



FXB's Development Approach: Foundational Values and Strategies

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François-Xavier Bagnoud (FXB) International was founded in 1989 by Countess Albina du Boisrouvray to honour and sustain the humanitarian passion and commitment of her only son, a helicopter pilot, who lost his life during a rescue mission in Mali. Active in over 18 countries around the world, **FXB aims to support vulnerable children by strengthening the capabilities of families and communities to realize children's rights to protection and care.**

Among the most powerless in society, children are highly vulnerable to the multi-pronged assaults of poverty on families and communities. Income insecurity, hunger, ill-health, marginalization, illiteracy, lack of sanitation and shelter, are causes and consequences of poverty that combine to ratchet families into a downward spiral of deprivation. Poverty experienced by children, even over short periods, can affect the rest of their lives. In worst cases, children die. If they live, malnutrition, insecurity and neglect in early childhood may lead to life-long consequences for health and cognition that compromise adult potential and productivity, and jeopardize the well-being of future generations.ⁱ Recognizing the critical importance of breaking this cycle, FXB focuses its energies on addressing the root causes of poverty as a means of securing children's rights to survive, grow, and develop.

Foundational Values of FXB

FXB is a pioneer of family and community-based programming that integrates health, economic development and human rights concerns into every aspect of its work. For over two decades, the FXB community-based model has been refined to its present cost-efficient structure involving three staff, and a vehicle serving 80 families. While a distinctive feature of the FXB model is its flexible approach to programme design, six fundamental values undergird the FXB development approach:

- 1) **Realizing child rights:** The most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), documents the civil, political, cultural, social and economic rights of children.ⁱⁱ Acknowledging the inherent vulnerability of children, it places special emphasis on the primary caring and protective responsibility of the family. Among its 54 articles is: the child's right to life, survival and development (Article 6); the right to a name, a family and national identity (Articles 7-8); protection from unjust separation from one's family including provisions for reunification (Articles 9-10); protection from abuse, neglect (Article 19) and exploitation (Articles 34-36); the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27), and the right to health, health services, and education (Articles 24-29).

FXB was formed to implement the articles of the Convention, initially targeting children orphaned and infected by HIV/AIDS, and then expanding to include families and children affected by multiple causes of vulnerability including conflict, poverty and disease. As specified by the Convention, a family focus was adopted given that families represent a fundamental unit of income generation, care, nurturance and affiliation, and the primary means through which children can access their rights. Building its development programmes around the family and community, FXB strives to provide an example of good governance for children: enhancing family and community capacity to realize children's rights to care and protection.

- 2) **The primacy of families:** FXB acknowledges the critical importance of functional families in promoting children's wellbeing. Beyond physical needs, all children require affection, protection and nurturing from stable caregivers who promote their social, cognitive and emotional development.ⁱⁱⁱ A firmly established body of research shows that supportive family environments are associated with higher rates of school attendance and better school performance; greater self-esteem, self-confidence and future orientation among children and youth; and a reduction in behaviour problems, among other benefits.^{iv} But children's basic material needs must be met in order for family care and affection to bear fruit. The cumulative effects of endemic poverty, food insecurity, and HIV/AIDS constrain the material capacities of family and community networks to provide children with the care that they need to develop, learn and thrive. FXB addresses these material constraints by enhancing family economic capacity, and by supporting family investment in children's development and education.
- 3) **Harnessing local expertise:** FXB recognizes the values, skills, and networks that define the communities in which they work. In early stages, FXB seeks to identify and harness these attributes, with the goal of building community ownership and social capital. By enlisting the community in the design and implementation of activities, and linking with other local organizations active in the vicinity, FXB ensures that its programmes respond to the real needs of families supporting children, and do not duplicate what is already provided. Programmatic activities take into account the particular cultural, political and economic context of those in need, and encourage the participation of those lacking voice or social status.
- 4) **Building capabilities:** FXB's programmes are designed to build family and community capabilities to realize the rights of children. First articulated by Nobel Laureate Professor Amartya Sen, the capabilities approach to development values people's functional capabilities to be healthy, and to engage in economic, social and political life.^v According to this approach, poverty is equated with capability-deprivation, and not just lack of income. The object of development, therefore, is not simply the achievement of a set of improved economic or social outcomes (income, social status, etc.), but rather the nurturing of capacities that make them achievable.

FXB's programmes engage families and communities in developing their capabilities as ends in themselves, and to achieve children's rights to protection and care. In addition to providing education and psychosocial support, specific efforts are devoted

to **strengthening family capacity for self-sufficiency**, such as the ability to generate income, and to plan and manage resources in order to meet the health, nutritional and educational needs of household members. At the community level, FXB works to support inclusive community networks with the values, skills and tools necessary to provide and advocate for the needs of children and other vulnerable members of society. Working simultaneously at family and community levels, and integrating concerns for health, education, economic development and human rights into every aspect of programming, FXB fosters synergies that strengthen and diversify family capabilities to ensure the well-being of children.

- 5) **Continuous learning:** As a learning organization, FXB actively seeks to question and refine its programmes based on evidence, and to critically examine its practice against the defining principles of rights, equity and social justice.
- 6) Finally, FXB makes the **restoration of human dignity** a central goal of its development approach (UN 1948).^{vi} Fundamental to dignity is the notion of control over one's environment and the self-esteem and social recognition that results when an individual, family or community is able to overcome hardship and build self-sufficiency. FXB nurtures the development of capabilities that are the basis of renewed dignity and wellbeing.

Key Strategies of FXB

Over 20 years of experience in impoverished communities in Africa and Asia have enabled FXB to adapt its approach to diverse and changing contexts. Particularly significant in FXB's evolution has been the move from a primary focus on the vulnerable child, to a family and community-based approach that aims to build collective capacities to provide, support and prevent future vulnerability.

Based on field experience, and informed by the fundamental values of child rights, and family and community empowerment, four key strategies define FXB's approach to programming:

Family and community engagement: By involving the poor and marginalized in analyzing and addressing the problems that affect them, FXB strengthens social relations, agency and self-determination.^{vii viii} Family and community engagement is also critical to programme success at every stage of implementation for without their involvement and ownership, both results and sustainability over the long term are undermined. At the same time, this strategy demands time, patience and commitment from all involved. Programme staff may need to adjust professional culture and priorities, and listen, learn and adapt, while beneficiaries must be ready to invest time and engage.

Central aspects of FXB's approach to family and community engagement^{ix} include:

- Learning from and building on previous or current activities, local expertise and experiences, and existing community networks and infrastructure.

- Identifying and providing the resources and training needed to help families and communities participate fully in FXB programmes and to advocate for services.
- Working with families and communities to assess their broad and specific needs, and in particular, the needs of their most vulnerable members.
- Developing context-specific strategies to engage marginalized groups, recognizing that certain vested interests may create barriers to participation.
- Jointly agreeing on how different individuals and groups can engage and contribute at different stages of FXB's programme cycle, and the commitment required from all parties.
- Informing citizens about plans and progress on issues of joint concern through existing community networks or forums.

Holistic yet specific: FXB has been a pioneer in the design of holistic family and community-based programmes that aim to support and protect children. Early field experience revealed that supporting vulnerable children requires a multifaceted response, but that this response must be geared to the specific needs of the families and communities on whom they depend. A first step in planning this response is a community assessment in which FXB staff, over 90% of whom are recruited locally, appraise community-level norms, power dynamics, networks, resources and services as they relate to vulnerable children and their families. The second step involves family assessments, whereby FXB social workers consider the needs and aspirations of every family in the community, and with them, develop a plan to enhance household capacity to provide and care for all of its members. This plan may involve ensuring that children's school fees are paid, that a household enterprise is supported, or that roofs are repaired.

Linkage and coordination: Given the holistic scope of the FXB model, coordination and linkage with other organizations, and government is critical. Indeed, in certain instances, specialist organizations involved with childhood nutrition, or micro-credit, are far better placed to provide quality services at scale to FXB supported families. In this context, the concept of "linkage" is central to strategy. When needed services are already available, FXB facilitates family or community access to these services, or advocates for their provision in the communities in which they are working. The linkage between client and services that is subsequently forged is independent of FXB, and will continue to secure the rights and needs of poor families over the long-term. FXB identifies, however, the need to keep duty bearers accountable. Especially in early stages, FXB is actively engaged in ensuring that client-service linkages are functional and that promised services are provided in a timely, coordinated manner, and meet acceptable standards of quality.

Time-limited and cost-efficient structure: Inherent in the design of the FXB model is its time-limited nature and lean administrative structure. Unlike a charity approach that requires sustained outside investment to continue, the FXB model has a three-year life span focused on building the social and entrepreneurial capacities of impoverished families and communities, and enabling them to become **empowered citizens in control of their own destinies**. The goal of self-sufficiency requires that families and communities acquire the capacities to support the rights and needs of children in their care, and that FXB's role be made redundant by the end of the three-year period. Rather than perpetuate itself in the communities in which it works, FXB seeks to move on and

initiate its model elsewhere. The lean administrative structure and financial costs of the FXB model facilitate this ambition of replication in other community and country contexts.

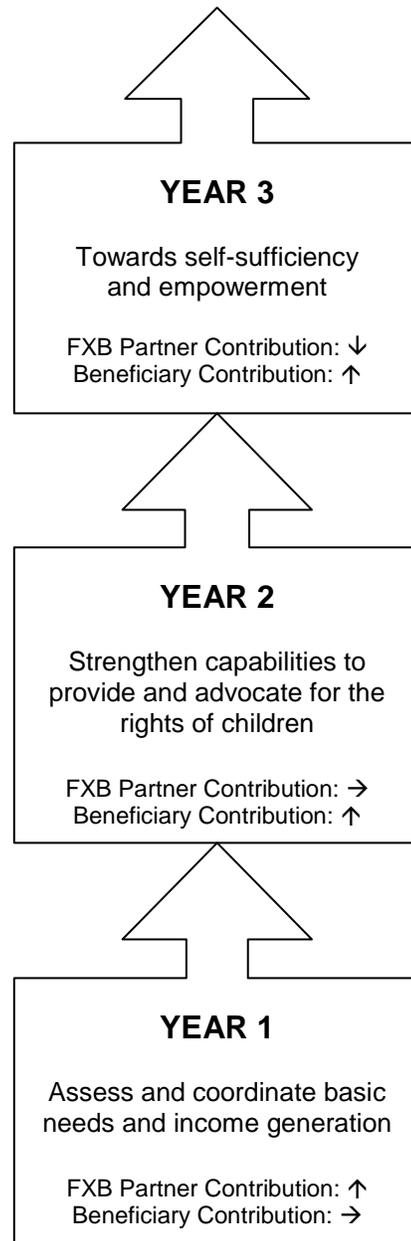
Phases of Work

Implementation of the FXB model involves five distinct phases of work that are pursued over a 3-year period (see Figure 1):

- 1) Assessment and analysis:** This initial phase involves mapping community level resources including government services, informal networks, and NGO interventions, and learning about their activities, plans and challenges. Through a process of community consultation, vulnerable households supporting children are identified. A series of home visits are organized in target households during which family members and staff assess and analyze household-specific constraints to ensuring the well-being of children in their care. Priority is given to issues requiring urgent attention i.e. nutritional support for a malnourished child.
- 2) Engagement:** FXB staff engages with families and communities in analyzing these constraints, and identifying a tailored set of activities that will set the household on a course towards self-sufficiency in providing for the material and social needs of children. Developed jointly, this family action plan identifies where needed services can be obtained, how income generation can be supported (skills training, in-kind grants etc.), and the roles and responsibilities that FXB, family, community and other service providers will assume. FXB assists families with small business start-up by providing in-kind support, small amounts of capital and other inputs, training, and on-going advice and supervision. Training and support is also provided around issues of savings, food security, child development and protection, HIV prevention, and health care.
- 3) Coordination and linkage:** FXB facilitates the provision of needed services to target households, by linking them to existing services administered by other local entities including government, religious groups and other NGOs.
- 4) Mobilization and advocacy:** FXB works with families and communities to set up systems for collective support, learning, planning and action around issues of health, children's rights and poverty alleviation.
- 5) Transition to self-sufficiency and empowerment:** Families and communities assume responsibility for the provision and protection of children in their care, and are enabled to independently advocate for their well-being. FXB helps families in securing sustainable income-generating activities and monitors progress through regular family visits. Beneficiary groups provide mutual support, and organize to access micro-credit and other needed services.

During the first years of the programme, FXB actively supports family and community efforts to analyze and address the root causes of poverty. Subsidies for education, health and nutrition are initially provided, however, FXB’s financial contributions decrease as income-generating activities expand, and families and communities are able to sustain these costs themselves. The aim of initial support for basic needs is to allow investment in long-term well-being through income generation, savings and capacity-building.

Figure 1.



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- ⁱ Grantham-McGregor S et al. (2007). Developmental potential in the first 5 years for children in developing countries. *Lancet*, 369 (9555): 60–70.
- ⁱⁱ United Nations (UN 1990). Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *The Convention on the Rights of the Child* <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Richter L, Foster G, Sherr L (2006). *Where the heart is: Meeting the psychosocial needs of young children in the context of HIV/AIDS*. The Hague, Netherlands, Bernard Van Leer Publications.
- ^{iv} Shonkoff JP, Phillips DA (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of child development*. Washington, DC, National Academy Press.
- ^v Sen A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press.
- ^{vi} United Nations (UN 1948). Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* <http://www.un.org/rights/50/decla.htm>
- ^{vii} Wallerstein N (2006). What is the evidence on effectiveness of empowerment to improve health? WHO Europe: Health Evidence Network.
- ^{viii} Yamin AE (2009). Suffering and powerlessness: the significance of promoting participation in rights-based approaches to health. *Health and Human Rights* Vol 11(1): 5-22.
- ^{ix} Popay J (2006) Community engagement to improve health: NICE public health guidance 9 www.nice.org.uk/PH009