

# 6 Partners and working relations

## **By the end of this chapter you will:**

- understand the importance of working in partnership to fulfil children's rights
- have identified a range of potential partners who can help you bring about changes in children's lives (including the State)
- understand the key principles for choosing partners and managing working relations.

*This chapter builds on and requires an understanding of the core CRP principles, tools and processes given in Chapter 2.*

This chapter explores the challenges of working in partnership. It tells you what we mean by 'partners' and how you can work effectively together to bring about the changes you want in children's lives.

## **Why work in partnership?**

You are more likely to achieve the changes you want for children if you work with other groups that can support the fulfilment of children's rights. Your partnerships should be based on common values, clear positions and clarity of roles. You need to make careful decisions about the partners you want to work with.

By working with partners you can:

- strengthen communities and their capacity to hold duty-bearers to account
- create a platform for accountability and openness

- increase legitimacy – on a long-term basis, children’s rights are better secured through national rather than international organisations
- improve the sustainability of your work through developing and supporting local structures
- increase the potential scale and scope of your work
- encourage mutual learning through co-operative relationships
- promote participatory approaches through local organisations.

## Who are your partners?

The term ‘partner’ can cover a wide range of working relations in many different contexts. It refers to any organisation that works with another in a formal or semi-formal manner towards a shared goal. Partners may be regional, national or local NGOs, networks, community-based organisations (CBOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), child and youth associations, trade union movements, women’s organisations, parliamentary groups, manufacturing companies, government ministries, international NGOs, UN agencies, and others... The list is long!

Wherever possible, you are likely to form key partnerships with local organisations. They are often better acquainted with programme/project areas, more sensitive to local cultures and traditions, and thus able to maintain better relationships with local communities.

The box opposite lists some of the different types of partners you may work with.

### Case study

Save the Children’s experience of working in coalitions and evolving partnerships in **Iraq** was based on the creation of a network of international and national NGOs in 2005. The network aimed to integrate a core consideration of children’s rights within the new Iraqi Constitution. Despite very difficult operating conditions, the Children’s Rights and Constitution Network was formed. The network put together a strong advocacy plan based on good research. It has continued to operate beyond the drafting of the constitution.

## Who are your partners?

- **Local, national or regional NGOs**, including large, medium or small NGOs, specialised or general NGOs, coalitions, alliances and networks.
- **Common interest associations**: organisations of people rather than for people; usually membership organisations bound together by a mutual concern or objective. These include trade unions, professional associations and guilds, child and youth associations, and school clubs.
- **Community-based organisations (CBOs)**: organisations of people rather than for people, representing and accountable to their constituencies either formally or informally (according to tradition). These include village committees, producers' groups, co-operatives, women's groups, credit organisations, parent-teacher associations, and federated CBOs (eg, farmers' unions).
- **Private sector**: NGOs are entering into an increasing variety of partnerships with the private sector. These include transnational corporations, individual companies (local and international), local chambers of commerce or industry, business federations and the media.
- **Government**: national, regional/provincial, district and local levels of government. These include: government-run institutions, government-funded pilot projects, municipalities, coalitions of municipalities, and parliamentary groups.
- **Support and academic institutions**: these include academic, training and research institutions, and professional associations (lawyers, doctors, engineers, journalists, etc).
- **Faith-based groups and institutions**
- **Multilateral and bilateral agencies**: for example, the European Union (EU), UNICEF, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and others, although relationships with these organisations will often be in their capacity as donors, rather than as partners.

## How to work in partnership

There are a range of partners you might want to work with, and there are many ways of working together. To achieve the changes you want for children, your partnerships should be based on the following general principles.

### General principles

- A shared vision and commitment towards children's rights
- Common values, policies and practices concerning non-discrimination, the protection of children from abuse and exploitation and the best interests of children. These will be reflected in an organisation's mandate, vision and governance structures.
- Common objectives, clearly defined and measurable
- Mutual learning and recognition through well-planned systems
- Mutual respect for different cultural perspectives, reflected in partners' profiles, approaches, own networks and personnel
- Mutual empowerment
- Mutual accountability through well-managed systems
- Openness and trust, including regular reviews of the partnership itself
- Impartiality, so that children's best interests are prioritised over any political or other affiliation.

Your partnerships should be about influencing others and being open to influence yourself. It is a process through which both partners gradually learn from each other.

### Identifying and choosing your partners

Your CRSA and programme priorities will determine the type of partner(s) you work with. You need to know the strengths and weaknesses of both your own organisation and any potential partners before entering into a working relationship.

Among other things, you need to know your potential partners':

- **vision, objectives and policies** – what makes the organisation what it is, the reason it was set up and by whom, and how long it has been operating for
- **activities and ways of working** – current and planned activities, practices, achievements (expected results), and, crucially, the extent to which children are involved in project planning, implementation and monitoring

- **relationship to target group and beneficiaries:** how is the organisation viewed by the community? Does the organisation have good working relationships with others?
- **organisational structure** – membership, staff, leadership and participation in decision-making.
- **organisational capacity** for project and financial management, its planning and administrative capability
- **funding situation** and capacity to raise funds, as well as who they receive funds from
- **information and advocacy work** – knowledge of child rights issues. Does the organisation carry out information and advocacy work?
- **legitimacy**, legal status and constitution. Are audited accounts, reports and references available?

### Case studies

In **South East Asia** a number of **children and young people's organisations** have been set up. Their members have a strong commitment to improving the lives of children. Most of these children and young people are struggling to keep their organisations going, having limited experience in management, policy development, administration, proposal writing and fundraising. What they do have is experience and expertise on children's rights issues, having been trained as peer educators and having implemented projects for local and international NGOs. Typically, such projects have a limited life span and when the project comes to an end there is no provision for children and young people to continue working on children's rights issues, unless they organise themselves. Save the Children has entered into partnership with such organisations, helping them to develop, with a strong focus on the principles of accountability, participation, openness, the best interests of the child, non-discrimination and inclusion. The aim is to support children and youth organisations to become strong and autonomous members of civil society. Challenges include understanding partnership, roles and responsibilities of all involved, power relations and agenda setting. Successful partnership working requires openness and flexibility on both sides.

*continued overleaf*

### **Case studies** *continued*

Save the Children in **South Africa** is supporting the development of new legislation concerning sexual offences, through a revision of the Children's Act. We have facilitated consultations with various stakeholders, including children, on what the new law should be. The Children's Bill Working Group is a coalition of children's rights organisations, and as such, is a key partner for Save the Children. The coalition's lobbying efforts have resulted in significant changes to the text of the bill, with the government reintroducing important clauses that had been removed.

### **Partnership agreements**

You need a partnership agreement to set out your mutual commitment and clear roles and responsibilities. It should be mutually binding and signed by both or all parties.

Make sure your agreement includes:

- **a partnership vision:** What do we believe in and what changes do we want to bring about for children?
- **partnership objectives:** What are the reasons for working together? Define what you all need in terms of experience, methods, knowledge and capacity to achieve your vision and specific changes for children.
- **partnership outputs:** What will your partnership produce? This may include projects, studies, networks, etc.
- **a partnership strategy:** How will you all achieve the objectives and outputs?
- **partnership activities:** List the main activities you will all carry out to achieve your objectives and outputs.
- **a partnership process:** How will the partnership be managed? Be clear about what you need to produce in terms of: reporting; child protection and other obligations; respective roles and responsibilities; financial arrangements; approaches and mechanisms for conflict resolution. You should also define the circumstances under which the partnership can be terminated by either or all side(s).

Whenever you decide to end a partnership, it is important to evaluate what you achieved together and how successful you were in bringing about changes in children's lives. This will inform any future partnerships you enter into.

## Working with and enabling the State

All States that have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are primary duty-bearers and have the main responsibility for ensuring the realisation of children's rights in their country. In principle, they are accountable to children and adults of that country and to the international community. The State also has an obligation to support parents and primary caregivers to ensure that children's rights are fulfilled.

Working with the State can increase the effectiveness of your interventions and ensure that any improvements are sustainable and long term. A key aim of such a partnership would be to encourage and support the State to meet its obligations to children. You would also aim to facilitate greater involvement of civil society in the work of the partnership as it develops.

States vary in their commitment to fulfilling the rights of their citizens, including children, as well as in their willingness and ability to fulfil their obligations. The opportunities for, and barriers to, you working with the State will vary according to your local context. Sometimes there is no option but to work in partnership with the State.

Whatever the context, working in partnership with the State is important because:

- it creates a relationship of trust and understanding between you and the State
- it can increase your effectiveness as the State has a unique insight and experience, and a crucial role to play in the fulfilment of children's rights
- it ensures sustainability, with the expectation that the State will work with increased capacity, larger scale and greater impact over time than you can.

Partnership arrangements might involve:

- secondment of specialist technical staff into government departments
- capacity-building programmes for State officials at different levels
- demonstration of effective practice through joint or contracted service delivery in selected areas
- supporting State bodies to develop and implement new policies.

Whatever method of partnership you choose, you will need to:

- identify appropriate fora during the **planning** process through which the state can contribute, with roles and expectations clearly defined.
- **implement** programme interventions that strengthen the State's own capacity

- **monitor and evaluate** your work in ways that develop and apply systems and indicators for data gathering, analysis and feedback processes in collaboration with the State.

All these ways of working together can pose particular challenges. You may encounter bureaucratic rules and regulations that lead to frustrating delays. There may be a different organisational culture, ideology and way of working. This may limit the potential for effective advocacy work on your part. You will need to know how decisions are made and what opportunities exist to influence decision-makers at all levels of government. This should be an important part of your CRSA.

Consider the following issues if you are working in partnership with the State:

- **Independence:** If your partnerships involve political parties, governments or their agencies, does this raise questions about political independence? You may encounter conflicts of interest by involving duty-bearers in partnerships or coalitions.
- **Reputation:** An organisation's reputation is affected by those it works with closely. Although a government partner may offer strong support for the issue at hand, there may be other aspects of the partner that your organisation is not comfortable with.
- **Motivation:** There is often likely to be greater uncertainty about the motives of government and other high-risk partners. This can lead to direct conflict of interests.
- **Target or partner?** Working with the State as a partner means you may be in a better position to influence them and the positions they take. They might also be thinking the same about your organisation! Be careful not to blur the lines between who is the partner and who is the target. Recognise the power imbalance that a partnership with government may involve.

## **Remember!**

If you decide to work in partnership with the State, you are looking to support it in fulfilling its obligations to children over the long term. It is vital that you continue to work closely with civil society groups to support them in their role as watchdog, in holding the state to account and in advocating for children's rights.

## Case study

In **Mexico City**, Save the Children works in partnership with a network of community-based early childcare centres. Despite 30 years of experience and excellence in providing services, when preschool education became compulsory the community-based centres were in danger of being forced to close. This was because their educators were not formally qualified and their buildings did not meet legal specifications. There was an urgent need to secure official recognition of these initiatives by women in their own communities. So, representatives from NGOs involved in education, the childcare centres themselves, and government officials for national childcare and education agreed to set up a working group on the issue. It took two years to agree a set of new regulations in which the efforts of civil society and the quality of community services were officially acknowledged. The working group still meets and has developed a set of indicators to evaluate the quality of early childhood education.

## Working with partners and the programme cycle

Working with partners should feature at every stage of your programme cycle. You are aiming to:



- share **awareness and understanding** of human rights principles and children's rights programming with your partners



- assess the capacity of civil society groups and potential partners (including the State), and the dynamics between them, through your CRSA



- take into account communities' capacity to support the rights of children at all levels when drawing up your programme plans and choosing the partners you want to work with



- reflect the range of your partnerships in programme implementation. These can link to the three pillars. For example, your partners could be a local NGO building emergency shelters (pillar 1); a national NGO building the capacity of government

officials in child protection skills (pillar 2); and your own support for a national coalition of civil society groups working on children's rights (pillar 3)



- learn lessons and feed back your experience to make further improvements to your programme and to inform your advocacy. Use your **monitoring, evaluation, learning and feedback** systems to do this. Involve your partners in gathering and analysing data and communicating results.

### Case study

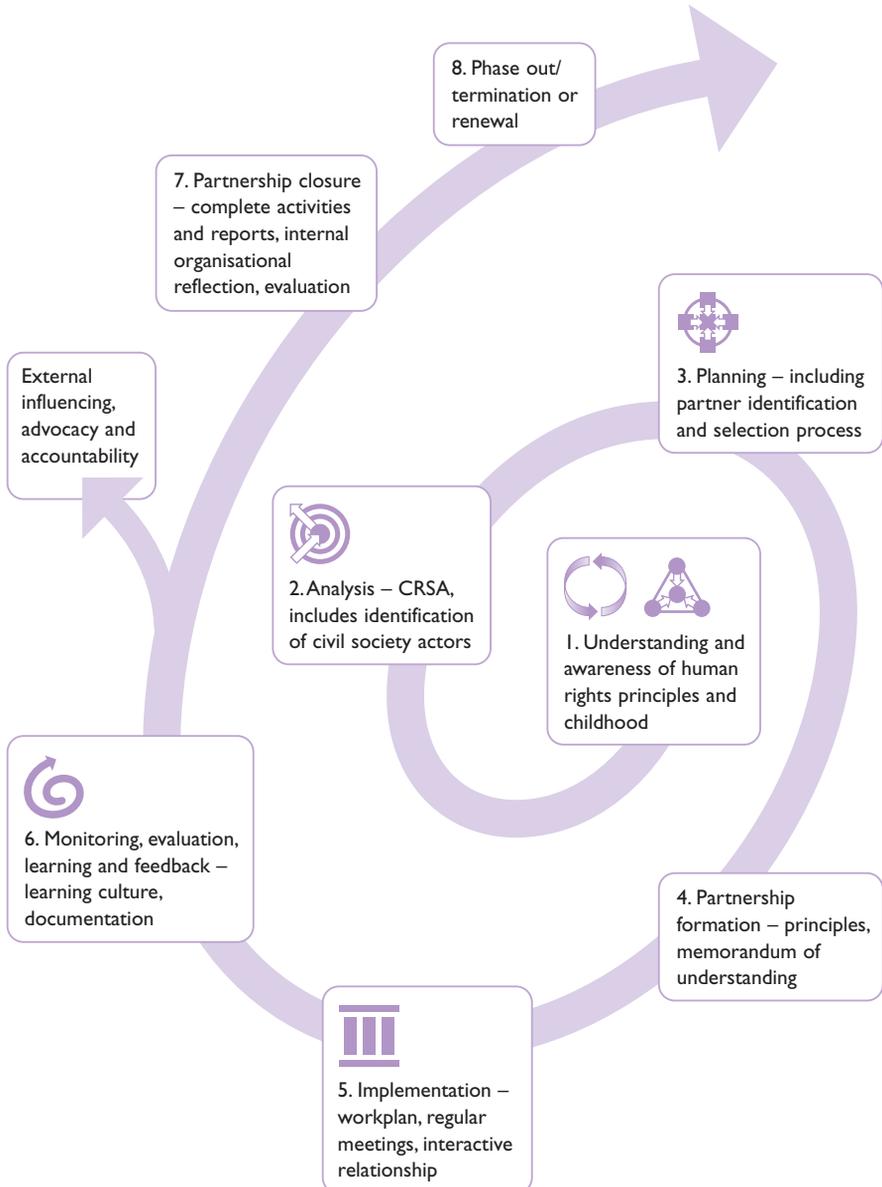
In the aftermath of the Ceausescu era in **Romania**, and with growing awareness of the extent of child abuse (particularly the conditions of children in care institutions), Save the Children decided to support a national children's NGO. During the first three years we supported the setting up of governance structures within the organisation. By-laws were drafted and approved, stating that the organisation should be governed by representative democracy through annual members' meetings. Roles and responsibilities were divided between the governing board and the executive director. We also helped with programme development.

From the mid-1990s we gave financial programme support and technical support for capacity building alongside our other partners in eastern Europe. We provided training on the UNCRC and its reporting mechanisms, as well as meetings, workshops and conferences on issues such as child sexual abuse, violence, child labour, street children, and children in institutions. The NGO developed technical skills in counselling and conceptual frameworks, including rights-based programming. A Communication and Information Centre was set up, acting as a focal point for UNCRC monitoring, as a research centre and as a base for advocacy work on children's rights.

In 1997 the NGO became a member of the International Save the Children Alliance (Salvati Copiii – Save the Children Romania). It is currently supported by Save the Children Sweden, including setting up a marketing department so that it can secure a stable income. It is also reviewing its governing structures to respond to wider changes in Romania.

A possible **partnership cycle** and its various steps can be illustrated in the following way and is shown within the framework of the programme cycle in the next diagram:

### Partnership in the programme cycle



## Codes of conduct

You may require your partners to be familiar with, or in some cases sign up to, certain codes of conduct – for example, on child protection. The table below shows how you can make sure that such agreements – in this case the child protection (CP) code of conduct – become more than just a piece of paper.

### Child protection (CP) code of conduct and local NGOs

Requirement	Options/resources
Build CP clause into partnership agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use standard CP contract clause</li> </ul>
Clarify roles and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build into partnership agreement</li> </ul>
Provide ongoing support to partner development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include partners in CP training and other events on CP</li> <li>• Schedule updates/briefings at regular intervals</li> <li>• Support development of CP focal point in partner agency</li> </ul>
Briefing of partner staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of CP and other supporting material</li> <li>• Initial introductory workshop</li> </ul>
Monitoring of CP compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build CP updates into project reporting mechanism</li> <li>• Schedule CP audits</li> <li>• Agree feedback sessions via staff and children</li> <li>• Include discussion of CP as part of scheduled visits</li> <li>• Observation during visits</li> </ul>
Establish case management procedures that cover CP issues in partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft joint reporting procedure</li> <li>• Agree roles, responsibilities, lines of reporting and accountability in relation to CP incidents</li> </ul>
Measure impact of CP on partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree impact assessment process and indicators</li> </ul>
Ensure process is established for succession planning/continuity after partnership arrangement ends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree CP development plan</li> <li>• Identify continuing support to partner on CP issues</li> </ul>

(Adapted from Save the Children's programme in Liberia)

Yes, but...

**“Why can’t we just do things ourselves? Working with partners is expensive, takes a lot of time and often doesn’t bring results.”**

It’s true that working with partners, especially small, local NGOs, takes a lot of time, energy, skill and financial resources. But the rewards are great. Local partners help you to ensure sustainable solutions, improve your understanding of local realities, build up local advocacy networks, provide greater potential for replication and scale, and work towards greater accountability.

**“How about in emergency situations or where partners simply don’t exist?”**

There may be times when you need to set up operations that bring services directly to children and their communities. For example, in an emergency in a country with weak and/or overburdened civil society networks, or in conflict situations where the possibilities for access and humanitarian intervention are very limited. But even in these situations you should try to form local partnerships where possible and will be working in coalitions at national and international levels as well as working with state partners.

**“In some countries the state simply doesn’t exist and in other countries non-state actors govern some regions. What do we do about the imperative to work with “state partners” in these situations?”**

Just as each situation is different and constantly changes, so the form of your partnerships will also evolve. Even if working with the state at national level is challenging, there are good examples of where local government partnerships have flourished. These may be the only way of gaining access to vulnerable children. Save the Children has worked with the humanitarian wing of non-state parties in southern Sudan for many years, and has co-ordinated with non-state actors in northern Sri Lanka and formed vital partnerships with local authorities in Somalia. So, it is possible. But you need to stay impartial and true to your vision to see children’s rights fulfilled. This can create the most unexpected of partnerships!

**“Mainstreaming the child protection code of conduct is already a challenge for our staff, given the local cultural realities. Extending this to our partners and making it a contractual condition seems unrealistic and unreasonable.”**

If you have a child protection or other code of conduct you may want your partners to adopt the same. If you have chosen your partners carefully, on the basis of shared values and vision, it is not unreasonable to ask them to consider adopting such a code. Especially as it encourages all involved to work with children in responsible, safe and respectful ways.

**“How can we apply the child protection code of conduct to commercial companies whose mandate is so different from our own?”**

You will find some notable successes of NGOs working with private sector partners and helping them build a code of conduct on child protection into their working practices. For example, working in a partnership of international agencies and donors with trucking companies contracted to deliver food aid in southern Africa in 2002 led to code of conduct agreements in that and similar partnerships. Code of conduct agreements have also been reached with construction companies, as in Mozambique when a new bridge was being constructed across the Zambezi.

## Where to go for more information

*Common understanding in relation to the State and Civil Society* for Save the Children Denmark, Save the Children Sweden and Save the Children Norway, 2006

This sets out the rationale for different relationships, key principles and approaches. It takes a strong rights-based approach.

*Partnership Policy and Guidelines and Partnership Implementing Guide*, Save the Children in Uganda and Save the Children Denmark, 2006

Step-by-step guides to working with a wide range of partners. They contain examples, formats and checklists that, though produced specifically for work in Uganda, can be adapted and used worldwide.

*Child Protection Policy*, Save the Children, 2003

*Keeping Children Safe: A toolkit for child protection*, Keeping Children Safe Coalition, 2006

*A tool for programme staff to undertake a CRP assessment of a partner organisation*, Save the Children Denmark, 1999

You can use this tool to assess a partner organisation in terms of how it understands and applies the CRP principles. It will help programme officers make a baseline assessment so they can measure the impact of capacity building (training and support for children's rights programming).

### Recommended websites and materials on the web

For extensive information on working with others on children's rights, including national and international coalitions and advocacy initiatives, publications and guidelines, see [www.crin.org](http://www.crin.org)

*The Partnering Toolbook*, Tennyson R, International Business Leaders Forum and Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, 2003. A complete guide to working with partners with tools written to assist you at every phase in the partnership relationship. Internet access to the book is found at: <http://thepartneringinitiative.org>

For more information on how to work with the **media** and guidance for the media when working with children, see [www.mediawise.org.uk](http://www.mediawise.org.uk), and *The Media and Children's Rights*, MediaWise, 2005 (commissioned by UNICEF).

For more information on community-based initiatives against child trafficking in the Mekong sub-region, see [www.mekongchildrensforum.com](http://www.mekongchildrensforum.com)

See [www.intrac.org](http://www.intrac.org) for more guidance on NGO and civil society capacity building.