

## 9 Becoming a rights-based organisation

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

- understand what a rights-based organisation is
- know what steps to take for your own organisation to become rights-based.

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

*“Becoming a child rights-focused organisation requires profound changes, as much at the level of values and clear principles as at adequate organisational structures.”*

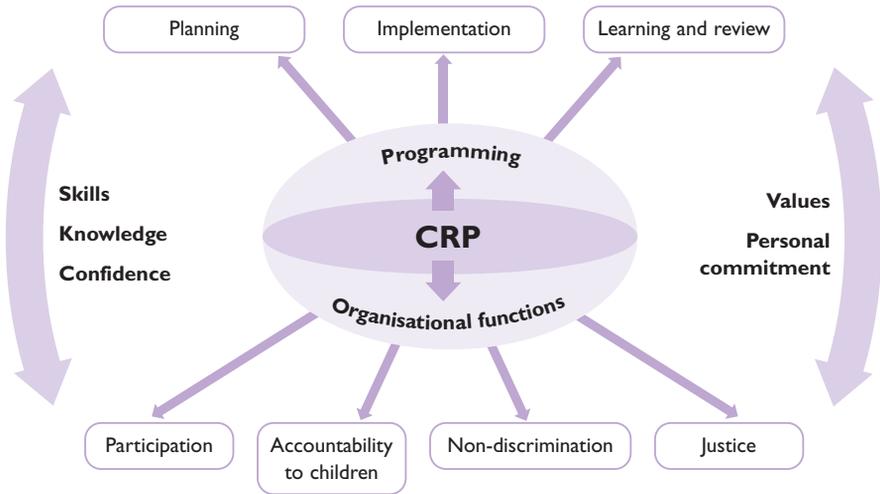
*From Experiences and Lessons Learned in the Framework of Implementing Child Rights Programming in the Latin American Region, Save the Children Sweden, 2006*

This chapter explains what a rights-based organisation is, and shows practical steps you can take throughout your organisation to become rights-based.

### **What is a rights-based organisation?**

A rights-based organisation applies human rights values and principles to itself at all levels through its internal policies and practices. It doesn't just talk about them to others! It promotes participation, accountability and non-discrimination as much in its internal procedures as in its programme activities. In all of its dealings it treats people with respect and dignity, and in all of its actions it demonstrates a commitment to equity and fairness. The diagram overleaf (taken from the International Save the Children Alliance *CRP Handbook*, 2005) shows what a child rights-based organisation

**Aspects of a rights-based organisation**



looks like – on the outside (its programmes) and on the inside (organisational structures).

The principle of organisational justice is a crucial one for rights-based organisations, so we go into a bit more detail on this below.

**Organisational justice**

Becoming a rights-focused organisation demands addressing issues related to organisational justice.<sup>1</sup> As an employer, you are a duty-bearer, and your staff are rights-holders. But your staff also have duties and you, as employer, have certain rights. In human resource and organisational development terms, a ‘psychological contract’ is established between you as an employer and your members of staff. This is made up of the set of reciprocal expectations held by you both about obligations and entitlements – what your staff will do for you as their employer, and what they expect to receive and how they expect to be treated in return.

Organisational justice focuses on the perception of an individual or group about the fairness of the treatment they have received, and the behavioural reactions that follow from this. Rights-based organisations work hard to ensure high standards of organisational justice. There are three dimensions to organisational justice:

**Distributive justice:** Do your staff perceive the distribution of praise, rewards, workloads or other organisational demands and benefits to be fair? This may have implications for your organisation's wage differentials, salary structures, job evaluation, benefits packages, and recognition processes.

**Procedural justice:** Do your staff perceive the application of organisational rules and procedures to be fair and consistent? This is characterised by consistency of implementation; impartiality; basing decisions on accurate information and reasonable analysis; mechanisms to correct inappropriate decisions; opportunities for staff to have their voices heard, to participate in decision-making and have their concerns represented; and compatibility with ethical and moral standards.

**Interactional justice:** Can staff openly communicate with and trust their managers? This concerns the quality of interpersonal treatment received at the hands of decision-makers – whether the individual feels that the reasons underlying decisions and resource allocation were clearly and adequately explained to them; and whether those responsible for implementing a decision treated them with dignity and respect.

### Staff morale, motivation and retention

It is no coincidence that people who work for rights-based organisations are strongly committed to their work. Such commitment arises from a particularly close personal identification with the mission, values and principles of the organisation they work for.

So if a rights-focused organisation takes actions or decisions that are perceived by staff to be contrary to these values and principles, it is seen as a denial of organisational justice. Staff may feel a very real sense of personal betrayal, which is damaging to their own individual sense of integrity, thereby resulting in anger and resentment. For this reason, the way you run your organisation – its processes and procedures – is as key to staff morale, motivation and retention as your achievements in the field.

### How to be a rights-based organisation

No two rights-based organisations are the same. Each organisation has different staff teams, has its own culture and history, and operates in different environments. You need to find your own path to becoming a rights-based

organisation. But there is a lot of experience you can benefit from and adapt to your context. Save the Children's experience has been documented in *A Study to Benchmark Progress in Adopting and Implementing Child Rights Programming* (2004). (See also the case study from Save the Children Sweden later in this chapter.)

## Rights-based principles

Here are some steps you can take to make sure that your policies and procedures reflect your move towards a rights-based organisation.

### 1. Non-discrimination

- Change working hours to consider family commitments. For example, in Kenya, Friday is a half day in Save the Children offices, so allowing staff time to make the long journey home, get to the local market and be with their families for the weekend.
- Improve access for people with disabilities.
- Your recruitment procedures and terms and conditions should actively encourage applications from a diverse range of groups, reflecting the diversity of the communities you work with.
- Develop codes of conduct based on respect and protection.
- Carry out communication and education work on non-discrimination (including policies, practices and procedures) through publications, debates, discussions and staff review mechanisms, eg, development of a poster campaign.

### 2. Dignity, respect and justice

- Implement security, health and safety measures.
- Set up mechanisms for feedback and praise.
- Set up mechanisms for reward and remuneration that are fair and transparent.
- Ensure staff representation, eg, staff unions.
- Adopt transparent and consultative decision-making processes, eg, in developing strategies, policies, organisational changes, and moving/changing localities.
- Develop effective internal communications, eg, staff newsletter, intranet.
- Adopt a behavioural code of conduct.
- Ensure you invest in ethical companies.

### 3. Accountability

Based on openness, transparency and effective communication, this can be achieved through:

- codes of conduct
- contracts of employment
- job descriptions
- plans and budgets
- clarity of expectations
- definition of competencies
- reporting mechanisms
- audit procedures
- performance management processes
- grievance and disciplinary procedures.

### 4. Participation and empowerment

Your staff should be able to participate fully and be empowered through:

- induction procedures, eg, introduction to the organisation, its goals, values, strategies, policies, working methods, basic routines
- appropriate access to support
- equitable, transparent resource allocation with inclusive decision-making processes
- delegation that respects competencies, potential and confidence
- opportunities for growth and development (secondment, acting up, training, mentoring, etc).

### 5. Working with children

You should prioritise developing the following:

- child protection policy
- impact assessments looking at harm to children
- adapted recruitment and induction procedures
- child-friendly spaces in the workplace
- performance management processes
- implementation of practice standards in children's participation
- ways to involve children in governing structures
- ways to involve children in planning processes
- ways to involve children in implementing, monitoring and evaluating programmes
- child-friendly communication strategies.

Responsibilities of a child rights-based organisation<sup>2</sup> (managers and staff)

Responsibilities towards children	Responsibilities towards partners	Responsibilities towards staff	Responsibilities towards supporters and donors
<p><b>Feedback,</b> monitoring, evaluation, review and audit mechanisms to assess <b>impact, effectiveness, use of resources and efficiency</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assess impact of work on children</li> <li>• children give feedback on programmes and are involved in reviews</li> <li>• programme reviews</li> <li>• performance appraisal set and apply clear performance standards</li> <li>• financial auditing</li> <li>• honest reporting</li> <li>• stakeholder assessments</li> <li>• ethical investment</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Equity, fairness, non-discrimination, diversity.</b> Concentrate on the worst rights violations and on the most vulnerable and marginalised children. Fight discrimination and promote equity and inclusion of all children</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focus on the most marginalised children</li> <li>• ensure programmes do not exclude some groups of disadvantaged children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• select partners who are committed to inclusion and non-discrimination</li> <li>• challenge partners who discriminate and exclude</li> <li>• select diverse group of partners</li> <li>• encourage partners to be more inclusive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• diverse workforce</li> <li>• equitable pay</li> <li>• clear policies for promotions</li> <li>• staff development plans</li> <li>• career planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• challenge discriminatory policies of donors</li> <li>• promote fairness, equity and diversity among supporters</li> </ul>
<p><b>Protection, safety, security, ethics.</b> Protect children, adult community members, staff and partners</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• child protection policy</li> <li>• ensure safety of all children involved in the programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• protection of partners: avoid putting partners at risk as a result of advocacy or work in dangerous areas</li> <li>• promote and monitor child protection policies in partner organisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• follow labour laws</li> <li>• staff safety</li> <li>• sexual harassment policies</li> <li>• child protection policies</li> <li>• health insurance and social security benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promote child protection policies among donors</li> </ul>

		<p><b>Participation.</b> Support people and other institutions to demand children's rights. Promote children's participation and children's rights to information, expression, decision-making and association</p> <p><i>Access to information</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>child-friendly information on all relevant parts of programme and organisation</li> </ul> <p><i>Involvement in decision-making</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>involve children in recruitment of staff who work with children</li> <li>involve children in planning and implementation</li> </ul> <p><i>Freedom of association</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>support children to organise themselves</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Collaboration.</b> Work with other agencies to promote children's rights</p>				
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>collaborate with child-led organisations</li> <li>support networks of partners</li> <li>encourage collaboration among staff</li> <li>promote donor collaboration</li> </ul>

It doesn't have to be difficult to involve children in your organisation's structures and procedures. Here are some examples of successful ways of doing this.

### **Case study: involving children in planning processes**

In **Zimbabwe**, Save the Children set up a children's advisory board to give feedback on programmes they had not been involved in. They evaluated programmes on education, reproductive health, emergency food aid and water and sanitation. One of the strengths of this approach was that their independence from the programmes enabled them to criticise without fearing repercussions. One of the weaknesses was that, at times, the children found it difficult to fully understand the nature and complexity of the programmes they were investigating.

### **Case study: involving children in governance structures**

In **Vietnam**, during the second year of a child-focused HIV and AIDS intervention project, representatives of the children involved took part in quarterly project management board meetings. Despite initial resistance from project partners, it was felt in the end that the children demonstrated confidence, and excellent facilitation and communication skills.

### **Case study: involving children in recruitment of staff**

In **India**, Save the Children decided that children should be involved in the recruitment of all programme staff. The process always involves children from the communities we work with. They become involved once the shortlist of candidates has been drawn up. They are given an induction into the interviewing process, presented with the prospective candidates' applications, and are asked to think of three or four questions to ask. They then take part as panel members alongside, and with equal status to, the adult members.

## Rights-based management or simply good practice?

So, you might ask, what then is the difference between good (professional) practice and management in rights-based organisations? The answer is one of belief and motivation, the imperative for rights-based organisations to address these issues that is demanded by fundamental rights, values and principles.

People In Aid, an international network of development and humanitarian aid agencies, has developed a Code of Good Practice that deals with many of the human resource issues outlined above. The box below shows a summary of their seven principles.

### People In Aid Code of Good Practice

**Guiding principle:** people are central to the achievement of our mission.

**Principle 1: Human resources strategy:** human resources are an integral part of our strategic and operational plans.

**Principle 2: Staff policies and practices:** our human resources policies aim to be effective, fair and transparent.

**Principle 3: Managing people:** good support, management and leadership of our staff is key to our effectiveness.

**Principle 4: Consultation and communication:** dialogue with staff on matters likely to affect their employment enhances the quality and effectiveness of our policies and practices.

**Principle 5: Recruitment and selection:** our policies and practices aim to attract and select a diverse workforce with the skills and capabilities to fulfil our requirements.

**Principle 6: Learning, training and development:** learning, training and staff development are promoted throughout the organisation.

**Principle 7: Health, safety and security:** the security, good health and safety of our staff are a prime responsibility of our organisation.

## Case study

In 2004, the International Save the Children Alliance co-ordinating group on child rights programming commissioned a study. The aim was to see how far a number of Alliance organisations had succeeded in implementing a rights framework. An innovative element of the study was the development of 14 benchmarks (see box opposite) that highlight the most significant organisational changes needed to adopt a rights-based approach to programming.

**Save the Children Sweden** used the benchmarks for a baseline study. This confirmed that the organisation has a clear commitment to children's rights, evidenced in its steering documents and overall policies. Staff have been trained to promote and incorporate a child rights-based approach in their work, and tools have been developed and introduced. However, many did not feel fully competent and confident in CRP. Another area that needed further development was how to involve children as stakeholders, and what it means to be accountable to children.

It was decided to use the 14 benchmarks and conclusions of the study as the basis for a strategy to strengthen competencies, identity and profile as a child rights organisation. The strategy has six main components:

1. Application of Save the Children Sweden values for in-house management and human resource development, including building competencies in children's rights and child rights programming, a review of leadership and human resource policies and clarification of the organisation's position on child participation in internal workings.
2. Mainstreaming of a child rights perspective in programme work.
3. A child rights perspective in external communication, including production of child-friendly materials on key priority areas.
4. Knowledge management and method development, including compilation, analysis and dissemination of lessons learned in key priority areas
5. Capacity building of external actors, including the elaboration of a strategy for training and advisory support to external audiences
6. Participation in and support to the NGO development of a global child rights agenda, emphasising the monitoring process of the UNCRC.

One of the lessons learned so far is that it is crucial that senior management is committed to, leads and supports the strategy.

## **Benchmarks of progress in implementing child rights programming (CRP)**

**Benchmark 1** A clear mandate, vision and mission expresses commitment to children's rights

**Benchmark 2** Policies and strategies translate the mandate and mission into practice

**Benchmark 3** Staffing policies, including recruitment and induction, facilitate effective CRP

**Benchmark 4** Tools, guidance and planning guidance have been developed to build capacity for CRP

**Benchmark 5** Organisational support has been introduced to strengthen an integrated approach to CRP

**Benchmark 6** All staff and board members have a clear understanding and commitment to CRP

**Benchmark 7** Staff feel competent and confident in CRP

**Benchmark 8** Partners are supported and enabled to work within a rights-based approach

**Benchmark 9** Situation analysis is directed towards mapping rights violations, and identifying causes and duty-bearers, through a process that respects the views of children

**Benchmark 10** Priority setting and planning is informed by a rights-based perspective, and takes account of the views of children

**Benchmark 11** Implementation is directed towards the fulfilment of all children's rights, without discrimination, involving both holding duty-bearers accountable and supporting children to claim their rights

**Benchmark 12** Monitoring and evaluation is informed by CRP, in respect of its process and focus

**Benchmark 13** Children are acknowledged as stakeholders

**Benchmark 14** Mechanisms for accountability to children have been introduced

Yes, but...

**“Children don’t have the capacity or competence to be part of our governance structures. We would be simply tokenistic.”**

You should carefully plan how best to involve children in your governance structures. It should be a gradual process and can take many forms. You might include children’s representatives on your decision-making structures, or involve children in evaluating projects at community level. There are many examples of successful ways to include children. You must make every effort possible to do this in ways that are appropriate to your context and that respect and understand children’s evolving capacities.

**“What happens if we’re being offered funds from a donor that does not act in the best interests of children?”**

Your relations with your donors need to go beyond purely financial and contractual issues to what is in children’s best interests, based on your values and principles. You will need commitment and determination for this to happen and, at times, you may need to take difficult decisions. (See Chapter 6 on advocacy and partners for more guidance.)

**“How can we make these internal changes with all the investment it involves and the resulting bureaucracy, yet remain effectively focused on bringing changes to the most vulnerable children?”**

All change is gradual. Don’t expect a miraculous transformation from one day to the next. But if you really want these changes to take place, and you know how they will improve children’s lives, then you know it is worth the investment. You will need to plan, be systematic and at times opportunistic. Learn from others, share your own experience and be part of a wider movement of rights-based organisations.

**“Most of our non-programme staff are neither informed nor trained in CRP. How can we expect them to accept and apply this approach?”**

The principles of rights, duties, transparency and accountability that lie at the heart of rights-based organisations apply to every level of staff. It is your responsibility to promote child rights programming with all your staff in the most effective way possible. Respecting each member of staff and recognising the role they have to play creates a motivated, effective and ambitious team.

**“Assuming our own staff pick up on this rights-based approach, with all the investment that implies, what about our partners? Isn’t that an even bigger and possibly unrealistic challenge?”**

You have already chosen your partners carefully, based on shared values, principles and approaches (see Chapter 6). You should already be working towards the same goal, supporting duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations and helping rights-holders claim their entitlements.

**“What about our fundraising, branding and communications strategies? How can we continue to attract funds and support while remaining ‘ethical’?”**

You need to find appropriate ways to involve children in your communication work – there are lots of examples where this has been done to great effect. But it takes time, leadership, commitment and effort. Recent evidence in Europe has shown that involving children in a positive and dignified way has more impact and generates sustained interest from the public. Having clear criteria for investment and for donor funding will help create the transparency and confidence you need to pursue an ethical approach.

**“Direct operations are mostly led by technical staff and field officers. We can’t expect them to understand and apply CRP while also meeting the day-to-day pressures of their jobs.”**

You need to give all your staff the time, space and investment they need to put these key principles and approaches into action. Technical experience is essential for some jobs; but you can only achieve the lasting changes you want for children if all staff promote rights-based values.

## Where to go for more information

*Ethical Guidelines: Guiding principles for Save the Children Sweden staff and persons*, commissioned by Save the Children Sweden, 2005

These comprehensive guiding principles lay the foundations for all Save the Children Sweden’s work and, in asking all staff to sign their recognition of these principles, works towards creating a rights-based organisation and culture.

*Children as Stakeholders Policy*, Save the Children UK, 2003

Save the Children UK’s policy on involving children as stakeholders lays out both its approach and main areas for action (at project level, programme and advocacy levels and at policy level).

*Child Protection Policy*, Save the Children, 2003

*So You Want to Consult with Children*, Save the Children, 2004

*Practice Standards in Children's Participation*, Save the Children, 2005

*Involvement of Children and Young People in Shaping the Work of Save the Children*, Lansdown G for Save the Children UK, 2003

Fascinating analysis of progress made by Save the Children to date in involving children throughout the programme cycles and in internal management and decision-making processes. Includes practical recommendations for ensuring further progress.

*Promoting Rights-Based Approaches: Experiences and ideas from Asia and the Pacific*, Theis J, Save the Children Sweden, 2004

*Evolving Capacities of the Child*, Lansdown G, Innocenti Insight 1, UNICEF, 2005

## Recommended websites and materials

People In Aid is an international network of development and humanitarian aid agencies. It helps organisations whose goal is the relief of poverty and suffering to enhance their impact through better people management and support. [www.peopleinaid.org](http://www.peopleinaid.org)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Sparrow P and Cooper C, *The Employment Relationship: Key challenges for HR*, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2003

<sup>2</sup> Theis J, *Promoting Rights-Based Approaches. Experiences and Ideas from Asia and the Pacific*, Save the Children Sweden, 2004