



Child Rights Monitoring: Focus on the Philippines

From 2017 to 2020, Save the Children Philippines (SCP) supported the Civil Society Coalition on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC Coalition) and the Children Talk to Children about the UNCRC (C2C) on influencing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) monitoring and Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process through the submission of CRC and UPR reports, as well as lobbying with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

Treaties such as the UNCRC is only as strong as its monitoring system and this is where children and civil society can make the most impact. Together, they can help ensure that states are facilitating changes to improve the conditions to promote child rights and protect children from abuse and exploitation. It is critical then that there are strong civil society organizations that can participate and contribute to child rights monitoring. SCP's partnership with the C2C and CRC Coalition is geared towards the objective of building their capacity to engage in the available human rights platforms such as the UNCRC. Aside from capacity building and organization strengthening, SCP also helped both coalitions to network with non-child focused civil society organizations (CSOs) and human rights groups, and in ensuring continuous gathering of analysis of child rights data through consultations with children and CSOs. This was made possible via the Child Protection and Child Rights Governance Program funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), which includes the Local to Global (LtG) Initiative.

The LtG initiative aims to support CSOs and children in holding States accountable for their commitments and obligations to child rights by increasing their capacity and space to influence regional and global policy discussions.

Philippine Context

The CRC Coalition (a network of 24 child-focused CSOs) and C2C (a network of 18 child-led groups) have been SCP's strong partners in CRR since 2009. Both these groups have elevated the important concerns of Filipino children in national, regional and global platforms. SCP has been a member of CRC Coalition since the 1990s and has been supporting its operations, including a full-time Secretariat, since 2007. SCP has also been supporting C2C, which it helped organize in 2008 together with a CSO partner, Samahan ng Mamamayan-Zone One Tondo, Inc. (SM-ZOTO).

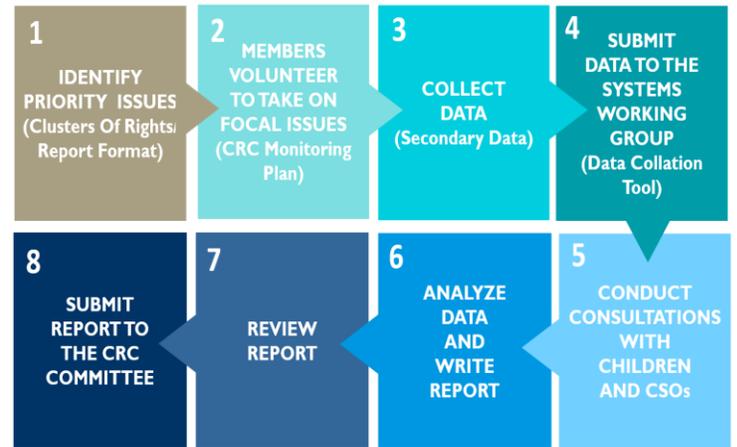
With the increasing threat to human rights, shrinking civic space and disregard for human rights commitments, which characterize the current administration, SCP and its partners believe that it is important to use the UN human rights monitoring mechanisms to highlight key issues affecting children and hold government accountable for the myriad violations and gaps in child rights fulfilment. This context also motivated CSOs to collaborate and create synergies in their human rights monitoring and advocacy efforts to have a stronger voice and to mitigate risks from possible backlash from the government.

Key Accomplishments:

1. UNCRC Alternative Report - 104 children (67girls and 37 boys) were consulted in preparing the NGO Alternative Report, with at least 70% from marginalized sectors. Child-led group network C2C submitted their own Filipino Children's Alternative Report and presented its highlights to the UNCRC Committee last September 2020
2. UPR - the Philippine Government accepted/supported 62% or 37 out of 60 child-focused UPR recommendations of the UNHRC, with 23 of the 37 accepted recommendations pertaining to priority child rights issues raised by the CRC Coalition in its UPR submission.
3. Save the Children, CRC Coalition and C2C also successfully advocated for the inclusion of child participation mechanisms in the monitoring of the National Plan of Action for Children (2017).
4. Advocacy campaign on not lowering the minimum age of criminal responsibility (2018); and
5. Adovcacy for the passage of the Positive Discipline Bill in Congress (which unfortunately was vetoed by the President; 2018).



Preparing the NGO Alternative Report



The Coalition follows a standard process in preparing the alternative report. It prioritizes which issues to focus on based on children's inputs during various consultations, as well as emerging issues that are affecting children such as the government's anti-illegal drugs campaign, online sexual abuse and exploitation, minimum age of criminal responsibility and violence against children, among others. Members then identify which issues to contribute to based on their priorities and areas of operation. Data is collected from national government statistics, local government data, data from their own programs, as well as case studies and existing researches.

To validate the data, the Coalition conducts consultations with children, making sure to gather representation from the three major islands of the Philippines. All data and inputs are farmed out to the different thematic clusters for analysis and drafting. These are submitted to the Coalition's Systems Working Group (SWG) for consolidation. The report is then reviewed and subsequently approved by a task group within the coalition before submission of the report to the UN CRC Committee.

The CRC Coalition is structured in such a way that enables it to perform its mandate of monitoring CRC implementation in the country. It has 5 thematic clusters that correspond to the 5 clusters of rights of the CRC, and also based on the outline of the CRC alternative reporting template. Each thematic cluster is composed of member organizations who have the expertise, interest or experience in the specific themes or issues in a specific cluster. The role of the thematic clusters is to analyze the issues that have been gathered and also often assigned to initially develop specific sections of the report.

The Coalition members are also organized into three geographic clusters, representing the country's three major island groups. Organizations in each cluster help gather data from their assigned geographic area.

Bringing in Children's Voices

Save the Children Philippines worked with child-led organizations in building their capacity and providing support to their child rights monitoring activities, as well as in furthering their advocacy in the different Child Rights Reporting global platforms.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – Member organizations of C2C had been continually involved in the child rights monitoring process from 2009 to 2020. As part of preparing their CRC report, C2C conducted consultations with indigenous children in conflict-affected areas in two provinces in Mindanao (southern Philippines) and with children affected by Typhoon Haiyan in the Visayas (central part of the country) to understand their issues and gather their views and recommendations. These consultations enabled C2C not only to capture the situation of children in farther regions and include these in its report, but also sensitized C2C members on the issues of other marginalized children and were able to share these concerns with then UN SRSG on VAC, Marta Santos Pais during a dialogue in 2017.

C2C also focused on further validating the content of their draft report with member organizations through area-based sessions, and conducted orientation sessions on the UNCRC with children in different parts of the country. C2C also led the development of monitoring tools for the Philippine National Plan of Action for Children, and developed and facilitated the consultations with their peers in subsequent regional consultations. The results of their consultations were then presented in dialogues with key government agencies and international bodies. They were able to participate and provide inputs to global and regional consultations on Online Child Protection, Digital Environment, Children on the Move, Children and the Environment, and Violence Against Children to name a few. They had also partnered with the CRC Coalition to provide area-based inputs in discussions on the War on Drugs, Child Marriage and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on children. The children's UNCRC report was launched in 2018 and was updated for submission to the CRC Committee in February of 2020.

They were also able to bring their key issues to UN-led activities such as the Day of General Discussion in Geneva, Switzerland last 2019, and in the UNCRC Pre-session activities for the Philippines in 2020.



C2C conducting child rights orientation for children in their barangays and schools.

Universal Periodic Review (UPR)– Following the submission of the country's UPR Report in 2017, children were engaged in orientations regarding the UPR and its role in CRR, including joint viewing of the UN HRC Plenary Session livestream where the Philippine delegation presented its National Report on the UPR. Child-friendly briefers had been disseminated to child-led organizations and live webinar discussions were held to provide UPR information for the children.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - Children were engaged in orientations and consultations for the SDGs in 2019 and 2021. Child-led organizations sent their representatives to learn and discuss priority child rights issues relating to the selected SDG goals for the years mentioned above. The results of their discussions were submitted to Child Rights Connect for the consolidation of the global report.

The children's inputs in 2019 were also part of the CRC Coalition's agenda, in their participation to the High-Level Political Forum in New York last July 2019 as represented by its members Plan International and World Vision.

CRC Coalition ensured that the NGO Alternative Report went through child-informed processes, with a total of 104 children (67girls and 37 boys) consulted in preparing the NGO Alternative Report, with at least 70% from marginalized sectors. C2C also conducted their child-led CRC monitoring and were able to tap an annual average of 300 children from 2017 to 2019.

Children's Thoughts on Child Participation in CRM

One of the key lessons that I've learned based on my experience would always be "Children Matter." I grew up in a society where people would always belittle children, where children can't be a leader, where children can't speak up, and that we are not capable of doing something. But with the experience I have had, I witnessed and experienced that children can do lots of things, children can be a leader, children can be an advocate, and children can be a voice and speak up for what they think is right, not just for them but for their fellow children. as well. – Jeff, 17

For children who have doubts about participating in organizations active in child rights advocacy, I could say that having doubts is completely okay, but make those doubts a reason to gather more information about it and be intrigued by the idea. In that way, your doubts can be transformed into the curiosity that will eventually lead you to participate in those organizations where your voices are needed the most. We have the right to participate. Therefore, it would be better if we actively use it so more children can have a voice. – Ericka, 18

Beyond the Alternative Report

The CRC Coalition and C2C ensured that the work continues even after the submission of the reports. Both actively engaged in forums with other CSOS, academe, government agencies, and donor communities to share the highlights of their report. They also conducted media briefings to share key issues and recommendations based on their priority issues.

Throughout the course of the project cycle, the CRC Coalition and C2C engaged with various UN treaty bodies and mechanisms to ensure that important child rights issues in the Philippines are highlighted at every opportunity and pressure is exerted on the Philippine government to address these concerns. The CRC Coalition was able to engage with the UNCRC in relation to its NGO Alternative report, the Human Rights Council in line with the 3rd Universal Periodic Review of the Philippines, the High-Level Political Forum on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN SRSG on VAC on priority child protection concerns and the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA).



Children were involved in the development and dissemination of IEC materials on the UNCRC.

Most Effective Models of Delivery

Partnership with CSOs and children's groups and ensuring child informed and child led CRR processes

Partnerships with CSOs and children's groups was an effective strategy to hold States accountable in upholding, protecting and promoting children's rights. Having been oriented on CRR and on facilitating meaningful children's participation, both these groups have ensured child informed and child led processes in the conduct of their activities. CRC Coalition's advocacies, researches, NGO alternative report and UPR submissions have always included the voices of children, which are taken from consultations conducted with them. Meanwhile, capacities of children from C2C were strengthened so they can conduct their own CRC monitoring activities in their communities, design their own CRC monitoring tools, facilitate discussions and interviews with other children, plan for the implementation of their advocacies, analyze information they have gathered, and engage with UN treaties and mechanisms.

Strengthening the organizational capacity of child-led organizations and CSOs

CRC Coalition and C2C's competencies on child rights monitoring and reporting were further strengthened in the form of training on the UNCRC and the CRC reporting & monitoring process, the UPR, requirements on meaningful child participation, and other thematic child rights issues. The training activities enabled CRC Coalition and C2C to strengthen their child rights expertise and to engage with UN treaties/ mechanisms to highlight concerns of Filipino children in these platforms. Moreover, SCP also provided financial and organizational development assistance to CRC Coalition and C2C (as well as to ZOTO, the adult support organization of C2C) in order to strengthen their governance, thematic, child protection policies, child rights monitoring system, external relations and networking, influencing and advocacy, and financial management system for more efficient and effective programming.

Networking and sustaining good relationships with duty bearers and stakeholders

– At the national level, CRC Coalition and C2C sustained and strengthened good relationships with duty bearers and stakeholders in line with its CRR activities. Both closely worked with the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC), Commission on Human Rights and other government line agencies in monitoring and reporting on children's rights and conducting consultations and bilateral meetings to follow up on UPR and UNCRC Concluding Observations and recommendations. CRC Coalition and C2C have also managed to sustain and even form new alliances with child rights related NGOs, other CSOs and the media to promote its child rights advocacies and CRR work.

At the global level, CRC Coalition and C2C also maintained good relationships with Child Rights Connect, SC Geneva Advocacy Office, Office of the SRSG on VAC and some members of the CRC Committee and are often invited to participate in their activities.



C2C members during one of their year-end evaluation workshops.



Both CRC Coalition and C2C engaged the government in presenting the results of their Child Rights Monitoring, and the contents of both their alternative reports

Challenges

Some key challenges which the program faced during its 5 years of implementation included:

Developing tools and systems for consolidating and storing data

– The two coalitions are continuously exploring which tools and child rights monitoring systems will be most efficient in consolidating data, and most effective in encouraging members to contribute data. The CRC Coalition is now finalizing the revised CRMS platform, as well as the CRMS manual which would guide members on the purpose and processes in gathering data.

Mobilizing coalition members for data collection

– There were challenges in sustaining data collection amongst CRC Coalition members, some of whom cited the CRMS was not user-friendly, and lack of time to input large amounts of information into the current tools. Meanwhile, C2C had been limited by the restrictive quarantine measures which has led the children to gather data via remote platforms in the past year.

Building consensus on specific issues

– The coalitions are made up of member organizations that implements a spectrum of priority programs on various issues. This sometimes proves to be a challenge in identifying which issues to be prioritized as a coalition. However, the both the CRC Coalition and C2C has addressed this challenge by ensuring they follow a participatory process of identifying their Child Rights Advocacy Agenda and banner issues.

Quick response to issues

– There is also a challenge in being able to come out with statements on emerging issues since it would require a certain number of members to approve the coalition's statement. This had been addressed by CRC Coalition by strengthening their advocacy and communications policies and protocols.

Mobilizing resources

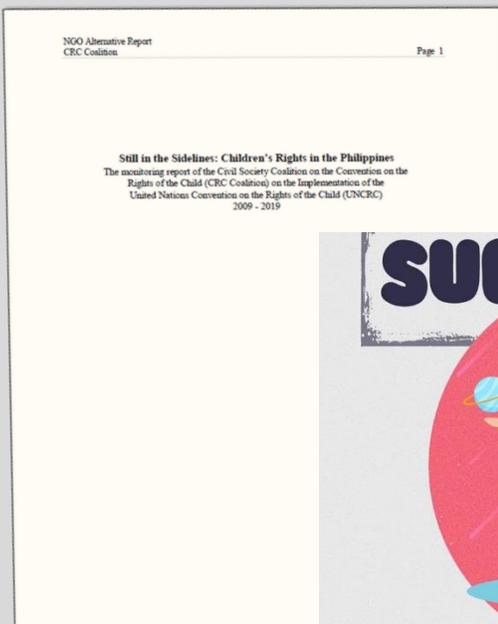
– Both coalitions struggle in finding diversified resources aside from a few donors, including SCP. There is a continuing need to strengthen the resource mobilization capacity of both organizations to ensure their sustainability.

Lessons Learned



In summary, the program's experience in CRR emphasizes the importance of a systematic process of monitoring and data collection from committed and engaged coalition members. This was made possible by strategic investments on capacities of both coalitions, both thematically and in their organizational development so that they can make efficient decisions, develop tools and connect with strategic networks and partners.

Meaningful child participation has also served as a key element in ensuring the validity and relevance of the issues covered by the two alternative reports. And lastly, both coalitions have grown into their roles as advocates, and are able to mobilize their collective strength into holding duty-bearers accountable in the fulfillment of children's rights.



For more information or to request a copy of the Philippine NGO Alternative Report and/or the Filipino Children's Report, please contact Olivia.burgos@savethechildren.org or Minerva.Cabiles@savethechildren.org