

Valid until end 2005

1. Introduction

Save the Children Norway's strategy for 2002-2005 states,

Local partners shall have the primary responsibility for implementing initiatives. Save the Children Norway shall emphasise the strengthening of local capacity to promote children's rights.

"Strengthening local capacity" takes the working principle "partner cooperation" in the previous strategic period 1998-2001, a step further. It includes "partner cooperation", but extends to a range of activities apart from work organised by partner agreements.

The principle reflects the general admittance that international NGOs can provide only limited contributions to the humanitarian challenges of our times. Sustained impact can only be achieved when national and local government and local people take responsibility for their own future. This working principle is about how SC Norway can contribute to such empowerment processes.

Thus the term "local capacity" entails the understanding, competencies and operational capacities of actors within civil society, in the private business sector as well as national and local authorities.

2. Experiences and challenges

Experiences have proved that SC Norway should work with local and national civil society organizations as well as with the governments to achieve positive and sustainable impact for children. Children and their parents shall be empowered to claim their rights. The principle encompasses a perspective beyond "strengthening the civil society" commonly described as the intended positive impact of North-South partner cooperation. SC Norway aims to contribute to strengthen the whole national and local capacity, not only civil society.

An often overlooked aspect of rights-based cooperation is the paradox that the rights based perspective broadens the concept of the beneficiaries, but narrows the range of potential partner organisations and institutions.

The rights-based approach broadens and changes the traditional reductionistic concept of the child as a recipient to a holistic concept of the child as a citizen with human rights and dignity. But by this the range of potential partner organisations to collaborate with, is limited to those that at least partly share the rights-based approach.

The rights-based perspective often also adds a provocative dimension to humanitarian and solidarity work. Whilst charity work and emergency operations generally are based on external capacities providing precarious necessities from the outside, and development work is about providing services and influencing national priorities, rights based work challenges deeply rooted cultural conceptions of what we are entitled to as individual human beings. Partnership with children and their organizations is therefore still being debated.

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The acknowledgement of the idea that human beings, and even more so that children have individual rights, run contrary to cultural traditions and social norms in a number of societies and communities, in rich as well as in poor countries, both in the south and in the north. In many societies humans are only valued as members of their respective groups, and children in particular are considered the properties of their parents.

3. Implementation

Strengthening local capacity to implement the rights of the child, involves mutual learning processes between SC Norway and its partners, and between partners. It covers a wide range of capacity-building activities and initiatives. It is being carried out in many different ways, with or without partners, with or without formal agreements, with or without economic support, as part of or separate from defined projects, and often in informal ways.

Formalised partner cooperation is still a key component. SC Norway's portfolio of partners contains government agencies, particularly ministries of education, and health and social welfare institutions including bodies of child authority, NGOs and in some cases actors from the business sector. SC Norway considers this mix of public and civil society partners a strength. The importance of sustained impact requires commitment from the authorities combined with critical monitoring by civil society who can hold public authorities accountable.

Cooperation with partners on capacity building is a key element in the work to strengthen local capacity. It aims to enhance the partner's own capacity to carry out direct practical services for the benefit of children, and to advocate for children's rights in their countries. The two aspects are usually closely intertwined, as the partner's credibility as an advocate builds on its reputation as service provider. When cooperating with partners on capacity building, it is important to ensure that the core values and vision of the organisations are respected.

When entering into a partner cooperation the following principles should be observed:

- *Shared vision and values*
Save the Children Norway shall engage in cooperation on the basis of a shared commitment to the best interest and the rights of the child. Cooperation shall be based on equity, mutual respect and understanding between the parties.
- *Common goals*
Cooperation shall be based on common goals in the short and long term. The short-term goals must be clearly defined and attainable, thus making it possible to determine whether the goals have been achieved and the cooperation completed. A distinction should be made between the goals of the jointly implemented activities and the cooperation itself.
- *Mutual learning and recognition*
Cooperation shall be based on mutual learning and the recognition of the distinctive competence of the parties. When entering into cooperation, the role and tasks of each party in the relationship must be agreed upon. Cooperation does not require unanimity in all matters, but it does require respect for each other's opinions.

Save the Children Norway's and the partner's participation in joint activities should be clearly visible in all communication, both internally and externally.

- *Flexibility and local adjustment*
Differences between partners and variations in local circumstances and cultural, social, political and economic contexts require differentiated approaches to cooperation. Save the Children Norway shall respect local cultures and demonstrate flexibility, but shall do so without renouncing any of its basic values and principles.
- *Long-term perspective*
The parties must be given sufficient time to appraise possibilities and preconditions before signing an agreement. Cooperation shall lead to mutual empowerment and demands continuous building of relationships. Save the Children Norway shall contribute to the establishment of forums for discussing and developing relationships among partners.
- *Transparency and trust*
Cooperation entails mutual obligations and shall be based on mutual transparency and trust. The parties shall demonstrate transparency in all aspects of their work and provide detailed information on their intentions, aims and activities. The parties must ensure open information on the use of resources and the achievement of results and impact.
- *Donor coordination*
Save the Children Norway will often be one of several donor organisations cooperating with the same partner. Save the Children Norway shall in such cases contribute towards the coordination of support and the terms of cooperation among the different partners.
- *Party-political neutrality*
Special interest organisations as well as national and local authorities are relevant Save the Children Norway partners, but such cooperation shall not be in conflict with the principle of party-political neutrality.

Another important area is competence - and capacity building of key professional groups like lawyers, health personnel, teachers, police, the army and politicians. This work is often carried out without formalised long-term partner agreements.

The role of SC Norway in cooperation on capacity building differs greatly between and within countries. This is not only because of the various thematic issues being addressed, but also because of different levels of organisational maturity. Major areas of capacity building are information and awareness-raising on the UN convention on the Rights of the Child, professional training in various thematic areas, knowledge on the implementation of country objectives and training in administration, management, accounting and human resource development.

A third target area is networking and alliance building within and between key societal sectors like political circles, civil society, NGOs and business communities. Experience shows that when different actors lobby together, it is far more effective than when each organisation lobbies independently.

Policy on strengthening local capacity

Strengthening local capacity also takes place through strengthening Save the Children's own presence in the countries where the International Save the Children Alliance is working. During this strategy period SC Norway will focus on the support of national SC organisations and on the consolidation processes in Nepal, Uganda, Sri Lanka and Papua New Guinea.
