



# Child Rights and Civil Society

The goal of Save the Children Sweden's Civil Society thematic programme is that civil society becomes an active change agent for fulfilling, promoting and protecting child rights.

## OUR PROGRAMMES

### 1 Promoting rights based programming in civil society organisations

Save the Children Sweden uses a Child Rights Programming (CRP) approach, which puts children at the centre of all programming. CRP acknowledges children as rights holders and engages children as actors in their own development. It recognises governments as the main duty-bearers in fulfilling children's rights, and promotes accountability to their citizens. Being 'rights based' we support civil society organisations that pursue advocacy work to make duty bearers accountable, proactive in ensuring child rights and transparent in policy and law making processes. This programme brings together lessons from country level for greater regional impact and is a cross-cutting theme for all programmes.

### 2 Religious leaders and children's rights

Religious and faith based organisations are critical in forming public opinion and thus their involvement in child rights issues is important. This programme increases cooperation with religious leaders and gathers lessons learned to strengthen the child rights agenda. By involving religious leaders we aim to demonstrate that there is not a contradiction between the concepts of the UNCRC and religious values. We have seen the positive impact of this from our work in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. All religions and religious leaders relate to, and have something to say about children. As religion plays an important role in South Asian society, it is crucial to engage with religious leaders to identify common grounds for our work.

### 3 Budget analysis from a children's rights perspective

When looking at children's rights and planning, programming and doing advocacy, it is important to understand how children's issues are prioritised in financial terms. The State and local budgets reflect how decision-makers prioritise. Poor allocation of funds to sectors like health, education and child protection has a serious impact on the realisation of children's rights. This programme facilitates comparative analysis of country budgets and together with local stakeholders agrees on recommendations. The regional office will facilitate and coordinate budget studies at country level, reflect on these from a regional perspective and share experiences and learning between countries.

### 4 Civil society involvement in emergencies

Emergency situations are common throughout the region. Many organisations lack the capacity to continue working in such environments. Whenever an emergency occurs, children's security, protection and development are more at risk. During emergency situations we try to improve the physical and psychosocial conditions of those particularly at risk, with no or little access to civil and social rights. The purpose of this programme is to actively engage with and ensure that civil society is involved in developing and implementing contingency plans together with authorities in emergency situations that ensure and protect child rights.

### 5 Children's rights in higher education

Acceptance of the importance of child rights depends on how social institutions accept and internalise the concept. Academia is one such social institution that can play a valuable role in the realisation of child rights. Academia helps to develop a discourse that creates dialogue in society. This programme aims to formalise children's rights in academia, create a pool of professionals conversant in children's rights discourse and develop centres of excellence in children's rights. Professionals working with children play an important role in implementing and advocating for children's rights. We have partnered with universities in Bangladesh, India and Nepal. This project will be strengthened and broadened to Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

### 6 Strengthening UNCRC reporting

Every state that has ratified the UNCRC is required to report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on how it is fulfilling its obligations. A report is submitted by the State party two years after it has ratified the UNCRC and progress reports are required every five years. An accompanying alternative report can be submitted by civil society actors and is imperative for continuous UNCRC monitoring. This programme offers coalitions of local NGOs technical support to improve their ability to monitor the reporting process. The information gathered and concluding remarks from the UNCRC committee is used for lobbying stakeholders at national and regional level. This reporting mechanism is crucial in promoting State accountability.



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# Child Rights and Civil Society in South and Central Asia

**South and Central Asia is home to nearly 700 million children.**

Civil society has an important role to play in ensuring all children have access to the rights guaranteed to them in the UNCRC.

Working to realise children's rights is at the heart of Save the Children's mission. Save the Children Sweden bases its work on the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which guarantees basic standards and sets minimum entitlements and freedoms that should be respected and protected by governments. These rights are founded on respect for the dignity and worth of each child, regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religion, opinions, origins, wealth, birth status or ability. The government has a duty to protect and ensure these rights, but civil society has a role to play in demanding and defending children's rights.

Civil society is understood as the space between the private sphere, the private sector and the State. A commonly used definition is that civil society is a group of people joining together for a common objective. It includes non-governmental organisations, community based organisations, professional associations, churches, trade unions, academia, the media etc.

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The goal of a child rights based civil society is to influence state structures at central or local level to implement the UNCRC. This can be done by examining how the State exercises power, checking and making public potential abuses (including non-action),. It can also be done by highlighting a problem and developing new models to address it.

Child rights based organisations mobilise people and provide channels for public participation, other than the channels provided by political parties and general elections. This is especially important for groups with specific interests and for groups that are otherwise excluded from accessing power, including children and youth.

South Asia has a vibrant civil society, however it is still challenging to advocate to the government for the high level changes necessary. It is also important for organisations to have a greater understanding of UN conventions or other human rights instruments. Without this understanding the impact of public advocacy campaigns and the ability to influence duty bearers is limited. Generally, civil society organisations do not have the technical expertise or resources to analyse National Budgets. This is important for developing relevant programmes and advocacy work.

Most of the countries in South and Central Asia are grappling with conflict, political instability, communal, ethnic and political violence, natural disasters and traditional social systems which impede the realization of child rights. When States do not respond to these complex situations or lack substantial capacity to respond to child rights issues, civil society has an important role to play in complementing the government to make child rights in South and Central Asia a reality.



## UNCRC and Civil Society

Article 45 of UNCRC provides space and opportunity for civil society organisations to offer expert advice and comment on the progress of UNCRC in the respective country. The process of civil society reporting is also known as shadow reporting or alternate reporting. It is thus necessary for civil society organisations to understand state commitments on the UNCRC and monitor on regular basis.

UNCRC monitoring by civil society is not restricted to only finding gaps in state commitments, but it works to complement state efforts and raise mutual accountability towards children of the nation and the country's global commitments.

The key components of Child Rights Programming such as accountability, sharing knowledge, partnerships, networking and participation of children, are at the centre of the thematic area of Civil Society and Child Rights Agenda in Save the Children Sweden



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