



Theory of Change
Bringing people together to fight poverty

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Theory of Change

VSO's *Theory of Change* explains our distinct contribution to development, drawn from over 50 years of experience.

There are numerous government and non-government organisations each playing their own part in the development process. The purpose of this paper is to explain the particular contribution that VSO makes, mindful of the complex factors that keep people living in poverty.

This *Theory of Change* lays out what it means to put people at the centre of development, and how bringing people together can achieve lasting change for the better. Our main resource is, and always has been, the people we work with, the people in our partner organisations, and the volunteers that support them. While our volunteering programme has become more complex and diverse, we remain an organisation that focuses on the contribution that people make to development.

What do we want to change?

Our vision is a world without poverty, where excluded and marginalised women and men have choices and opportunities to participate effectively in society, have enough to feed and clothe their families, have access to education and healthcare service, have land on which to grow food or a job to earn a living.

With this as our starting point, we believe that unequal and unjust power relations between people have to be addressed. For this to happen, poor and marginalised people must have access to quality essential services, be able to work to improve their lives and have access to information and ideas that link them to the wider world.

For VSO, putting people at the centre of development means recognising that it is individuals who can play crucial roles in initiating, promoting and facilitating change in organisations, in the provision of services and in changing policies.

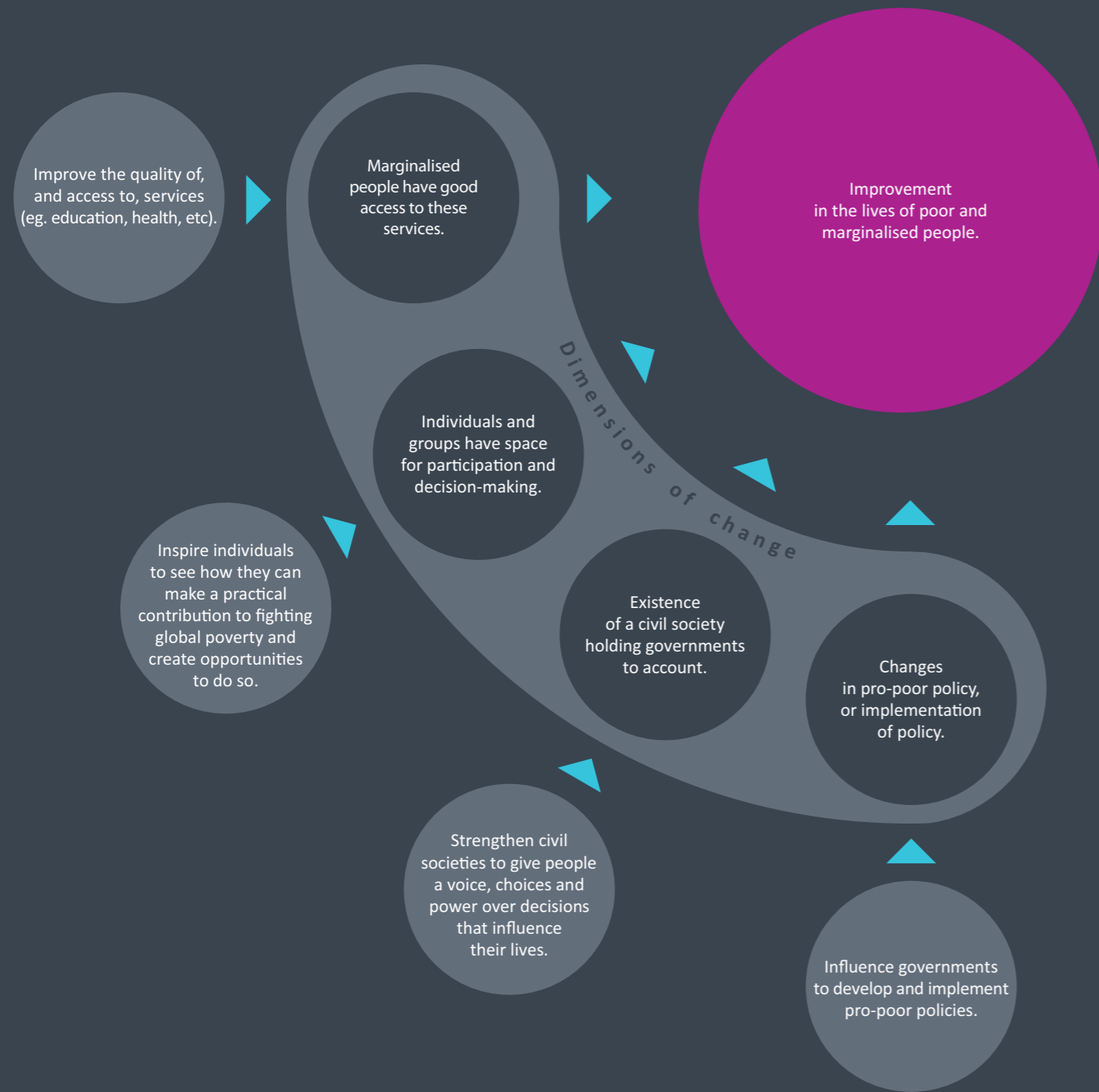
What can we change?

Our development experience has led us to focus on four main **dimensions of change**, conditions that are needed to enable poor and marginalised people's capabilities to be enhanced and their rights realised:

- Improving poor people's access to quality services
- Promoting the development and implementation of policies to support poor people
- Ensuring the participation of socially-excluded groups in determining their own path to development.
- Building organisational capacity to support these aims.

The dimensions of change are interrelated and success for any of our programmes will be defined as changes in one or more of these dimensions (see diagram on page two).

VSO's Theory of Change



How do we bring about change?

By building a global volunteering movement as a way to bring people together, we contribute to change at many levels.

- By improving the skills of one individual, we can increase the effectiveness of a local organisation.
- By changing a perspective to a problem, we can create a new approach to issues in a respectful way.
- By creating a lasting difference in the aspirations of an individual, we can, over a lifetime, help transform an entire community.

We work towards contributing to the dimensions of change, placing different focus and emphasis depending on the context.

The quality of services:

NGOs and governments provide relevant and inclusive services which meet poor people's declared needs, and which they play their part in shaping.

A key part of improving quality of poor people's lives – and sometimes the single most pressing priority – is that they should have access to quality services in health, education and other areas. In very poor countries where governments cannot yet provide basic services, VSO recruits international volunteers to deliver such services until institutional weaknesses are remedied. Volunteers also work alongside communities to help them articulate their priorities, build capacity of service-providing organisations, and link organisations so that they can learn from each other's experiences.

Strong civil societies:

Civil societies are stronger and more representative of poor and marginalised women and men.

We believe in the role of civil society to hold governments to account, and to deliver fair measures for all. We work with civil society organisations to challenge issues such as gender roles to bring about sustainable change to the face of poverty.

We build stronger links and networks between organisations – both within countries and on a global level – so that they can relate to and learn from each other. We work in partnership with organisations, supporting them to learn and realise their own development agenda. When organisations are better linked, strengthened and representative, the people within them and those they work for acquire more power over the decisions that affect their lives.

We work towards supporting a strong civil society that plays a vital role in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies. In short, we support the work of community organisations, social movements and governments to bring about lasting change.

Pro-poor policies:

Governments develop and implement pro-poor policies.

Changes in policy, or in implementation of policy are often necessary before people are able to access quality services. Where they have been developed with the meaningful participation of civil society and representatives of poor and marginalised people, strong pro-poor policies can challenge issues of exclusion and gender inequality and deliver major improvements in service delivery for poor people.

VSO's work on pro-poor policy addresses the structural causes of poverty and disadvantage. We support civil society to influence governments, as well as international bodies, to develop and implement pro-poor policy and practice. The strength of VSO's support to partners and poor people in demanding change is that the arguments are based on the direct experience of what is happening in poor communities.

"Every day people thank us... not for doing the work for them, but for giving them the opportunity to work themselves. But it goes both ways. I'm incredibly grateful for the chance to share my skills here and to learn."

Stephanie Stoker, volunteer, Peru

Creating opportunities to fight poverty

To build a fairer world, individuals need to be convinced that they can make a difference, and to act on that conviction. Enabling this to happen is right at the heart of VSO.

Internationally, we inspire people to see themselves as part of a global community, and to step out into that community to be part of the fight against poverty. In the South, volunteers from around the world may live and work alongside poor communities, or work in government ministries and other organisations that affect the lives of poor people. Bringing professional skills that are not readily available, they directly provide services that would otherwise be denied to poor communities and may pass on those skills to colleagues so that organisations become lastingly more effective. With humility and openness to learning themselves, international volunteers become powerful agents of social change by inspiring in people the confidence that they can change their world. Back in their own communities, international volunteers act differently and influence others to do likewise.

We believe communities can begin to change things for the better when ordinary people are motivated to step forward. Community level volunteering can provide poor people with opportunities for personal development and increase their voice in decision-making, thus increasing local level ownership of the development agenda. VSO supports the efforts of ordinary women and men who seek to transform their own communities and have the confidence to step forward to become active citizens who can shape their own development.

“I’m really proud of what the team achieved. We went from virtually nothing to having objectives, work plans, policies and budgets. But most importantly for me, by the time I left the change was being lead and driven by the staff – we’d got some real momentum going and it was being sustained.”

Martin Fawdry, volunteer, Nigeria

Theory of Change in action

By giving people an opportunity to volunteer within or outside their communities, VSO helps them become the drivers of change. They can be active citizens, able to share their own development. We bring people together to achieve lasting change in the following ways, we:

- Motivate people to contribute in the local or global community to fight poverty
- Understand organisations and work with them to progress towards their aims
- Recruit and supply people who can deliver essential services
- Bring knowledge to help those who decide on and implement policies
- Share learning and experience between people, organisations and governments.



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