Coaches Across Continents’ Theory of Change

“Learn from the people
Plan with the people
Begin with what they have
Build on what they know”

Lao-Tzu
Coaches Across Continents is a global leader in the sport for social impact movement. Our award-winning corporate partnerships and ‘Hat-Trick Initiative’ consist of comprehensive, year-round organizational development and sport for social impact education that focuses on local issues such as: female empowerment, including gender equity; conflict prevention, including social inclusion; health and wellness, including HIV/AIDS behavior change; child rights; vital life skills; and fun. Our key to success is a unique Self-Directed Learning model that is based on our 'Chance to Choice' and ‘ASK for Choice’ curricula that educate people to identify, address, and solve problems specific to their communities. We mentor organizations and empower communities to question harmful traditional, cultural, and religious practices; responsibly choose their own futures; and create sustainable change. Since 2008, we have worked in 37 countries with 304 implementing community partner programs. Overall, we have educated and certified 14,221 community coaches and directly impacted 1,939,316 young people.
The Predominant Theory of Change

The predominant approach to change in developing countries is typically top-down, outside in, and deficit based.

In the case of NGOs this frequently manifests itself in a “west knows best” approach, by which foreign experts identify what they perceive to be local community issues. Externally determined solutions are then presented to local recipients with the expectation that they will be accepted and long term change will result. The change process is thus based on primary ownership by outsiders who analyse the situation based upon their perspectives, issues external directives and seek to change local communities without input from the community itself.

This model has significant weaknesses:

• Foreign ‘experts’, from their ‘outsider’ position, cannot fully understand the complex traditional, religious, cultural and social norms that permeate community beliefs, behaviors and expectations. Consequently any externally based analysis of required changes is fundamentally flawed.

• As a result, problems (symptoms) are addressed, rather than root causes being considered. Root causes are invariably culturally based and include tradition alongside religious beliefs and practices.

• Resistance to the change within communities may arise because the change initiatives have been instigated by outsiders and there is no local ownership.

• The process deskills local communities and reinforces their sense of ‘learned helplessness’. Local communities are directed to externally determined actions rather than engaged in local problem solving. They do not learn the thinking skills required to identify, analyze and solve their own problems. They merely learn how to follow directives.

• The lack of insider insight and community ownership is counter productive to sustainability.
Conversely the guiding principles of Coaches Across Continents’ theory of change are that it should be **bottom up, inside out and based on building community capacity**. Change is fostered from within by empowering local partners to question previously taken for granted cultural certainties, challenge damaging local traditions and make responsible choices for their future. The Coaches Across Continents curriculum uses sport to educate for a changing world. It is structured to create self directed learners who have the capacity to identify, analyze and address local concerns and to see the world in a fundamentally different way. Social impact is ongoing. Changes are sustainable.

This model has significant strengths:

- Local partners have an informed ‘insider’ perspective on their community and bring deep understanding of the root causes of complex issues within their societies.

- Change initiatives originating from within communities are more likely to be owned by those involved and affected. There is local commitment to newly launched initiatives.

- The skills of Self-Directed Learning are highly relevant and applicable in and for a rapidly changing world.

- ‘Insider initiated change’ is understood by those involved in it. Furthermore, participants, having been designers of their change process, have the skills to address any unanticipated outcomes.

- Insider insight and community ownership lead to increased sustainability.
Coaches Across Continents’ Change Model

As indicated earlier, CAC’s policy for change is based upon insider insight, community ownership and sustainability. In addition, CAC’s change policy follows a strategic pathway and is systematic and structured.

1. **Needs Assessment.** Community organisations complete a comprehensive application questionnaire when requesting a partnership with CAC. Partner selection requires a positive attitude from prospective partners. To be selected, they must demonstrate that they are beginning to question previously taken for granted cultural certainties and are seeking alternative solutions to their status quo in order to bring about the desired beneficial social change.

2. **Self-Directed Learning.** The CAC curriculum and games are used to empower partners to move from ‘learned helplessness’ to ‘self organized learning’ and subsequently to ‘Self-Directed Learning.’ This educational process develops inquiry and problem solving skills, emphasizes collaborative and cooperative learning and leads to solution-building.

3. **Community Insight and Ownership.** Through on the field games, local partners are supported to examine their community thoughtfully and to consider these facts alongside international cultural practices. The capacity to see with fresh eyes and to look at things as if they could be otherwise is key to community based change. Acquiring factual information leads to ‘evidence-based’ decision making instead of relying on traditional answers or beliefs.

4. **Design, develop and implement.** When local partners have developed Self-Directed Learning skills, they can be instrumental in identifying local issues of concern, competent in analyzing the situation, have the capacity to choose between possible solutions and the motivation to put their plans into action. They redefine their societies through the introduction of positive cultural practices which establish new cultural norms.
Coaches Across Continents’ Change Model Is Thus:

- **‘Bottom up’** as it is based on community inquiry. The community challenges cultural certainties, takes ownership of the problem and embarks on a quest for change.

- **‘Inside out’** as potential solutions are identified within the community, which then takes action.

- **‘Learning driven’,** as changes, when implemented, contribute to the evolution of the culture and a change in behaviors and beliefs.

- **‘Based upon transferable skills’,** in that Self-Directed Learning, founded on ‘problem solving’ and ‘solution driven’ skill sets, is generic and applicable to other situations and issues.

- **‘Empowering’** in the widest sense, in that communities develop the capacity to address any issue and choose their own future.

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**Summary**

Traditional change models deskill communities whilst offering cosmetic changes. Coaches Across Continents’ change model empowers and provides communities with the skills to be architects of their own future. It opens communities up to ongoing possibility.

“When the task is accomplished
The people all remark
we have done it ourselves.”

Lao-tzu
Thank you for taking the time to read about Coaches Across Continents’ Theory of Change.

Please get in touch with judith@coachesacrosscontinents.org to find out more about Coaches Across Continents’ Theory of Change.

To find out more about Coaches Across Continents please visit:

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