



Networking for
Children's
Rights

A Guide for NGOs

NGO Group for the Convention on
the Rights of the Child

PREFACE

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and has been ratified by 191 countries- every member country within the UN with the exception of the USA and Somalia. Its principles and standards have achieved near universal recognition throughout the world. Nevertheless, there is a huge gap between formal ratification and effective implementation. The primary responsibility for the realization of the CRC rests with the governments. Few governments, however, have yet taken their obligations seriously. NGOs have an important role to play in contributing to encouraging governments to give priority to the rights of the child and to fulfilling their commitments.

In many countries, national child rights coalitions have been formed, many of which are active in the implementation and monitoring of the CRC both at international and national levels. They have gathered a considerable amount of experience on how to work in coalitions as well as on activities that can be carried out.

This guide was initiated by the Task Force on National Coalitions of the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and has been written in cooperation with the NGO Liaison Unit in Geneva. It is meant to be a practical tool for helping NGOs forming and sustaining child rights coalitions. It contains ideas on how to promote coalition building, methods of child rights advocacy and examples of how NGOs could use the monitoring mechanisms, particularly the reporting process to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

We hope that this guide will be useful both for those wanting to form coalitions and those already involved in coalition work.

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INTRODUCTION

Gerison, a children rights activist, commenting on the work of national child rights coalitions, notes it is ‘overwhelmingly vast! The job seems hugely defeating before you actually start. But coalitions need hope.’

This is the purpose of this guide to national coalitions and other NGOs working on children rights – to enable coalitions become more effective advocates for children’s rights. The guide offers suggestions and ideas to help national coalitions and others that share an interest in children rights to move forward. In doing so it demonstrates how the Convention on the Rights of the Child is an essential tool in advocating for children’s rights. For countries without coalitions it is meant to inspire non-government organisations (NGOs) to form them and, in those that have them, to share experiences on how to work more effectively. The guide is the ‘brainchild’ of the Task Force on National Coalitions, a subgroup of the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The NGO Group for the CRC is a network of international NGOs committed to supporting the sustainment and active work of children’s rights coalitions in the implementation of the Convention. To date, the Convention is by far the most recognised international human rights treaty, having been ratified by all states except two since it came into force in 1990.

Prior to the Convention coming into force, the international NGO community played a constructive role in the drafting process. Some argue that it was this contribution that was responsible for the Convention recognising the important role of NGOs in monitoring its implementation. Article 45a of the Convention states:

‘The Committee may invite the specialised agencies, the United Nations Children’s Fund and other competent bodies as it may consider appropriate to provide expert advice on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their respective mandate.’

This article represents an important gateway for NGOs concerned with the rights of children to become proactive in encouraging implementation. The reporting process to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the treaty body mandated to monitor implementation of the Convention, has been a significant stimulant to NGOs in joining forces to participate in the reporting process. A former member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child said in reference to national coalitions –

‘(They) constitute another important monitoring mechanism in this field. They mobilise a strong social movement around children, promote advocacy for their rights, encourage children’s participation and inculcate in each and every individual and group the sense of being a child’s right defender. Moreover, they can decisively influence Government’s action, as monitors of their action and as a partner in the realisation of children’s rights.’ (1) (Marta Santos Pais –

Florence 1996)

But what do we know of national child rights coalitions? For a start, such bodies take wide variety of forms in terms of structure, membership/participants and methods of work. There is no standard model. However there are some common features, such as:

- Coalitions have generally emerged in response to the need for an ‘Alternative Report’ to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child offering a different perspective on the state of children rights to that given by the government. Following this initial activity, many grapple with the challenge of maintaining a dynamic programme that receives wide support from members.
- Coalitions tend to be dominated by NGOs, particularly those that have traditionally worked directly or indirectly with children. Additional members come from other sectors, including government and statutory agencies, as well as from other NGOs working in related fields.
- Coalitions generally regard themselves as having a responsibility for the broader promotion of children rights and therefore pursue activities to raise public awareness on the Convention.
- Coalitions often seek to influence their governments at a variety of levels, particularly to bring about legislative and policy reform
- Although coalitions generally strive for a constructive relationship with their governments while maintaining their independence, this kind of relationship is not always attainable.

In summary children rights coalitions take many forms both in terms of structure and function, however they are predominantly NGO networks committed to promoting the implementation of the Convention and advocating for children’s rights.

Over the years national coalitions have made outstanding achievements in children rights advocacy that have strengthened many members’ capacities in advocacating for children. Yet coalitions have also exhibited common weaknesses that need to be addressed, some of which will be examined in this guide. But first the ‘good things:’

WHY SHOULD WE FORM AND SUSTAIN A NATIONAL COALITION?

- Coalitions provide a focus for children rights work by acting as a catalyst for change, bringing together organizations that share a common concern for the advancement of children’s wellbeing as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Coalitions are often the main advocates for children’s rights acting on behalf of or with children and young people in the realisation of their rights.
- The credibility and authority gained from the collective membership generally outweighs what individual member organisations can achieve.
- Coalitions serve as a platform for focusing action by all interested parties.
- Coalitions ensure NGO participation in the reporting process with the UN Committee

- on the Rights of the Child.
- Coalitions bring together a range of expertise and experiences which are vital for preparing alternative reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and for the promotion of child rights.
 - Coalitions also enhance the capacities of individual members through the sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences in child rights promotion work.
 - Coalitions can provide protection for members, particularly for those organizations that might be vulnerable if challenged on their own.
 - The public presence and activities of coalitions raise awareness of children's rights and the Convention.
 - Coalitions can be a useful means for donors to channel funding to a range of organizations for children rights work.
 - Coalitions have played a key role in stimulating change from a welfare orientation to a human rights orientation among organizations working with or on behalf of children.

WHAT ARE THE PERSISTENT CHALLENGES?

- Like most networks, coalitions are vulnerable to divisions, such as conflicts between members as a result of competition or lack of trust. Personality conflicts, especially in leadership can also weaken the network.
- Difficulty in sustaining the active interest and support of members, in many instances as a result of member organizations not having an expressly defined commitment to the coalition or because of competing demands.
- Tensions may exist between the interests of individual members and that of the coalition as a whole. If not managed well the two may come into conflict or at least not be compatible.
- Often due to worthwhile but competing demands coalition work is not always a top priority for some members. In such cases members are unable or less inclined to commit the necessary resources for the successful completion of tasks.
- Disparities in the size and influence of member organizations can also lead to tensions within coalitions. Larger members that actively participate generally have more resources and time to commit to the coalition, consequently their agenda become more dominant.
- Human rights work, including child rights, attracts relatively little donor support, consequently coalitions often have difficulty finding funding
- Direct involvement of children is usually weak and minimal, due largely to coalitions' lack of information and experience on how to integrate them in a meaningful way.

- Coalitions are not immune to wider societal forces. In some countries coalition members' external interests, e.g. political and religious association do affect the dynamics within the network in negative ways.

WHAT THE GUIDE HAS TO OFFER

This guide is meant to be a practical tool for NGOs who are in the process of forming child rights coalitions and for existing coalitions who want to develop their work. The first chapter entitled '*Developing a Framework for Action*' provides suggestions on how to do a strategic analysis to define a course of action to advance children rights. The second chapter '*Organising for Impact*' assists coalitions in assessing their strengths and weaknesses, as well as gives ideas on how to improve capacities towards achieving the agreed goals. '*Methods and Approaches*' outlines a variety of actions in child rights advocacy. The next chapter, '*Monitoring and Reporting*' highlights the importance of the reporting process of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and other treaty bodies and provides guidance on how to make the best use of these monitoring mechanisms.

The guide is primarily based on the experiences of national coalitions, and includes several illustrative case studies. To assist the coalition in analysis and action the guide provides checklists. There is a reading list of sources on the area covered in the four main chapters. The appendix includes a number of key documents including the Convention, State reporting guidelines, ratified human rights treaties of each country, and useful internet sites.

The NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child

The NGO Group has been in existence since 1983 when the drafting of the Convention began. It was then known as the Informal Ad Hoc Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and was actively involved in the drafting process. After the Convention came into force the NGO Group changed its name to the present one and currently has a membership of over 50 international NGOs. The NGO Group's mission is to facilitate the promotion, implementation and monitoring of the Convention. Over the years the NGO Group has been a platform for action for members, primarily to influence the UN system, but also regional and national forums.

One of the significant areas of the NGO Group's work is to enable national coalitions to participate in the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child reporting process. Another key area is the development of a focal point to monitor global developments on child exploitation issues. The NGO Group also has several thematic subgroups that play an essential role in co-ordinating member's efforts to have greater impact on particular issues.

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DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

The Introduction outlined some of the common characteristics and experiences of national child rights coalitions. This chapter provides guidance on how to plan effective coalition work. There are several approaches to analysis and planning, whether for the long, medium and short term. Highlights of some of the main elements in analysis and planning for child rights promotion are contained within the chapter.

Without appropriate information and sound analysis of the situation of children in their country, using the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a measure, it is difficult to define the best plans for action. In most instances national coalitions do many aspects of this analysis while preparing Alternative Reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. At some point however, most coalitions feel the need to undertake a comprehensive analysis in order to determine their priority concerns and focus for action. While the Convention provides an excellent tool for comparison between the ideal and the reality, coalitions must also take into account local institutions and systems that affect children's lives. An analytical exercise is critical to longer-term existence and effectiveness of coalition action, but can be thwarted if insufficient attention is paid to making preparations beforehand.

Preparation Stage – Setting Up the Process

Questions to consider during the Preparatory Phase of an action plan

- Should we include other individual, groups or organisations outside the membership of the coalition in the analysis and planning exercises?
- Do we have sufficient representation of special groups such as disabled children or from geographic areas such as remote rural communities?
- How familiar are coalition members with the Convention and how essential is this knowledge for analysis and planning?
- Are we all familiar with the recommendations (concluding observations) of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child?
- Are the participating member organisations sufficiently prepared and in a timely manner, in order that they can make substantial contributions to the discussions and decisions?
- Will specialists (lawyers/policy makers) be needed for a proper analysis of compliance to the Convention?
- Who should facilitate this analysis workshop and who might be responsible for preparing any final document?
- What are the internal obstacles (interpersonal or otherwise) to having an open discussion and how can they be 'neutralised' before the meetings?
- What are the estimated financial and material costs? How should members meet these costs?

- How do we ensure maximum participation of all who attend?
- Should children participate and how?

Stage One - Assessing Compliance

Situational Analysis – What is the status of child rights in our country?

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the principle standard by which the situation of children in a country should be assessed. The Convention contains fifty-four articles outlining various rights for children, which are indivisible, inalienable and universal. These articles are standards or yardstick which coalitions should use to assess the status of children. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has grouped the articles of the Convention under different sections with equal importance attached to all the rights. In the (appendices or end of the chapter) the groupings are outlined. The headings include:

General measures of implementation – Articles 4, 42, 46 (paragraph 6)

Definition of the Child – Article 1

General Principles – Articles 2, 3, 6 and 12.

Civil Rights and Freedoms – Articles 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 37(a)

Family environment and alternative care – Articles 5, 18 (para.1,2), 9, 10, 27(4), 20,21,11, 19, 25, 39

Basic health and welfare – Articles 6(2), 23, 24, 26, 18, 17.

Education, leisure and cultural activities – Articles 28, 29, 31

Special protection measure- Articles 22, 30, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40.

In addition to the Convention itself, coalitions can also use other human rights standards such as UN human rights treaties, ILO standards and annual reports from relevant UN bodies like UNICEF. Where there is an acute child labour problem coalitions may wish to use the ILO conventions, in particular 138 and 182 that refer to the minimum age of employment and the worst forms of child labour. See the Appendices for the list of international human rights treaties each that state has ratified. In addition, coalitions could consult UN agencies, human rights organizations and development agencies that are monitoring the implementation of these standards in their country, for an indication of which standards have been met.

The UNICEF Implementation Handbook for the Convention is a useful tool for comparative studies. It provides a detailed analysis of each article based on the developing work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other UN related reports. Each chapter refers to one article and ends with a 'Implementation checklist' that could be used by coalitions in developing their framework for monitoring.

The coalition may choose whether to carry out a comprehensive analysis of all children and all their rights or key areas, such as health, education and juvenile justice. The choice would in part be dependent on coalition resources and also access to pertinent information

vital for this analytical exercise. It is important that a decision is taken early to avoid loss of time and resources in changing strategy.

Assessing the situation in the country in relation to the Convention and other relevant international standards necessitate reviewing national laws, particularly those directly affecting children. If the knowledge of national law does not exist within the coalition, it would be essential to co-opt persons with the expertise. After examining national laws to assess whether they are compatible with the Convention, the coalition may then identify and assess the instruments and processes through which laws are implemented, mainly national policies and programs. Usually coalition members have a fairly sound working knowledge of how national laws are translated into practice, however expertise may be needed where there are crucial gaps in knowledge. The result of this will make evident the degree to which national laws; policies and programs comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Convention	National Law	Policy	Programs
General Measures of Implementation	Children Act etc.	National Plan Of Action	Ministry of Social Service – Foster Care
Definition of Child	Education Act Criminal Code	Compulsory Educ. Juvenile Policy	Primary Education Probation Service

The display when read across, shows a connection of the Convention with national laws, policies and programs. Some key issues to consider are:

- What aspects of the Convention are covered or not covered in national law?
- Where do national, regional and local policies and practices conform or not conform to the Convention?
- Where do national laws fall short of the Convention and why?
- To what extent do government programs meet the standards outlined in the Convention?

This exercise leads to looking more closely at the institutions responsible for implementing the Convention.

Stage Two - Identify the key social institutions, groups and systems responsible for implementing child rights

The list ought to include critical national agents for promoting and sustaining rights for children, namely government, judiciary, media, religious organizations, school system, children and young people, public opinion and culture. The list could be quite long, however it would be advisable to confine it to those that are most important. While identifying the key 'duty holders' for implementing the Convention and other relevant standards and recommendations, do a simple comparison between what they should be doing and what they actually doing. Not only will this exercise help to determine how essential they are to implementation; it will also determine what is the best course of action that can be taken on the part of the coalition.

Stage Three - Assess the position of these social institutions and groups to child rights

Generally national coalitions have a good idea what the opinions are of some interest groups on children rights, as well as cultural and social attitudes to children and childhood. But the position of organizations on these issues is often not clear and at times appear quite confusing. For example the government at the overall political level may express support to the Convention, however the commitment of senior civil servants which is crucial for implementation, is not readily evident. A mapping exercise enables the coalition to quickly recognise where more information is needed about the position of key actors, their commitment and potential for making adjustments in favour of the Convention.

Step Four. - List the possible options for action by national coalitions

Having completed the two stages of analysis, namely assessing the degree of compliance to the Convention and main institutions for ensuring implementation, the coalition then needs to establish priorities for action. The choices for action by a coalition will not only depend on the position of the institutions and groups mentioned above, but also the internal capacities of the coalition. Three main elements within most coalitions that largely responsible for defining the internal capacities are:

- ***the leadership*** – elected officer, committee heads and paid senior staff,
- ***relationships among membership*** and guided by the leadership,
- ***and resources*** which include finances, equipment and other materials.

The interplay of these three elements, carefully managed by the leadership, determines the degree of success the coalition is likely to experience. A more detailed discussion of these three elements will be done in the next chapter. Chapter three describes several activities that coalitions could pursue in promoting children's rights. Include these ideas in the range of options for action when developing plans. Additionally, decide who will do what and in within what period of time.

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING THE STATUS OF CHILDREN IN THE COUNTRY

1. The Convention and other key documents <i>Convention on the Rights of the Child</i> General Measures of implementation Definition of the child General Principles Civil rights and freedoms Family environment & alternative care Basic health and welfare Education, leisure and cultural activities Social protection measures	2. Social Institutions & Groups that affect the implementation of the Convention Central Govt. – Political/legislative levels	3. The positions/views of social institutions & groups on child rights and the Convention a) Does the coalition know or not know what the views and position of ...	4. Possible Action by Coalitions for advancing child rights Lobby/Campaign....
	Relevant Govt. Ministries	b) Does the coalition know whether the views are positive/negative/ combination ...	Negotiation/Campaigns....
	Regional/Local govt. & municipalities	c) Is there a 'gap' – no accurate information on the views and position of ...	Lobby/inform....
	Current Legislation concerning children including the Constitution Judicial System	d) How should the coalition get the information to fill the gap(s)? As above in a, b, c, and d	Comparative study between Convent. & laws.... Training/monitor ...
Committee for CRC Conclud. Observ. Other reports including the UNICEF annual country report	Media	As above	Build alliance/inform....
	Religious organizations	As above	Build alliance/inform....
	School system	As above	Build alliance/training ...
	Children & young people	As above	Inform/collaborate/empower....
	Culture (popular & traditional)	As above	Research on compliments and contradictions....
	Public Opinion	As above	Information ...

Plan of Action

The analysis of the country's compliance to the Convention could greatly assist in defining the coalition's long term vision. This might be expressed as an overall purpose or goal, or as a set of objectives. Keep them positive. The mission for the coalition might include medium and long-term goals and offers some clear justification for the coalition's existence. The strategy should then set out what the coalition will do in order to fulfil its mission. Projects are short-term activities that serve as building blocks towards accomplishing the longer-term goals. Keep the project objectives as specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound (SMART). Evaluations should be carried out after the completion of each project, to assess the degree of impact and to identify lessons learned.

STAGES IN DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

STAGES	ACTION
Coalition Vision ?	A 'wishful' statement arising from an analysis of the society in relation to the CRC.
Coalition Mission ?	A statement that has the following dimensions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Targets for change - Nature of change - Justification for the coalition's place and role
Coalition Strategy ?	Selected areas and methods of work in order to fulfil the mission, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Enhancing institutional capacities to comply with the convention</i> - <i>Promoting legislative/policy changes</i> - <i>Engendering child rights orientation in X</i>
Coalition Projects ?	Activities in keeping with the strategy and based on SMART objectives (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound). Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Training programme for...</i> - <i>Campaigns to persuade....</i> - <i>Research on ...</i>
Outcome & Learning ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The degree of impact on the target group - Other expected or unexpected consequences - Review and evaluation - Basis for further planning

Practical Activities in Carrying out the Analysis

- Establish a committee or working group responsible for co-ordinating the analysis exercise, developing a format, setting up the timetable and methodology
- Convene seminars of experts to help identify key areas of concern with respect to children's rights violations
- Set up working groups to undertake scrutiny of particular articles in the Convention
- Invite all coalition members to take responsibility to closely study those areas where they have some knowledge and contribute their expertise to the overall analysis
- Produce a checklist of questions for each article of the Convention for circulation to interested NGOs to complete and have their replies integrated in the final report
- Once the draft analysis is produced, send it to a wide range of organizations and interest groups for comment
- Consult children and young people of differing ages and social, economic and institutional contexts.

From the NGO Group for the CRC - Task Force on National Coalitions (1997)

ORGANIZATION FOR IMPACT

Many child rights activists will read this chapter and say ‘The writer is talking about an ideal world. It does not happen in our coalition!’ This might well be true as most instances national coalitions come into existence rather quickly to prepare and present an Alternative (or Shadow) Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. In that initial period little attention is given to organisational issues as members join with the short-term goal in mind, namely to prepare the alternative report. The fact is however, that the Convention is to here stay and the NGO community (through national coalitions) has taken on the obligation to promote the implementation of the Convention. In several countries coalitions have laudably demonstrated their commitment to ensure its promotion and implementation. National coalitions therefore need to be well organised to stay the course. This chapter is all about that. It highlights some of the existing capacities within national coalitions and provides suggestions on how to strengthen these capabilities.

Coalition Internal Co-operation

Most national coalitions consist of child-focused NGOs, together with other organisations and groups that share an interest in child rights issues. Some coalitions also include representatives from government departments or agencies and some recognise individual membership. Hence child rights coalitions do not conform to one common structure, but rather have adapted themselves to the context in which they exist. Despite differences in structure they do, like all networks, bring together a range of skills, knowledge, resources and commitment. In addition, coalition members have different spheres of influence in their society, some enjoying high credibility and recognition. In becoming members of the coalition, these organizations/groups/individuals lend their reputation and credibility to the coalition. In some cases, coalitions have been able to take advantage of the strength of individual members. In other cases, coalitions have failed to capitalise on them. The box entitled ***National Coalition Internal Audit***, provides key areas to include in the review exercise. As a result of the audit, the coalition should be clearer about how to make best use of these resources, bringing benefits to the coalition as a whole, as well as to contributing members.

NATIONAL COALITION INTERNAL AUDIT

Periodic audits should be carried out of the amount of resources which coalition members/participants can commit. Their commitment is generally time bound, and therefore need to be renewed and possibly increased. The audit may be carried out during each planning cycle. New members should be informed of the variety of ways they can contribute beyond attending meetings and paying membership fees. Existing members should be encouraged to see the work of the coalition as an important compliment to their own work and should therefore include it as a significant item in their annual plans and budget. For many coalitions, the authority and legal status of its membership are crucial to its own credibility. Commitment of member resources further strengthens that credibility. The other potential advantage of increasing member commitment is that they will have a real stake in the coalition's work.

What are the internal resources available to national coalition?

A. Membership Human Resource Commitment:

- Staff/volunteer representative(s) to attend general meetings
- Staff/volunteer representative (s) to participate in work groups or special projects
- Staff/volunteer representative who is able to give X time of work to the coalition beyond attending regular meetings.
- Staff/volunteer representative to work part/full time with the coalition.

B. Membership Material Commitment:

- Venue for coalition meetings
- Refreshments for X number of coalition meetings
- Paper or other materials for projects
- Access to telephone, fax, e-mail up to \$X in value
- Office space (and/or facilities for example furniture) for X period of time.

C. Membership Financial Commitment

- Membership fees (not all coalitions require membership fees, but most do as a token of commitment. A few coalitions charge membership fees that will significantly contribute to meeting programme or secretariat costs)
- Additional contributions for general purposes
- Additional contributions for specific projects or areas of work
- Inclusion of coalition in annual budget
- Assistance with fundraising

D. Other Membership Commitments

- Representation at external forums such as national advisory committees, workshops, conferences. (This is an area that should be carefully handled in order to avoid misrepresentation)
- Inclusion of coalition agenda on members' work programme (A good way of harmonising programme work and avoiding conflict of interest)
- Secretariat services.

TIPS

- Try to ensure all members contribute in all the domains mentioned above
- Have special occasions to recognise the contributions of members. Symbolic gestures can be very motivating.
- Keep a flexible arrangement whereby members who make significant contributions can also gain visibility. For example, include their organisation's name on a poster financed by them. Donors often insist on such conditions to which coalitions usually agree.

Membership

Active membership participation in coalition activities is dependent on the member's degree of interest and commitment to the mission or programme goals. Where members see the coalition complementing with their own work, they are more likely to be active. For them the coalition reinforces and strengthens their own work. The opposite is also quite true and is often the case with many coalition members. Child rights is an 'add on' to their regular work that may not even directly relate to children's issues. Participation of such members tends to be low and highly selective on a task by task or issues by issue basis. The same can be said for members who regard the coalition or certain members/personalities within it, as competing with their work. Not only do they tend to minimally participate, but also in extreme situations, become counter productive.

In summary, coalition members generally have a strong moral commitment to the Convention and the promotion of child rights, but their actual participation in the coalition is dependent on their perceived stake in the more specific goal of the coalition. If this statement holds true, it is necessary to adopt a rational approach to recruiting and sustaining membership. '*Pointers for Enlistment and Membership Review*' give members (or prospective members) some ideas on how to approach membership and participation.

POINTERS FOR ENLISTMENT AND MEMBERSHIP REVIEW

National coalitions' long-term interests are best served when their members and potential members carefully analyse and clarify their motives for membership. The five-step process outlined below is a way of achieving this goal. While coalitions often have to sell the idea of organizations/groups/individuals joining, it is equally important that they encourage members to periodically assess their involvement and commitment.

- Become familiar with the coalition's mission, work and plans for the future
- Examine whether they (the mission, work and plans) complement or conflict with your own mission, work and plans.
- Make some preliminary decisions on what aspect(s) of the coalition's work you (the individual, group or organisation) will participate in or support.
- Assess the *benefits* to be gained on both sides (that is the member and the coalition). See the list of benefits below subtitled '*Benefits Package.*'
- Discuss with the coalition's leadership your interests and contribution to the coalition with the aim of coming to an agreement. Then stick to that commitment!

This exercise is also a useful tool for coalitions, as it is in their interest to encourage members to give serious thought to membership and avoid having a long list of names on paper but few active members. Coalitions could even go further in their approach to membership in order to enlist organizations in ways that are mutually beneficial. Full membership status is of course only one of several possible roles and status. Other possibilities include associate, consultant, observer, supporter or participant. Interested organizations could be

encouraged to think about other options that may be more appropriate beyond regular membership. This approach will enable organizations to choose the most appropriate way of associating with the coalition. Although a membership list can be impressive, coalitions should encourage members to periodically review their status and determine their most appropriate role and status.

BENEFITS PACKAGE FOR COALITION MEMBERSHIP

NETWORKING
ALLIANCE BUILDING AND SUPPORT
MORAL SUPPORT
REPRESENTATION
ACCESS TO INFORMATION
ACCESS TO CHILD RIGHTS RELATED INFORMATION
TRAINING IN CHILD RIGHTS
ACCESS TO OTHER RESOURCES
LEADERSHIP
PROGRAMME ENHANCEMENT
SKILLS AND EXPERTISE

National coalition leaders ought to highlight these advantages to prospective members and existing members as compelling reasons for membership and commitment to the coalition and its work.

The Coalition on Child Rights in Kenya – The coalition was formed in 1990 and consists of various local and regional NGOs in addition to a number of government departments as associates. ANPPCAN Regional Office headquarters for a network for the protection of children, formed and co-ordinated the coalition. Through the combined efforts of coalition members, existing programmes on child rights and child protection are significantly strengthened in Kenya. The coalition encourages sharing of children's rights related materials and resources to avoid wasteful duplication. Kenya's coalition has formed a useful platform for a wide range of national and regional organizations to join forces in promoting children's rights. Through this structure they provide an effective avenue for NGOs to work

Functions

Coalitions differ greatly in the degree of formality of their structures. In some Western European countries, children rights coalitions (often referred to as Forums) are quite informal both in structure and mode of work. Instead of using the term ‘members’ to refer to those involved, some use ‘participants’ being more suited to the informality of the group. They regard the coalition as a platform for action in which any credible organisation or group can participate with minimum commitment to the network, while at the same time having a commitment to the work of their choice. Other coalitions are more highly organised with detailed statutes covering a range of areas including membership, governance and association with external institutions and groups. Several coalitions in the African continent bear these characteristics. While the choices are very much dependent on the context and traditions in networking, it is essential to coalitions maintain some degree of flexibility to ensure renewal and growth. The box entitled **Assessing National Coalition Viability** provides a checklist for assessing the coalition’s internal strengths and weaknesses, an essential basis for determining future directions.

ASSESSING VIABILITY OF THE NATIONAL COALITION

Coalitions vary widely in the way they operate. The national context, resources and commitment of members determine their *modus operandi*. However most coalitions have characteristics that are typical of networks. Here are questions grouped in five areas that could assist the coalition to objectively assess its viability. The list is not exhaustive, but is intended as a guide for internal assessment. This assessment should not lead to discouragement, but instead help to define alternative ways for bringing greater dynamism to the network. To do this exercise the coalition members may seek the assistance of an impartial third party to facilitate the process.

Membership Participation

- Are members aware and supportive of the coalition's vision and mission?
- How does the coalition define participation?
- What measures are taken to encourage member participation?
- What reasons do non-active members have for not being involved and what measures taken to encourage their involvement?
- Are the internal structures (working group etc.) enhancing wide participation?

Co-ordination

- Are there sufficient resources to ensure that essential co-ordination activities take place?
- Does the leadership have the right 'mix' of persons? Sometimes a conciliatory figure is needed; other times a dynamic person to push things forward.
- Are the co-ordinating functions perceived by some members as competing with their own functions? Co-ordination should provide added value that only it can do.
- Does the coalition leadership have a mandate to act, which is clear and widely supported?
- Is co-ordination treated as a learning process and responsive to meet emerging situations and membership needs?
- Are collective decisions respected and abided to by members?

Goal Achievement

- Is the coalition's planning cycle consistent?
- Are plans made in accordance to available or potential funding or are there other preconditions?
- How much effort is allocated to project monitoring and evaluation?
- Is there a culture of learning from past and current projects?
- Do all members share in the successes of the coalition?

Resources

- Are the resource requirements for carrying out the coalition's work clearly established?
- When was an internal resource audit last carried out?
- What measures are in place to harness resources both internally and externally?
- How has the coalition been accountable to external donors?

External Factors

- What is the coalition's public image?
- What is the nature of the coalition's relationship with significant organizations and special interest groups with whom it has been associated? How do they perceive the coalition?
- Are there 'competing' organizations, networks or groups? What is the coalition's association with them?

TIPS – ON BUILDING COALITION VIABILITY

- Here are a few more suggestions on improving the coalition's viability:
- Keeping members interested and involved, means knowing what their interests are and assisting them in finding useful ways to combine their interests to the work of the coalition.
- Encourage a culture of openness and self-criticism at all levels within the coalition
- Co-ordination must aim at ensuring clear allocation of tasks and mutual understanding of whom is responsible for what.
- Don't be shy about 'blowing your own trumpet.' Highlighting the coalition's accomplishments is vital way of raising the coalition's image and credibility.
- Build and sustain a culture of learning and review in the coalition. Lessons learnt from previous experiences are essential for ensuring greater success in the future.

Another popular assessment tool is the **SWOT Analysis** (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats Analysis). The SWOT Analysis encourages input from not only members but also other interested parties to help identify potential solutions and constraints. Amnesty International has prepared an excellent guide to using the SWOT Analysis as part of the '*Campaign Pack for Local Groups*' and adapted for coalition purposes.

THE SWOT ANALYSIS

1. What are the national coalition's Strengths?

Strengths are positive factors within the coalitions that can make effective contribution to a campaign. Strengths might include – adequate financial and material resources, good public image or specialist knowledge.

2. What are the Weaknesses?

Weaknesses are negative factors within the coalition that inhibit the coalition's ability to act generally or on particular issues. It is very important to identify the weaknesses so that steps can be taken to overcome them, or avoid activities that the coalition is unable to cope with. Weaknesses might include poor organisational capacity, lack of experienced members, limited or no funds.

3. What are the Opportunities?

Opportunities are factors about the context in which the coalition works that might complement their activities. Opportunities might include: an open, sympathetic press, potential donors, other organizations that might be interested in particular issues or that might be able to put effective pressure on the targets of the campaign. Again, when planning consider how you might take advantage of opportunities in the context.

4. What Threats exist?

Threats are factors in the wider context that may have a negative impact on the coalition's ability to contribute to the campaign or action, or generally function. Threats might include – political or economic crisis, lack of public interest in children's rights, restrictions on work. Threats will usually be out of the coalition's control. In the longer term the coalition should hope to bring about a change in at least some of the factors that represent a threat to their work.

Adaptation of Amnesty International Campaign Pack for Local Groups. For more on campaigning see Brian Lambs, The Good Campaign Guide, NCVO Publication 1997

The Children's Rights Office (the co-ordinating focal point for the England coalition) launched a campaign to encourage statutory bodies and NGOs to formally 'adopt' the Convention. In so doing these bodies are making a commitment to use its principles and standards as the framework for developing their policies and practice. The Office also produced short introductory guides to help organizations understand the implications of 'adopting' the Convention. Nearly 400 organizations have now done so. In some organizations, this process has led to a detailed examination of how to improve consultation with children. In others, it has led to a reconsideration of how budgets are allocated, how to ensure that anti-poverty strategies take better account of children, introduction of child protection

Structure

National child rights coalitions generally divide tasks among willing members and get on with the work. A few find the resources to hire full or part-time staff to do most or all the programme work. Many rely on members to carry out secretariat responsibilities. In several cases international NGOs, such as Defence for Children International and the International Save the Children Alliance have been instrumental in starting national coalitions and maintain an active supporting role.

As members carry out majority of the coalition's work, the division of tasks and responsibilities among members are pivotal for effective work. Members often divide themselves into different working groups, each serving a separate purpose. The categories of working groups and functions outlined below represent a system commonly used by coalitions. While there isn't a strict definition for each committee or group, there is some consensus about their functions, as follows:

- The **General Assembly** refers to a meeting of all coalition members. The frequency and nature of these meetings varies depending on the way the coalition works, most meet once or twice per year. The General Assembly makes decisions on the overall work of the coalition, leadership and future action. General Assemblies are usually not appropriate forums for detailed monitoring of ongoing programme/project work or special projects. However all committees, sub-committees and other internal structures report to this assembly.
- The **Co-ordinating Committee/ Executive Committee** refers to the elected coalition leadership. Committee members are usually elected or appointed by the general membership. The primary task of the committee is to co-ordinate the coalition's work and to ensure that mission and project goals are met. The Co-ordination Committee may have executive functions, that is management-related tasks or another committee may be created for this purpose. Where coalitions have the resources, most of the executive and secretariat functions are carried out by employed staff who report to the Co-ordinating Committee or Executive Committee. In addition, the committee is usually expected to represent or participate in the selection of coalition representatives in key national or international forums.
- **Committees/Working Groups** are often thematic or issue focused, while others are programme oriented. They form the 'heart beat' of the coalition as they implement the main decisions taken at the General Assembly. The work

of Committees is generally ongoing with a cycle of activities that includes planning, project implementation, monitoring, evaluation, recommendations for further action to the general assembly, further planning and so on.

- **Sub-Committees/subgroups/task forces** usually have a shorter life span. These groups are usually mandated by a larger group to focus on a specific issue.

In some instances an organisation, group or individual acts as a **Focal Point** for co-ordinating the flow of information among several persons to achieve a particular task with expedience. It is normally not a permanent position, but as always, there are exceptions.

- **Lead agency** refers to coalition member that is responsible for of carrying out an agreed activity. Usually the lead agency is an organisation with considerable experience in the area of work to which they are assigned.

Finances

The question of finances is often a difficult issue for most national coalitions. In fact coalitions generally never have enough resources to carry out all the desired activities. While the guide does not offer any ‘quick fix’ solutions, there are some reminders worth considering when addressing the issue of finances.

A. A Core Budget

‘Core budget’ refers to essential costs of maintaining the coalition. These are costs for servicing meetings, administering the coalition, publishing the annual report, rent, utility and so on. It can be differentiated from programme costs, which have less to do with financing administrative functions, but instead activities directly related to carrying out a project. Although there may well be several mutual line items, such as communication and staff costs it is always useful to make the distinctions. Core budget costs should cover a specific time period and revised at each planning cycle.

A. Programme Budget

The programme budget covers incurred while carrying out projects. Such programme costs include expenses for producing child rights materials and other information materials, TV programmes, carrying out child rights training etc. Donors are generally more interested in funding programmes since they are less dominated by administrative costs. Therefore coalitions must find creative and ethical ways of including administrative costs (a major part of the core budget) within the programme budget; for example a project that relies heavily on postal services could include a percentage of the administrative communication costs in the programme budget. One practical suggestion is to link project-planning meetings to coalition management meetings.

A. Fund-raisers

Actively recruit members or associates who are known for their skills in fund-raising and proposal writing. Coalitions can have no excess of such persons, as it is too onerous a task for one or a few people to sustain.

A. Donors

Keep an active register of donors and their current interests. Many donors still make a distinction between human rights and children rights, that might be a plus or minus depending on the situation, but at least the former is also a potential source. Look for unconventional donors such as development agencies, trade unions, and political parties that have resources for human rights work or political education and even the government. Funding from government is a difficult issue and most coalitions avoid this source of funding. Some coalitions however argue that because it is the state's obligation to monitor the implementation of the Convention, coalitions that carry out this function should receive some financial support from the state in recognition of their contribution. Usually this approach works best where governments are traditionally responsive to NGO advocacy.

Excerpts on Advice to Grant Seekers

The funding research process is time consuming and involves many steps. However, if carefully planned, it can lead to successful and lengthy relationships with foundations and corporate citizenship programmes.

1. Successful funding begins within your Coalition

Successful funding from foundations should be based on the development of a clear coalition strategy and a linked project proposal. In developing the strategy aim to address the following questions clearly and directly:

- What is the unique purpose of our coalition?
- What audience do we serve?
- Does this audience receive similar services from any other organisation or network?
- What important need or needs do we aim to fulfil?
- Does that membership fully support our initiative to begin to respond to these needs?

2. Research on funders' stated interests is essential

Blanket or scattered-approach funding, whereby requests are sent to a wide group of foundations and corporate funders, is ineffective and can damage your coalition's credibility. Having developed the coalition's project objectives, start your research to determine those few funders that have similar interests. In doing so develop an initial 'prospect' list of some 10 to 15 funders who have general interests in the subject area. The second step involves further research to refine this list to 3 or 4 funders you may approach.

3. Further research refines your prospect list

The very best sources of information about foundations and corporate funders are those that they release themselves. Funder publications can be annual reports, newsletters grant lists, press releases, application guidelines and other documents. Through these sources as well as their website, funders will give you a comprehensive overview of their priorities and the areas they will or will not fund. Pay careful attention to stated programme interests, restrictions, geographic limitations and other qualifications.

4. Funding usually commences at top level

Successful funding usually commences at the executive/board level to top management level. Foundations and corporate funders do not simply support the words and texts of written project proposals; they fund the people who can execute these proposals effectively. Sometimes such top-level personal contacts may not exist. In this case, you should write a brief, clear letter of inquiry, usually no more than two or three pages. The letter should:

- Describe the aim of the proposed project
- Note the measurable objectives and goals that the coalition plans to accomplish
- Summarise the project's budget and other sources of funding
- Explain the coalition's abilities and qualifications to accomplish the project

Adapted from the **Funding Guide for Child Welfare NGOs in Europe and across the World**, published by European Forum for Child Welfare 1999 edition

E. Accounting

Maintain a sound accounting system that clearly shows income and expenditures. It is critical for the coalition's credibility. Do an annual audit utilising a method that is affordable. Include the audited report with the annual activity report as they serve complimentary functions.

External Co-operation

The value of national child rights coalitions' involvement with relevant external organizations; groups and committees cannot be over-emphasised. It is in such settings that coalitions have opportunities for influencing, and thereby achieving change in favour of children interest. They also serve important information and networking functions. But these benefits cannot be accomplished without clarity on the purpose for participation. The coalition mission and goals should strongly determine both choice and nature of participation in external forums. This approach prevents the coalition from spreading itself too thin trying to cover many events and issues that may not be beneficial in the long run.

There are several levels of external involvement open to coalitions. Again the choices made depend on their strategic value to the coalition. The chart below summarises the main options and sets out the pros and cons for each option. Further details on coalition involvement with external state and civil society 'actors' is discussed in greater detail in chapter three entitled '**Methods and Approaches.**'

**CHOICES FOR EXTERNAL INVOLVEMENT BY NATIONAL
CHILD RIGHTS COALITIONS**

LEVEL	ORG/COMM/GRPS	GREATEST VALUE	LEAST VALUE
Local	Community Groups Local Govt. authorities	Most responsible for implementing programmes that directly affect children	Least involved in national issues
Regional/ County	State offices & Comm. Regional Assoc./ groups Central Govt.	Most responsible for interpreting and promoting national policies affecting children	Limited direct influence on children.
National	National Monitoring Committee National Assoc.	Determine the national agenda for children including law reform, nat. budget and policy	Limited influence on local activities and issues
Inter-country/ Regional	Thematic networks Regional Organizations International Agencies	Most strategically placed for networking with others that share similar interests.	Some but limited influence a national level.
International	International Networks UN Agencies/Bodies International Agencies	Able to bring international pressure to governments on implementing the work at national level CRC	Usually very limited ongoing

Happy Coalition Building!

METHODS AND APPROACHES

The previous chapter closed with comments on intervention choices available to national child rights coalitions in order to achieve their mission and goals. This chapter outlines a range of activities that coalitions have carried out and continue to use in monitoring and promoting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The examples are very practical and are from varied contexts and situations in which effective initiatives have taken place. Though the range of possible children's rights promotion activities is wide, the guide focuses on the four areas most common to coalitions:

- Methods in **monitoring** the implementation of the Convention
- Strategies for **promoting** the implementation of the Convention
- Children's rights **awareness raising** activities
- Methods in **mobilising** civil society in support of children's rights

But first a few words on Advocacy...

For the purposes of this chapter it is assumed that the reader has a working knowledge of standard approaches to advocacy and therefore appreciates the implications for impact from the examples given. Advocacy is about influencing and there are some essential requirements for effective advocacy. The section below entitled '*Requirements for Effective Children's Rights Advocacy*' is a summary of the critical factors in planning for advocacy. If the coalition has little or no experience in advocacy, it is advisable that expertise is identified and recruited before embarking on such plans. Good advocates can be found in several fields of work, especially in human rights and social development.

Requirements for Effective Children's Rights Advocacy

Credibility as an advocate: The seriousness with which the coalitions (and their members) are treated as advocates depend on:

- the coalition's standing and reputation in society
- demonstrated experience, professionalism and work record in children's rights
- the 'usefulness' of what the coalition has to offer in terms of analysis, expertise, on-the-ground information and access to relevant constituencies
- Motives – is advocacy really for the public good?
- Source of funds - in some countries foreign finance causes suspicion
- Independence from political parties
- Size and/or visibility

Credible agenda: These are the changes being pursued bring about the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Where there is little conformity between state legislation or policy and what the coalition in advocating, there is scant ground for dialogue; here public protest may be apt. Where sufficiently similar goals exist, the government must be persuaded to believe what is proposed by the coalition.

Credibility packaging: In addition to coming from a credible coalition, an advocacy strategy must be targeted appropriately towards policy makers, opinion leaders, the coalition's own constituency, allies and opponents. Presentations should be designed to:

- Make evident the depth of study and consideration of other interpretations and opinions
- Stress arguments and perspectives which would attract the greatest number of allies
- Project the issues rather than the coalition
- Carefully involve and, where possible, direct or guide media attention

Many 'backers:' The breadth of support determines how many fronts and pressures policy makers and other state actors, have to deal with at once; generally speaking the more the better. To this end:

- Identify, develop and activate as many allies and partners as appropriate
- Get others on board who push the issues with the same policy makers or institutions
- Recognise and use the heterogeneity of the government and competing opinions of groups within it
- Establish contacts while targeting key players

Appropriate sales strategies and tactics: In as far as coalitions have correctly analysed the status of children in the country and identified the necessary changes, how can this agenda best be put forward?

1. Make use of changes in key players or in other external forces within society
2. Match the advocacy strategy to the organisational strength of the concerned interest groups:
 - adopt mass constituency mobilisation when the groups are strong;
 - adopt informal pressures on key personalities and powerful decision-makers when interest groups are weak and the degree of risk is higher.
3. Adopt or switch between a 'campaign' mode of short, intense activities versus a 'programme' mode of fewer, long-term pressures
4. Investigate public interest litigation. This is a further advocacy path, but one which high professional demands in terms of research and conformity with rules. It also contains potential risks in the event of negative judgements that may close off other legal possibilities, thereby providing extra ammunition for opponents and encourage greater resistance in the state.
5. Turn to the legislative arena that offers a further advocacy potential. This arena elevates issues to a public platform which can involve presentations to parliamentary committees, prompting Private Member's Bills, letter writing drives to pressure elected or prospective politicians and so on.

Making the right (combination of) strategic or tactical choices hinges on a mix of competencies a coalition has, or can mobilise, together with a sound assessment of opportunity costs – assessments which are hard to quantify

Source: Adapted from draft by Azeez Khan, 1996, Part V and published in Alan Fowler's 'Striking a Balance'

Methods in Monitoring the Implementation of the Convention

The government is primarily responsible for ensuring the implementation of the Convention. For this reason, coalitions should closely monitor governmental initiatives that have an impact on children. In some countries an ombudsperson for children or commissioner takes responsibility for some of this monitoring. Nonetheless, coalitions in these countries, and more so in countries where such posts do not exist, can make significant contributions to supporting this work. Many national coalitions have formed strong alliances in ombudsperson offices. Another common mechanism for monitoring is government appointed monitoring committees that often incorporate child-focused NGOs and coalitions. The appointment of national coalition representatives on these monitoring committees while desirable, should be careful in retaining their independence. The difficulty many monitoring committees experience is that they have little influence on government structures, as they are not usually vested with any legal or executive authority. Consequently much needed support comes from coalition monitoring activities. Monitoring ultimately leads to coalitions taking action to persuade their government to fulfil their obligations to the Convention. Some monitoring activities that coalitions could pursue are as follows:

1. Conduct a comparative study on relevant local laws in relation to their compliance with the principles and standards of the Convention. Identify the legal changes necessary for compliance. Ideally, concrete proposals on revisions to legislation should also be included in the study.

The UNICEF Implementation Handbook for the Convention is a useful tool for the comparative study. It provides a detailed analysis of each article based on the developing work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other UN related reports. Each chapter refers to one article and ends with a 'Implementation checklist' that could be used by coalitions in developing their monitoring framework.

2. Monitor the extent to which existing legislation is implemented. In some countries, the legal framework for promoting and respecting children's rights is strong, but often not adequately implemented. Therefore coalitions need to examine both the legislation and the legislative system. An analysis of why the system has failings should also be included. Sources for this information are many and may include statistical data and research available from credible organisations, reports from professional bodies, public inquiries, journalistic investigation and the experiences of children and young people.
3. Examine the national budget. Study the ways in which the government determines how much is allocated to programmes that directly or indirectly affect children's lives such as health, education, child welfare, housing and transportation. Identify what external and internal forces strongly influence national budgetary decisions. NGOs that receive funding and/or subventions from the Finance Ministry usually have access to key departments that could offer vital information on the way the government allocates funds.

4. Identify the main government ministries and statutory departments responsible for implementing the different articles in the Convention. Assess whether their policies address those articles and what programmes exist to implement them.
5. Create a ‘newspaper clippings’ library. Local newspapers provide an excellent avenue for gauging public opinion on children’s issues; monitoring key developments, and assessing the relative importance of children issues to other subjects covered in newspapers.

***COMEXANI**, a coalition in Mexico, monitors the situation of children in that country by producing every few years a report on the status of children in Mexico. This monitoring process involves organising a series of meetings with practitioners and experts, including children, to discuss various areas identified in key reports such as the UN Committee's concluding observations. The outcome of these discussions, which take place across the country, are compiled in a report and published for wide circulation. This publication is launched in a high profile event and widely consulted by various organizations and individuals. It also forms the basis for appraising the UN Committee of the country's progress since ratification.*

Many coalitions operate outside the state system, consequently have little access to the best sources of information for monitoring purposes. Coalitions can lobby government however, in order to create the necessary mechanisms to ensure that comprehensive monitoring takes place. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child consistently suggests a range of mechanisms through which governments can enhance their capacity to both monitor and promote the implementation of the Convention. Coalitions have a key role to play in lobbying for the introduction of these mechanisms:

- Dis-aggregation of budgets at national, regional and local levels to ascertain the proportion of public expenditure on children and its appropriateness in accordance with their numbers and needs.
- Creation of government ministries or ministers with responsibility for promoting the rights of children.
- Establishment of intergovernmental structures at all levels to ensure coherence and consistency in legal frameworks and in the development and delivery of services to children.
- Creation of child impact analysis at national, regional and local levels to assess the direct and indirect impact of existing and proposed legislation and policies on children.
- Establishment of independent commissioners or ombudsman for children with a remit to monitor and promote implementation, investigate abuses, raise awareness of children’s rights among other activities.
- Production of an annual report to parliament on children, drawing together matters of expenditure, relevant statistical data, policy issues and legislation.

Indicators for Monitoring – National Coalitions in South East Asia and the Pacific

In late 1997, several coalitions in South East Asia and the Pacific met in Caylabne Bay, Philippines to share experiences in reporting and monitoring the Convention. Several coalitions had developed indicators for monitoring child abuse and neglect, child labour, juvenile justice and prostitution among children. At the end of the workshop the participants agreed that:

- ❖ Much more work was needed to develop indicators.
- ❖ It would be desirable to have unified CRC indicators
- ❖ Indicators should serve as a global terms of reference
- ❖ Coalitions were important means for data collection
- ❖ The quality of data should be comprehensive, accurate and disaggregated
- ❖ Special efforts should be made to collect child-focused data.

The elusive 'indicator' An extract from the Innocenti Global Seminar Report

The following is summarised from a Child Watch International Document: *Indicators for Children's Rights: Proposal for a Project to Identify and Develop Indicators for Monitoring the CRC.*

Very few, if any, adequate definitions of 'indicators' exist, other than that they 'indicate.' The UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) describes an indicator as a modest measure of an aspect of life and/or development that may only give indirect information about what is going on in a time series. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines indicator as 'variables which help to measure changes.' The four essential WHO criteria for indicator selection are validity, objectivity, sensitivity and specificity. UNRISD provides seven: availability, comparability, quality, validity, discriminatory power, balance and avoidance of duplication, and conceptual significance.

Maggie Black, UNICEF, Monitoring the Rights of Children

Strategies for Promoting the Implementation of the Convention

Article 4 of the Convention states that government must '*undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the Convention.*' It goes on to add that in respect of economic, social and cultural rights, governments undertake such measures to '*the maximum extent of available resources.*' The wording of the article was not meant to be an 'out clause' for governments to evade their responsibility for implementing social and economic rights. Rather the Committee stresses that it imposes obligations for action, which represent progressive steps toward the realisation of children's rights. To ensure that the general measures for implementing the Convention are taken seriously by governments, coalitions could pursue a variety of strategies.

Mobilising support for change

1. Build broad alliances with organisations able and willing to campaign on particular issues. Governments are more likely to listen if there is significant groundswell of opinion promoting change.
2. Utilise the media, identify sympathetic journalists, respond to relevant issues in the news in order to present a children's rights perspective, take pro-active initiatives to place children's rights on the public agenda and highlight violations of rights.
3. Create opportunities to address key professionals groups in order to encourage them to adopt a commitment to supporting the promotion of children's rights by speaking at conferences and writing articles in professional journals.

Lobby governments directly

4. Use opportunities in the government legislative programme to introduce amendments consistent with the Convention.
5. Arrange meetings with government representatives to promote the legislative changes necessary for compliance with the Convention.
6. Collect and provide evidence to government on the situation of children.
7. Provide illustrative evidence (possibly experiences in similar countries) of how the establishment of effective state structures would enhance the capacity to promote implementation.
8. Identify areas where more information is needed in order to monitor compliance.
9. Invite government ministers to NGO conferences or hearings to account for their actions and to hear their responses to the CRC Committee's recommendations.
10. Seek to establish annual meetings with government officials and ministers to reflect on progress and to set an agenda of priorities for the upcoming year.
11. Encourage the formation of groups of parliamentarians across party lines to monitor children's issues.
12. Encourage governments to produce guidance for local and regional authorities, where there is evidence that legislation and national policies are not being properly implemented.

The Swedish National Coalition, the NGO Network on the CRC, holds yearly NGO hearings with government officials. The purpose of the hearings is to see how well the Convention is implemented in Sweden. Before the event the coalition co-ordinated the compilation of a list of questions from members and other interested civil society groups. These questions are submitted to the relevant government departments before the hearing in order to ensure that government officials can provide full explanations.

Similar hearings also take place in Norway and Finland.

COSECODENI - Costa Rica

The Ombudsman Office co-ordinated a drafting commission that had various sectors from civil society and government institutions. The purpose was to initiate an analytical process aimed at elaborating the Código de la Niñez y Adolescencia (National Code of Children and Adolescents) to include the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Federation of NGOs for the Defense of the Rights of the Child (COSECODENI) was among those that actively participated, giving important contributions and lobbying with key actors in order to attain the code's approval. As a result of the approval of the national code on February 6, 1998, the Consejo Nacional de la Niñez y Adolescencia (National Council for Children and Adolescents) was formed and COSECODENI was elected to be vice-chair of this multi-sectoral group.

Promote implementation among institutions providing services to children

13. Encourage organizations to make a formal commitment to 'adopt' the Convention and use it as a tool for auditing their policies and practices in line with its principles and standards. Also use the Convention as a tool to develop comprehensive plans and budgets for monitoring implementation.
14. Encourage relevant organizations to publish guides that detail the policy and practice implications of using the Convention. For example, Article 19 refers to the right to protection from all forms of physical and mental violence. Coalitions could produce or encourage the production of materials for institutions such as schools, hospitals, local authorities, security forces or special interest groups such as parents, on how to interpret the article and practical steps for implementation.
15. Encourage relevant organizations to produce guides for local or municipal health authorities that have key functions in relation to children, on the essential principles in the Convention that ought to underpin their work.
16. Collect and disseminate examples of good practices in the implementation of the Convention.

In South Africa's parliament more than 300 children gathered to witness about physical and sexual abuse and absolute lack of respect for children's rights in their country. The children asked the ministers, representatives from the High Court and other authorities and institutions why they allow this abuse to persist. Parliamentary representatives were called upon to monitor the situation and report to the Parliament on a regular basis.

Similar parliaments for children have been held in several countries in West Africa, such as Mali, Guinea-Bissau and Burkina Faso. It has proven to be an effective means to inform key national decision-makers.

Promote opportunities for children and young people to contribute to advocacy for change

17. Promote children's participation in local democratic processes and decision making. This implies that they need to be kept informed, encouraged to develop their opinions on matters that directly affect their lives and provided with channels to express these opinions with the relevant authorities.
18. Support the development of children/young people's organizations and groupings in order that they acquire opportunities for advocating on their own behalf unmediated by adults.
19. Encourage governments to introduce legislation, training, guidance and resources to facilitate children's involvement in decision-making in families, schools, local communities and local and national political structures.
20. Develop or encourage the development of materials for professionals working with children on how to encourage and promote children's participation. The production of these manuals in a manner that is clear and practical would be of great value in the implementation of the Convention.

In several countries national coalitions have been in the forefront in forming children and youth organisations for the promotion of children's rights. In Cambodia one such group exists and has been instrumental in training children across the country on their rights.

*In the UK, an organisation called **Article 12** was created. It is run by and for children and young people under 18 years. Article 12 aims to promote opportunities for young people to participate in decisions, which affect them.*

***PRESS** is an organizations run by and for young people 13-25 years old. It aims to give young people a voice, to increase the solidarity among Norwegian citizens towards children in other countries, as well as to work for the most vulnerable children.*

Providing Training on the Convention

The creation of a cultural climate of respect for children's rights requires that those in key positions of power in relation to children know and understand the implication of the Convention. The CRC Committee has recommended that training on children's rights be incorporated in the curriculum of teachers, social workers, police, and magistrates, judges, health care professionals, as well as employees in care and detention institutions. Coalitions can play a significant part in encouraging the development of training programmes for these professionals through:

21. Identifying relevant training bodies and encouraging them to introduce the Convention into the training curricula;
22. Produce introductory materials or advice on materials that could be used in such training programmes;
23. Identifying resource persons who could offer sessions on the Convention in general and providing training for trainers;
24. Identifying specialists/experts who could run seminars for particular groups of professionals on the application of the Convention in their work with children.

In Nicaragua, police commanders from the National Security and Criminal Police divisions received training on issues related to children and their rights. Similar training programmes have taken place in several countries through the direct or indirect efforts of national coalitions.

Children’s Rights Awareness Raising Activities

Governments have a clear obligation to disseminate the Convention as outlined in article 42. However rights have little meaning if the subjects of these rights are unaware that they exist. In many countries the language of human rights is not familiar to many key groups including professionals working with children. Coalitions should encourage governments to take seriously the duty to disseminate the Convention in forms that are understandable to all sectors of society. Although coalitions often take pro-active measures to raise awareness on children’s rights, these activities should not be a substitute for government action. Instead, the coalition should continue to encourage the government to take its obligations seriously. Promotion of the Convention may involve the following activities.

Dissemination of the Convention

1. Publicise the Convention and produce accessible materials both for adults and children of varying ages.
2. Translate the Convention into local languages including those of minority or indigenous groups
3. Make it accessible to children with disabilities – for example in Braille for the visually impaired.
4. Make it accessible to special groups such as refugees, dwellers in remote areas and other hard to reach sectors of the population.
5. Promote and encourage wide distribution throughout governmental authorities and institutions providing services to children including guides on how to translate the principles of the Convention into practice.
6. Ensure wide distribution of the Convention to libraries, radio and television stations.
7. Disseminate information about the Convention to schools, religious institutions, academic and professional institutions and service clubs.

Promote Information about and in line with the Convention

8. Produce or encourage the production of regular newsletters and/or journals to disseminate information that develops the audiences’ understanding of children rights.
9. Encourage, commission or collaborate in the production of educational videos, posters, leaflets on children’s rights.
10. Develop contacts within the media, write articles and press releases for submission to the media in order to inject a children rights perspective in public debates and issues of current concern.
11. Promote opportunities for children themselves to be heard in the media.

12. Utilise in particular children's radio, TV programmes and magazines to disseminate information on the Convention and encourage the media to develop programmes to help children understand the concept of rights.
13. Contribute to the adoption of codes of conduct for media and the private sector; react to advertisements that violate children rights by discriminatory messages or images.

In Yemen, journalists from newspaper companies, radio and television stations were trained on the Convention and its practical implications. As a result of the training there was a dramatic increase in the coverage given to children's issues by the media.

METHODS IN MOBILIZING CIVIL SOCIETY IN SUPPORT OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Many find the Convention difficult to understand and equally difficult to apply directly to their own experiences and practices. Coalitions could play a useful role in paving the way for the creation of mechanisms and tools to enable a wide range of people to understand the Convention. Not only will they learn to appreciate the philosophy of the Convention but also the interdependence and indivisibility of the rights it embodies. Activities to this end may include:

1. The production of materials which explain the Convention and illustrate the importance of a wholistic understanding of its principles. For example, coalitions could produce information on the implications of the Convention for disabled children, drawing not only on those articles that make specific reference to disabilities and health, but also on rights pertaining to education, family life, play participation in decision-making, non-discrimination and respect for their evolving capacities.
2. Promoting initiatives designed to enhance children's capacities to help other children whose rights are being breached or not met. There is a growing body of experience in this area, in which children provide mediation and counselling to other children.
3. Broaden the alliance for children by approaching religious institutions, political parties and parents associations for example, that could mobilise wide spectrums of the society.
4. Develop alliances with authorities not directly involved with children but whose work none the less have an impact on children. Encourage them to address the question of the rights of children in their work.
5. Exchange experiences internationally with other NGOs and develop regional co-operation with other coalitions.

- 5.
6. Makes links with international networks, such as the Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) and NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that have a real concern for the promotion of children rights.
7. Work with academic institutions to promote the development of research on children, particularly initiatives designed to investigate children's experiences and understanding of the world. Coalitions should encourage these institutions to use new and innovative methodologies for effective child participation in research, clarifying the ethical issues involved.
8. Identify key NGOs that will take responsibility for pursuing implementation of thematic issues in the Convention, as well as the recommendations from the CRC Committee.

In several parts of the world regional meetings have been held among national child rights coalitions. These occasions have proven to be invaluable in building co-operation between coalitions, sharing issues of common interest, training and improving advocacy strategies.

Regional meetings have taken place in Latin America, Asia, West Africa and Europe.

CRIN (Child Rights Information Network) is an information service with over 500 member organisations and individuals from over 100 countries. CRIN aims to support and promote the implementation of the Convention, through meeting the information needs of members and others. Child rights information is handled and disseminated both electronically and through other mediums. See their website at www.crin.org.

Develop a Resource Data-Base

There is a need for a national resource database that provides expertise and information on the Convention. This information might include:

- Sources of relevant articles, journals and books on children's issues
- Current government initiatives which will impact on children positively or adversely
- Research or background materials produced from investigations or polls.
- Documented coalition campaigns and hearings
- Current information on the CRC Committee
- Referral to sources of expertise in advocacy or on key aspects of children's rights.

The national child rights coalition in Burkina Faso, COBUFADE, has carried out a study on the perceptions of child rights in that country. A multidisciplinary team consisting of an anthropologist, jurist and sociologist was created for this purpose. The study focuses on the socialisation of children, various stages of development and how children are perceived both by themselves and adults.

Tips on actions to avoid in children's rights advocacy

There are a few pitfalls coalitions often find themselves which are worth mentioning in order that they be avoided in the future:

1. Avoid modifying the coalition's programme plans to suite donor interests exclusively. This danger is particularly great in some developing countries where national coalitions present an attractive channel for some donors to support several NGOs at the same time. Donor interests might not be precisely compatible with coalition plans, especially if the funds are for welfare or relief purposes. Committing the coalition's time and resources to carrying out projects that are in conflict or tangential with their advocacy agenda risks their credibility and overall effectiveness.
2. Avoid doing large public education projects without having a clear strategic aim. Again several coalitions have embarked upon public education projects, due to the availability of funding without considering all the ramifications. Carefully plan awareness raising projects coupled with a strategic goal to ensure that maximum benefit is gained.
3. Avoid taking funds from donors about whom little is known. Before accepting funds coalitions ought to have open and frank discussions with the donor on their respective interests and motives for offering the funds or other resources in question. In addition, coalitions should do their own investigation of the donor to assess their suitability. The questions of donor requirements both during and after the funding period should be carefully examined.
4. National ceremonies, children's parliament and Children's Days are important, but useless without any strategic considerations about the coalition's involvement. Many coalitions make the fatal mistake of placing these ceremonial events high on their calendars and agendas, absorbing a significant percent of their resources and time, but with little attention to what the longer-term benefits ought to be.
5. Avoid isolating the child rights movement from the wider human rights community in your country. Remember that children rights are human rights for children. The human rights movement is quite well established in many countries and generally has a strong track record in advocacy from which the children rights community can learn a great deal.

- 5.
6. Avoid making too many assumptions for or against the media. Work with the media is vital but must be handled with great care. Learn from groups that appear to use the media effectively.
7. Avoid tokenistic activities with children and young people. Without careful planning and integration of children in the work, coalitions run the risk of inviting strong criticism from their opponents.
8. Avoid having an association with government that places the coalition in others' perceptions as merely an extension of the government. While coalitions widely acknowledge that they must work with the state in order to bring lasting benefits for children, care should be taken in retaining independence.

MONITORING AND REPORTING

Painting the Picture of the Context

At the time when this guide was written approximately eighty national child rights coalitions existed in the five continents, most of them were involved in the reporting process to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The NGO Group for the CRC's publication called *A Guide for Non-Governmental Organizations Reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child* has been in existence since 1993, revised in 1998 and available in three languages both in hard copy and on CRIN's website. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has grown accustomed and looks forward to NGO input at their pre-sessional working group meetings. National coalitions are taking an increasingly active role in the sessions of the Committee. Another important developments for this contextual picture is that several reliable web-sites exist, in particular Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) that offer valuable information on children rights related issues. Coalitions operate in a global environment where much relevant information and rich experiences with respect to the CRC Committee reporting and monitoring process are available.

Against this background, this chapter will provide ideas on how to maximise the benefits that may be gained from the reporting and monitoring process. It also draws attention to some of the other options for action at the international level that coalitions and child rights NGOs may use in promoting and protecting children rights.

REMINDER – Importance of the Reporting Process

How can NGOs benefit from participating in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child reporting and monitoring processes?

- It represents a unique opportunity to bring coalition concerns about the status of children to the international treaty body legally responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention.
- It empowers coalitions as it offers a legitimate external source to which children's rights issues can be raised and addressed.
- It is an important avenue for enabling coalitions to have key recommendations supported by an international treaty body that is recognised by their governments and to which the latter are accountable.
- Information from coalitions is used by the Committee in various ways during the pre-session and session
- Through the process of preparing an Alternative report coalitions could have wide ranging and open debates on the status of children and their rights.
- It is a unique opportunity to build new alliances and support to the cause.

Preparation of an Alternative Report paves the way for defining key issues for future work.

- For many coalitions it creates a window of opportunity to have serious dialogue with senior government officials and ministers about the state's efforts to comply with the standards and principles of the Convention.

Role of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

The function of the Committee is to provide an international mechanism for monitoring the progress on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child... Its major tasks are to examine the Initial and Periodic Reports submitted to it by State Parties under Article 44 of the Convention and the realization of the rights of the child. The Committee is considered the highest international authority for interpreting the Convention.

(Extract from the UNICEF Implementation Handbook)

Stage One – The State Report

In preparing the state report to the Committee, governments are expected to consult widely with relevant organizations, interest groups and experts in civil society. At times coalitions are invited to participate in the drafting process under conditions largely dictated by their governments. Not surprisingly coalitions are often dissatisfied with the degree of influence they have in this process. Hence the Committee's pre-sessional working group meeting is a critical chance to raise their concerns. In many countries, once approved by parliament, the final state report is sent to the UN without the coalition having an opportunity to see it. However the state report is not a secret document and coalitions often receive copies through several sources locally or internationally, such as the NGO Group for the CRC Liaison Unit. The main suggestions and reminders for this stage are:

- Keep the question of submission of the state report alive in the minds of government officials. Press them to make a commitment on the deadlines for preparing and completing the report. Many countries have submitted their initial state reports but many are still outstanding and nearly all countries are due to submit periodic reports.
- In instances where there appears to be political will to meet state reporting obligations but very limited capacities within the civil service (possibly one too many international reports for submission and not enough staff) explore ways in which the coalition can play an enabling role. For example the coalition may suggest that the government requests technical assistance from UNICEF or the Offices of the High Commission for Human Rights.
- In instances where there is the capacity but no political will, coalitions could also inform many of their allies and potential allies of the delay and enlist their support to put pressure on the government to comply with the reporting requirements.
- Encourage government officials responsible for drafting the report to have wide-ranging participation/contributions both from other governmental departments and civil society as a whole. Special effort ought to be made to include representatives of hard to reach groups such as deep rural community organizations, indigenous peoples, refugee representative groups and associations/organizations concerned with disabled

- Keep reminding government that the reporting process ought to be used as a catalyst for domestic review and debate, hence adequate budgetary allocations and time ought to be made for this purpose.
- Encourage the government to go ‘public’ with the preparatory process as it demonstrates the ‘seriousness’ they attribute to children and the Convention.
- Inform as many ‘backers’ and potentially new allies of the process and encourage them to contribute whether or not they were approached by the government.

Stage Two – Preparing the Alternative Report

The NGO Group’s Guide on Reporting to the Committee (mentioned above) points out the merits of having as many NGOs as possible co-operating in drafting the Alternative report rather than having several different reports from each NGO. In some countries there are a variety of coalitions or networks, some having a thematic/issue focus, which make the task of one report difficult. In a few countries like India, the sheer size of the population makes it impossible for one network to cover the whole country. Others like the United Kingdom, are a union of more than one country, therefore it is unlikely that one coalition in one of these countries could submit a credible report on the whole union. Yet the principle of co-operation remains central and should be pursued. Some additional suggestions:

- Use the preparation of the Alternative report as an opportunity to enlist more allies, members and supporters to the cause.
- Actively pursue strategies to effectively include children and young people. Let them give their own perspectives and tell their own stories. Then be faithful in carrying their information to the Committee.
- Use it as an opportunity to review the coalition’s priority issues and medium-term work plan.
- Prepare a comprehensive budget for the whole process and begin approaching potential donors.
- Invest a sufficient amount of time and effort to make the Alternative Report as attractive and professional as possible. Remember it is a reflection of the coalition and has added value in building credibility. Develop a list of key issues of concern.
- Plan carefully the participation of members and other interested parties in the drafting process, to ensure as far as possible that everyone has a reasonable and equal opportunity to be informed and contribute.

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- Begin developing a media campaign plan. If there is little experience among coalition members in working with the media, seek help especially from human rights groups that have some experience in this area. The NGO Guide to Reporting also provides some useful ideas on how to time media involvement and information to be given to them.
- The selection of representatives to the pre-session out to be carried out with much wisdom, equity and transparency. Representatives ought to be very knowledgeable and articulate. Coalition representatives have three hours with the Committee and shares this time with other presenters. The time constraint demands a high degree of organisation and incisive contributions from the representatives.

Stage Three – The Pre-sessional Working Group of the Committee

The pre-session is a crucial opportunity for coalitions to have an open discussion with the Committee in order to raise issues that are not adequately addressed in the state report. The intensity and pace of preparations for the pre-session are great and coalitions may neglect a few important details that could further maximise the benefits of the time spent in Geneva while attending the pre-session.

- Shortly before going to the pre-session some coalitions seek an audience with key government officials to discuss with them the issues that will be raised with the Committee. This helps to ensure some degree of transparency on the part of the coalition and signals an interest to enter into or maintain an ongoing dialogue with the government.
- If it is strategically and politically feasible, widely distribute the coalition's key issues of concern and recommendations to the Committee among special interest groups or the public in general.
- Before coming to Geneva do some research to identify useful contacts based in Geneva. It is possible to meet key persons within the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, NGOs that share some of the coalition's interests and officials in other UN bodies such as ILO, WHO and UNHCR. The NGO Group Liaison Unit could assist with arranging appointments. These appointments must be made prior to arrival in Geneva.
- The pre-session is also a useful opportunity to meet NGO representatives from other countries also attending the Committee meetings. The NGO Group Liaison Unit usually arranges a workshop for all NGO participants to share experiences and common concerns in children rights promotion and advocacy.

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- Get in touch with the press office at the United Nations to ascertain how much coverage the coalition can expect from them at the upcoming session. Some larger media houses have an officer posted within the UN. While others make arrangements with the NGO Group Liaison Unit for communication access to their local media houses.

Stage Four – The Plenary Session

The NGO Group Guide to Reporting to the Committee has several very good suggestions of coalition activities that may be pursued both during the period leading up to and during the plenary session. These suggestions are well worth reading in that guide along with those pertaining to the Concluding Observations, Periodic Reports, Local Monitoring and the Theme Days. Here are some highlights:

- Coalitions should attend the plenary session. Although they cannot speak during the meeting, they may participate as influential observers
- It is also possible to communicate with Committee members informally before and during the session in order to present additional information, provide updates, or suggest possible questions
- Concluding Observations are made public on the last day of the Committee's session and the NGO Group Liaison Unit ensures that national coalitions receive copies immediately
- Concluding Observations can be a very useful tool for coalitions to stimulate discussions at national level, exert pressure on the government to implement the recommendations and to lobby for changes in legislation and practice

Periodic Reporting

- The preparation of Periodic Reports is an opportunity for coalitions to conduct a comprehensive review of measures taken to harmonise law and policy with the Convention, as well as to monitor progress made in the fulfilment of children's rights.
- Coalitions ought to prepare a written submission to the State Periodic Report, using the concluding observations from the Committee's consideration of the Initial Report to assess whether or not progress has been made over the intervening years
- The coalition report should provide the Committee with information on the positive and negative changes in key areas, since the Committee's consideration of the Initial Report.

- Since the need for local monitoring is essential, coalitions should not hesitate to submit information to the Committee between State Party reports.
- Coalitions could contact the Committee if the situation in their country worsens rather than improves

UN Committee Theme Days – Once a year, usually in September, the Committee holds a day of general discussion on a thematic issue. Theme days are intended to focus the attention of the international community on one specific aspect of the Convention and to share strategies on programs and policies required to improve the situation.

- For the Committee’s annual Theme Day, coalitions can submit case studies and examples of abuses related to the theme for that year.
- If coalitions attend the Theme Day, oral interventions should not only describe the problem but also make recommendations for improving the situation. Innovative, successful programmes should be cited as examples that may be used in other countries.
- Coalitions have an important role to play in providing the Committee with ideas as to what could be done at the international level in order to draw attention to the subject under discussion.

Stage Four – Post Plenary Session

Coalitions have a great deal of work to do after the Committee’s plenary session as the ***NGO Group Guide to Reporting*** points out. Here are some additional ideas that coalitions may wish to consider:

- Disseminate the Concluding Observations to national coalition members and hold a planning meeting to determine how to carry the recommendations forward.
- Do a constructive, critical analysis of the Committee session, put it in writing and submit it to interested organizations such as the NGO Group for the CRC and the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights.
- Coalitions may involve the media in publicising the concluding observations
- Send the Alternative report to the Secretariats of other UN Treaty bodies to which the government has ratified the Conventions, highlighting the relevant areas for their attention.
- Send the Alternative report to interested groups and networks in your region, for example coalitions, human rights groups and organizations as well as thematic networks on children’s issues.
- Assess the degree to which the coalition’s recommendations to the Committee are reflected in the Committee’s Concluding Observations to the government.

- Do an analysis of the concluding observations with a view to determining which governmental departments would have responsibility for implementing them. Approach these departments to assess their awareness and plans for implementing the Committee's recommendations.
- Seek to ensure the Concluding Observations and the State report are widely disseminated. The mass media could be a useful means of disseminating the information widely.

Other Options

There are a several other international human rights monitoring mechanisms in which coalitions can participate. Save the Children Sweden has produced a practical guide for NGOs entitled *Advocating Children's Rights in the Human Rights System of the United Nations* that orients the newcomer to the UN human rights system and offers useful ideas on how to use the system to advance children rights. Below is an extract of that guide which illustrates how coalitions could intervene in the UN human rights system:

Recommendations for Advocacy Work

There are several ways for NGOs to promote and advocate children's rights issues so that these are raised systematically in the human rights system of the UN, and a child rights perspective is adopted in mechanisms other than the CRC. These may include:

- ? **Participating as Observers** at various sessions of the Commission on Human Rights, sessions of the (Treaty Body) Committees, and the annual meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees.
- ? **Making oral statements** at various sessions of the Commission on Human Rights, the pre-sessional working groups of the Committees and during the first day of the session of the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- ? **Submitting written information formally** to the Commission on Human Rights, the special rapporteurs, the pre-sessional working group of treaty bodies, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Division for the Advancement of Women.
- ? **Submitting written information informally** to participants at the session of the General Assembly, the Commission on Human Rights and Committee members, particularly the so-called country rapporteurs responsible for the examination of reports and concluding observations.
- ? **Submitting the same information** on a specific issue to several mechanisms at a time, if the information is relevant to the work of the mechanisms.
- ? **Holding informal parallel meetings** with government delegations during the sessions of the General Assembly, the Commission in Human Rights, and briefing Committee members informally in sessions outside the scheduled meetings.
- ? **Lobby Special Rapporteurs** so that they consider children's issues and rights in their reports.
- ?

- ◇ **Lobby government delegations** before the sessions of the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights.
- ? **Lobby Committee members** so that general days of discussion on specific subjects are held and general comments/recommendations on specific subjects to child rights made.
- ? **Working together with other organisations** and advocating issues together in order to be more powerful within the system.

There are also several regional intergovernmental groupings such as the Organizations of American States (OAS), the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) and the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAACR), that have within them mechanisms to address human rights. It would be worthwhile getting to know more about them and the complementary functions that they can play in advancing children's rights.

In Conclusion

The guide has provided a range of ideas and tools on how to keep national child rights coalitions vibrant and effective. The NGO Group for the CRC trusts that readers will indeed find it useful for this and other networking endeavours. More importantly it is the hope the guide will strengthen the movement for the defence of human rights for children.

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