children in worst forms of child labour, trafficked children, children migrating to the south to engage in menial jobs
- Children with disabilities
- Children living in abject poverty

While our work supports all children at risk, without discrimination, we also tackle issues specifically affecting women and girls, including advocating education for girls and preventing child marriage.



Factors that affect change happening

Influences

Contextual influences

Ghana is a highly polarised country, with 70% of people in the north living in poverty, compared with 11% in its southern capital, Accra. Across the northern regions, an unacceptable one in nine children die before their fifth birthday and many children still miss out on the basic education which could help them break their family's cycle of poverty.

The north has a largely savannah landscape with stark rainy and dry seasons. Most people rely on subsistence agriculture and there are relatively few natural resources that can be utilised in manufacturing or export industries. The region's infrastructure is patchy; many people have no access to clean water, electricity or roads. Schools and clinics are approaching universal coverage but the building is often rudimentary and there is not enough equipment and trained personnel. The region is largely stable with faiths peacefully co-existing.

More than half of all people across northern Ghana live on less than £1.18 per day, and there are few opportunities for them to change this. The few individuals that do get the chance to earn qualifications usually migrate south in search of work, so the north struggles to retain the skills that could stimulate the economic growth it needs. Significant investment is needed in infrastructure, though disparate communities with high rates of illiteracy put little pressure on the government to demand these changes.

Stakeholder influences

As an organisation, we understand that we operate in a very fragile environment where the task of ensuring the safety, education and health of all children is a complex and sensitive business - not least in ensuring any changes made to do this can be sustained. Many people, organisations and factors influence the success of our efforts to do just this:

- Government institutions, policies and policy execution;
- Family and community groups and their traditional beliefs and practices; and
- Non-government and private institutions.

Identifying and taking cognisance of these influences gives us the opportunity to maximise those factors that support our work, and manage those that have the potential to hinder it.

Our Theory of Change diagram highlights our key stakeholder groups: community and government and private institutions, and within those, the stakeholders that are most critical, i.e. have the most power to influence whether

changes can be made. It also shows the interface between these two groups (in essence the bridge between policy and systems designed for children and the realities they face at home and in their communities) which is a strategic point for our interventions.

The diagram shows those that already influence change positively in green and those that can have both positive or negative influences in blue. This highlights key stakeholders for AfriKids to invest time "converting to green". Some factors have a significant negative influence that AfriKids cannot directly impact, such as climate change, shown in red. These factors will be captured in organisation risk assessments and mitigation strategies put in place to limit their detrimental impact.

Changing the bigger picture - goals for systemic change

In order to create sustainable impact, AfriKids works to create systemic change too – improving the systems that relate to our goals and affect children's lives - namely the education, healthcare and child protection systems in northern Ghana. This gives our work wider and more permanent reach, benefitting many more children than direct support alone.

In the process of developing our Theory of Change, AfriKids identified some priority changes it wants to help bring to these systems. These sub-goals are not detailed in the summary diagram because of lack of space, but form the basis for activities aiming to create systemic change under each of our Programmes:

- **Improved educational quality:** better implementation of government and community mechanisms to support at-risk children; better government monitoring; more equipped teachers; and improved infrastructure.
- **Improved protective environment:** functioning community systems to protect and support children (child labour committees, Community Education Campaigners, etc.); and mothers, fathers and community providing guidance and support for children.
- **Improved quality of health care services:** Increased infrastructure and improved capacity of health workers to provide quality services.
- **Improved organisational skills and influence:** so AfriKids can contribute to this impact.

How we help make changes happen

Approach

The consultations, learning review and workshops that were held to develop this Theory of Change examined how AfriKids works and which aspects of its approach are most important and effective. The following components of AfriKids' approach were distilled from information gathered as the most essential and those that should be central to all of our Programme strategies.

Firm principles

Though AfriKids' work is varied and has evolved over the years, its principles have remained firm and run through all areas of the organisation and its work. The organisation has a number of defined principles, including on how we fundraise and communicate, but perhaps the most significant relating to our Programmes are three fundamental rules to our approach: to listen, empower and sustain. These principles under-gird everything our Programmes do. We do not assume we know, but listen and empower others to ensure that changes are sustainable and continue even after AfriKids exits.

Quality local staff

Underpinning our achievements is the fact that AfriKids is locally-led and embedded in the community with knowledgeable and dedicated local staff. Our work is successful because communities know that projects are not initiated by foreigners but based on strong relationships with staff that listen to and respect them, understand their values and practices and are responsive to local needs. This means that communities take more responsibility for their own development and the impact is therefore more sustainable.

Key methodologies

We have learned that the following four ways of working are most effective in achieving our goals and will be our main approaches going forward, providing a framework for Programme planning:

Building children and youth engagement and influence

- Equipping children with knowledge of their rights and responsibilities (particularly through our Child Rights Clubs).
- Involving children in planning, action, influencing government and monitoring.
- Ongoing counselling and monitoring.

Building community responsibility and ownership

- Involving community in identifying root causes of issues affecting child rights

- Sensitising them in culturally relevant ways (collaboration not confrontation)
- Strengthening existing groups and structures.

Balancing direct support with systemic change

- Filling in gaps in provision while working out longer-term solutions.
- Providing educational and livelihood support for the most in need
- Building strategic partnerships with government, the private sector and NGOs for better reach and sustainability.

Strengthening and influencing government

- Building the capacity of government staff and systems.
- Influencing district budgets to support desired systemic changes.
- Improving implementation of government policies and schemes.
- Increasing partnerships and cooperation between governments and the people they serve.

Supporting Systems

In order to be effective in our approach, we also need strong support systems:

- **Effective governance:** good leadership with strong transparency and accountability.
- **Organisation development:** A clear and measurable strategy; monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework and staff skills.
- **AfriKids UK support:** critical to international networking, communications and providing due diligence to international funders.
- **Funding:** A diverse income strategy to provide the most cost-effective and appropriate funding for our work, including:
 - Donations raised ethically in Ghana and where needed or more cost-effective, via AfriKids UK
 - Enterprises that help fulfil our programme objectives whilst also generating funds
 - Programmes seeking ways to fund their objectives without aid E.g. student loans instead of grants where possible, that can be recycled to help more students
 - Continuous investment and innovation in "alternative" fundraising (social investment, payment by results, direct funding, etc.).

Looking forward

This clear framework serves as a constant reminder of what we are ultimately trying to achieve and sets parameters for the programmes we develop and how we operate.

What we have learned

Much of our approach rests on strong evidence from our own experiences, our beneficiaries and communities and from external learning. The Theory of Change process has helped us better understand the importance of more systematically engaging children and young people in the process – something that has happened more intuitively until now.

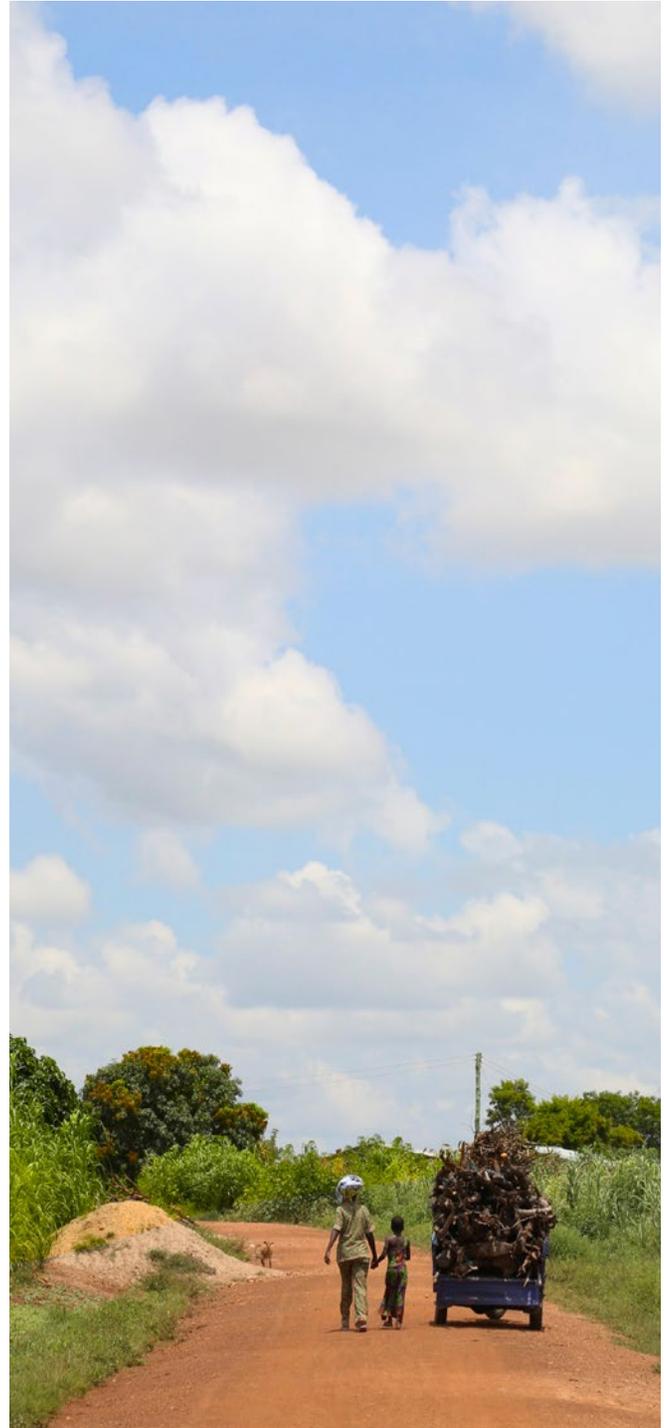
It has also shown us the need to intensify our work to influence government systems and policies in addition to building its staff capacity if we are to have greater reach and sustainability.

An outstanding question, however, is how we can most effectively balance direct support - particularly of livelihood and educational support - with systemic change interventions. While our direct support projects have brought valuable, sustainable changes to the lives of thousands of individuals, they are also costly and intensive - bigger changes to fewer lives when compared with the vast and longer-term reach of programmes that create systemic change.

Next steps

Continuing on from this project, we will explore this conflict carefully, to find the right balance between our duty of care to those most in need, and our professional responsibility to ensure value for money and commitment to tackling issues at the root (i.e. by making systemic changes) for sustainable development for all. Striking this balance between prevention and cure will enable us to help more people than ever without compromising the integrity or quality that are the cornerstones of our success.

This Theory of Change will be an essential tool in guiding our strategy and programme plans. Northern Ghana is an area with much need for support, and as a household name, AfriKids receives requests for support every day. This clear framework serves as a constant reminder of what we are ultimately trying to achieve; how we can ensure the safety, education and health of children at risk in northern Ghana. It also provides clear goals and parameters for the programmes we develop and how we operate, ensuring we remain focused, effective and can continue to measure our progress towards this aim.



For more information, please:
visit our website: www.afrikids.org
or contact us: info@afrikids.org

We would like to thank our consultant on this project, Cathy James (INTRAC), and all of the stakeholders that took part in this valuable process.