

Sustainability in the Home Visiting Model

Findings from a multi-site ex-post study in Mongolia



2025



Introduction

Community-based volunteers are widely used in international development—supporting health, nutrition, WASH, and child protection efforts, among others. Organizations, including World Vision, view volunteer engagement as a pathway to strengthen community connection and ownership of activities, a means to overcome limited formal workforces, and a way to potentially sustain activities and results after a program ends.

In World Vision's Home Visiting (HV) model, trained volunteers, known as home visitors, support vulnerable children and families by strengthening parent-child relationships, nurturing spiritual well-being, preventing neglect or abuse, and linking households to social services. The model typically includes supervisors who coordinate and guide volunteers, along with a coordinating partner that provides operational oversight, by ensuring consistent and adequate

home visitor recruitment and training, monitoring operations, and managing relationships with referral partners.

With several HV programs in Mongolia recently concluded, these programs presented an opportunity to examine the sustainability of home-based models after program closure. This research asked whether HV programs and individual home visitors remained active, and what factors supported or hindered their continuation.

The findings aim to strengthen evidence-based lessons that may inform both World Vision and the broader development sector (including donors) in designing and funding home visiting programs and volunteer-led programs that are more resilient and sustainable over the long term.

Study Design

This study applied the Rogers and Coates (2015) sustainability framework, which highlights the need for motivation, capacity, resources, and, often, linkages in sustaining development activities and outcomes. Their work also identified the importance of early sustainability planning, gradual transitions to local handover partners, and local contextual factors (such as population-level shocks and stresses) for post-program sustainability. Guided by this framework, we examined the extent to which these factors were present in Mongolia's HV programs.

Data were collected in late 2024/early 2025 from a set of HV programs that had concluded their original funding between six months and five years earlier. In four of the programs, World Vision had coordinated the HV implementation from the outset. In the other program, five local partners led the HV implementation, each in their own distinct geographic area and receiving targeted technical assistance from World Vision. The selected HV programs varied in their geography (rural and urban), donor type (sponsorship and US government public grants), and program duration.

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A mixed-methods design combined:

- **73 qualitative key informant interviews** with current and former staff, government officials, partner organizations, and home visitors, exploring planning, implementation, and enablers and barriers to sustainability.
- **A structured phone survey with 235 current and former home visitors**, exploring motivations and volunteer experiences.

Survey sampling was limited to individuals with available phone numbers from World Vision's monitoring records. This is a common challenge in ex-post evaluations, as programs rarely anticipate follow-up years after closure.

Who were the home visitors?



Female



Married with children

42 Average Age
(range 23-83)

Varied Service Length

Program closure—not attrition—was the main reason volunteers stopped services after the program.

Findings

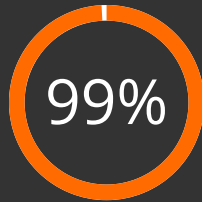
Overall Summary

Viewed through the Rogers & Coates framework, the Mongolia study shows that home visitors were strongly motivated and felt well prepared, but these strengths alone were insufficient to ensure program continuity (Rogers & Coates, 2015). Where implementing organizations had the motivation, capacity, and resources to continue, Home Visiting programs were sustained. Where they were absent, disrupted by external factors, or there was too little time to put them in place, home visiting was discontinued.

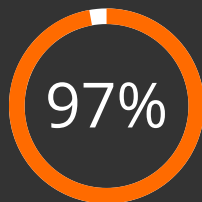


Rogers, B.L & Coates, J (2015). Sustaining Development: A Synthesis of Results from a Four-Country Study of Sustainability and Exit Strategies among Development Food Assistance Projects. Washington, DC: FHI 360/Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project (FANTA).

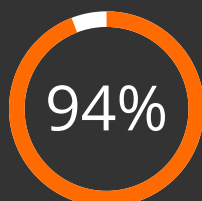
Fast Facts



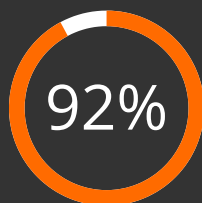
felt it was important to help others



believed they were meeting a community need



described volunteering as a “feel-good experience”



said “you receive what you give to the world”

Finding 1: Home Visitor Motivations

Survey results show that Mongolia’s home visitors were primarily motivated by deeply held values and the desire to help others. Nearly all respondents agreed that it was important to help others (99%), that they were meeting a community need through their volunteer role (97%), and that they felt concerned for those less fortunate (91%). Reciprocity was also a strong theme: 92% believed that “you receive what you give to the world.” In addition, 94% said volunteering was a “feel-good experience.”

Other motivations mattered to smaller proportions. About one in four home visitors mentioned recognition or appreciation as important, while 41% said they volunteered because they themselves had faced difficulties.

“This experience made me feel proud and fulfilled because I could see that my efforts were making a difference, even in small ways. It reassured me that listening, being patient, and offering support could truly help families take positive steps.” –
Home Visitor

Finding 2: Home Visitor Capacities

Technical & Managerial

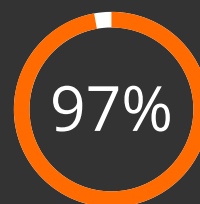
Survey results highlight that Mongolia's home visitors had strong technical preparation and support during program implementation. Nearly all respondents (97%) felt well prepared by training, and 99% reported having the skills needed to fulfill their responsibilities. Supervisory support was also strong: almost all received guidance and advice, and most felt appreciated by the program.

Relationships with families were a particular strength. Nearly all home visitors said the children and families they worked with respected, trusted, and followed their advice. Many also noted positive peer support networks among home visitors, reinforcing confidence in their work.

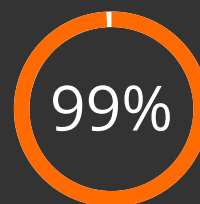
Despite this strong capacity base, emotional strain was common while carrying out home visiting. More than 80% at times felt helpless when unable to meet material needs or solve all family problems, and 40% reported feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities—though this was not due to excessive hours, because most served fewer than eight hours weekly.

Home visitors felt sufficiently skilled and trusted, although emotionally strained.

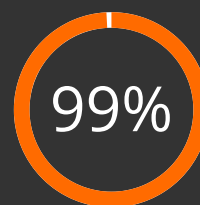
How did home visitors rate their capacities?



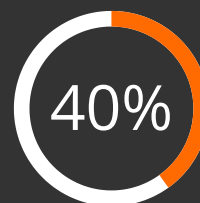
Felt well prepared



Felt sufficiently skilled to serve as HV



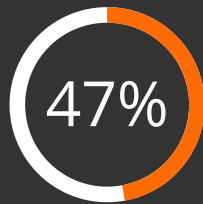
Felt trusted by families



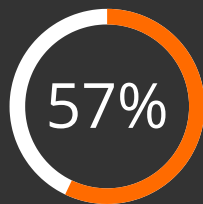
Felt overwhelmed at times

Fast Facts

Did home visitors have sufficient resources and linkages?



Received material support when requested



Travel distance made visits difficult



Felt unsafe at times during visits



Lacked opportunity to debrief difficult cases

Finding 3: Home Visitor Resources

While home visitors were skilled and motivated, resource gaps posed challenges, contributing to attrition in some cases. Only 47% said supervisors helped home visitors secure needed material support to carry out their work. For example, in qualitative interviews, home visitors described how limited office supplies affected their ability to keep detailed case notes.

Travel was a particular challenge for home visitors. Over half (57%) said distance made home visits difficult. About half felt unsafe at times—commonly due to aggressive dogs encountered en route. Home visitors expressed frustration about the lack of resources to secure safe, reliable transportation for their home visits.

About one in five reported inadequate opportunities to debrief difficult cases. In qualitative interviews, home visitors described a lack of broader community resources available to meet the needs of children and families experiencing deep poverty or in need of social service referrals. However, home visitors almost universally (96%) said they were well connected to other home visit volunteers, in case they needed their advice, ideas, or support.

Finding 4: How is home visiting sustained?

Linkages and early sustainability planning)

At five of the seven sites examined in Mongolia, home visiting ceased when the program funding was discontinued. Program closure was the single most important factor that affected home visitor retention.

The two sites that continued implementing home visits successfully transitioned to strong handover partners with the motivation, capacity, and resources to sustain it.

At sites that closed, sustainability planning often began too late. Many limited stakeholders reported that they were not informed about exit or transition plans until the very end, limiting their opportunities to prepare for transition. When handover partners were identified, they did not always have the motivation, capacity, or resources needed to continue home visit activities, nor sufficient time to build or link to necessary sources of motivation, capacity, or resources.

By contrast, in the two successful sites, sustainability planning began years in advance. Local Departments of Education took ownership, embedding home visits into teachers' formal responsibilities.

These institutions shared a common motivation with the home visiting program (positive outcomes for children), had the technical and operational capacity to train and coordinate teachers as home visitors, and were able to allocate the required budget to support program coordination.

Initially designed to be carried out by community volunteers, in both instances where home visiting was continued post-program, home visiting responsibilities were incorporated into the roles of salaried schoolteachers. This was not an indictment of the volunteer model, but rather a conscientious decision by organizations with the motivation, capacity, and resources to sustain oversight of the program within the structure of their existing organizations. While a practical solution, it also posed some risks. Adding home visits on top of full-time teaching duties created workload strain that program stakeholders acknowledged could affect teacher retention.

Fast Facts

2 out of 7 sites
Sustained home visits through government handover

5 out of 7 sites
Saw volunteer mechanisms end with funding

Both of these sites shifted away from volunteers

Lessons Beyond Mongolia

While these findings are rooted in Mongolia's context, the lessons extend well beyond. Many WV programs worldwide rely on community volunteers as a pathway to sustainability. This study reinforces that volunteers can bring strong motivation and capacity to home visiting. But sustaining a volunteer-based approach requires more than volunteers. Effective coordination and management of home visiting require planning, resources, and committed partners. Importantly, home visiting can be sustained even when volunteerism is not the primary model. Programs thrive when motivation, capacity, resources, and linkages are intentionally cultivated, regardless of staffing structure.

Overall, the findings align with broader evidence, indicating that sustainability depends on motivation, capacity, resources, and linkages. When these elements come together, programs endure and even evolve to meet community needs.

Motivation, capacity, and resources are important considerations for home visitor retention and functioning, too. Programs should be responsive to the specific experience and needs of their home visitors.

Recommendations

For Donors

- Require and review sustainability plans from the start, not at the end.
- Monitor progress against sustainability plans throughout implementation.
- Provide guidance and resources that set realistic expectations for sustainability and transition.

For Implementers

- Plan for sustainability early, ensuring that there is a sustainable source of motivation, capacity, and resources to carry activities forward.
- As needed, identify and work with handover partners early, monitoring the success of the transition to ensure adequate motivation, capacity, and resources.
- Support home visitors with ongoing training, peer support, and essential resources (emotional, material, transport).
- Strengthen volunteer networks and referral systems to reinforce motivation and capacity during implementation
- Adapt programs to local challenges (e.g., safety, case load, community needs).

For Handover Partners (e.g., government, local organizations)

- Secure budgets for coordination and home visitor resources and support.
- Build organizational systems to manage turnover and sustain home visitor motivation.
- Integrate activity elements into existing structures where possible.

This technical brief was produced by the WVUS Evidence and Learning team. Original authors: Matthew Stephens (Senior Technical Advisor – Child Protection) and Bridget Lavin (Independent Consultant). Technical reviews: Holta Trandafili (Director, Research, Learning, and Analytics) and Ila Casselberry (Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation Specialist).

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