



# Organisational Review Save the Children Norway

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Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

P.O. Box 8034 Dep, NO-0030 OSLO  
Ruseløkkveien 26, Oslo, Norway  
Phone: +47 22 24 20 30  
Fax: +47 22 24 20 31

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# **ORGANISATIONAL REVIEW SAVE THE CHILDREN NORWAY**

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Stein-Erik Kruse  
Kim Forss  
Knut Olav Krohn Lakså

Center for Health and Social  
Development (HeSo)

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## *Acronyms*

CACP	Children affected by armed conflict and disaster
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CLG	Country Leadership Group
CRC	Convention on the Rights of Children
CP	Child Participation
CVSA	Children affected by violence and sexual abuse
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
HO	Head Office
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IPD	International Programme Director
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SC	Save the Children
SCA	Save the Children Alliance
SCiSL	Save the Children Sri Lanka
SCiUG	Save the Children in Uganda
SCS	Save the Children (Sweden)
SCUK	Save the Children (UK)
SCUS	Save the Children (US)
UP	Unified Presence

## Executive Summary

### Purpose and Methods

Norad commissioned Centre for Health and Social Development (HeSo) to review the performance of Save the Children Norway (SCN) as one of the five largest NGOs receiving significant funding from the Government. The stated purpose was to examine SCN's ability to provide effective aid. The report with its recommendation is meant to assist Norad in taking decisions about a new frame agreement from 2010.

The review is focusing on "the system for service delivery" and not services themselves or their results. Humanitarian assistance (funded by MFA) and information and advocacy work in Norway are not included in the mandate. It was decided to concentrate the review on the ongoing unification within Save the Children Alliance since this process will affect work at country as well as head office level.

The report is based on a review of documents, interviews with staff at SCN HO in Oslo and visits to two country programmes – Uganda where SCN is Managing member and Sri Lanka where Norway is a Participating member. A more in depth thematic study of child participation was included as part of the review.

The analysis took as a point of departure that SCN needs four key abilities to provide effective aid - an ability to be (identity), to organise (systems and resources), to relate (partnerships) and to do (results). Those abilities determine organisational performance. It is the successful combination of all four which provides the basis for and shape high performing NGOs.

### Key Findings

A short summary of the findings is that SCN's strength lies in its strong and clear identity – as an organisation committed to fulfilling children's rights. It is also an organisation with well established managerial systems and procedures and ample human and financial resources. It can also document the ability to produce results for children – though to a lesser extent in the area of advocacy, capacity building of partner organisations and civil society. SCN has the weakest score in its ability to engage in external partnerships and achieve results through partners.

The report shows that SCN has the ability to reach its goals, but it knows more and has better evidence of results concerning basic service provision and numbers of children reached through its projects than it has concerning results of a qualitative nature.

The operations of the SCN International Programme Department are solidly anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have not come across any activities, projects or programmes that do not follow from a rights-based approach to the international Conventions.

SCN has a focus on some particular aspects of rights, namely those relating to education and protection. Within the Alliance, other members work with other themes, but the specialisation of SCAN can be defended in terms of relevance to the final recipients. It also leads to more effective aid through the mechanism of economies of scale and specialisation.

SCN operates with working principles that – fully implemented – increase the relevance of its work. Those working principles are the notions of children's participation and partnerships. While each of these entails problems and dilemmas for the organisation, they are nevertheless good principles and they will, in the long run, increase the relevance of the work done. However, there is a risk that children's participation is considered so closely linked with SC identity, that there is less room for critical discussion.

The approaches of SCN are firmly anchored in objectives and values that characterise Norwegian development cooperation, namely rights to education for children, partnerships and participation, etc.

SCN has long experience in managing their own country programmes and efficient systems and procedures. The unification will introduce changes and it is premature to discuss most of them since the new systems have either not been operational for a sufficiently long time or not yet been introduced.

SCN has a clearly defined target group – providing the basis for its strong identity. On the other hand, it is not equally clear how this should be achieved and who the most strategic partners are. It seems that SCN sees

partnerships more as a means to an end and is more effective in fulfilling rights for children than strengthening civil society through local partners. It is significant that the SCN policy document on partnership is actually a policy for capacity building of partners with whom SC works to accomplish its own organisational objectives. Neither the policy nor strategy documents articulate SC works together with other organisations.

SCN has built systems and organisational structures for monitoring and evaluation. So far, there is an excessive focus on quantitative results in terms of children reached, directly and indirectly and not the quality of results.

Still, there are many examples of how SCN has had a major impact with a rather limited use of funds. Through innovative projects in basic education, it has been possible to generate models that are applied on a much wider scale and that affect large numbers of children outside the initial target area. There have been impressive achievements in institutional development with a limited use of funds. Advocacy activities have had an impact far beyond the rather low costs of such projects, but the review has also identified how SCN could be more cost efficient.

### **The Unification Process**

There is no doubt that a unified presence is a step for the better and it increases the efficiency and effectiveness of Alliance members. That being said, it is a process that has been ongoing for many years and that has seen some failures. The costs of unification and the entailing organisational change at country level are also high and therefore the process of change should be speeded up. While it was useful to start the unification as an open process in 2003 and 2004, it is now high time to close the process and to establish a vision for what the Alliance should look like when the change process is finished.

The need for improvement in several areas identified during the review process does not overshadow the fact that SCN is a highly professional and effective organisation.

### **Recommendations to Norad**

Norad should enter into negotiations with SCN about a new frame agreement from 2010. The new agreement should provide core strategic support to country programmes.

There is scope for improvements and issues to be discussed between Norad and SCN in particular pertaining to unification. Hence, Norad should:

- Request SCN to provide a short critical and strategic annual report on the unification process.
- Request that an external evaluation of the unification process is carried out early 2010.
- Emphasise the need for an improvement in analysis of results and qualitative aspects of results in particular in the area of advocacy, capacity building and children's participation.
- Request a plan with approaches and methods for improved qualitative and quantitative monitoring and reporting to be submitted in 2009.
- Review its new guidelines for support to Norwegian NGOs in light of the extensive collaboration between SCN and governments at national and local level.

### **Recommendations to SCN:**

- Prepare a proposal to Norad for a new frame agreement for 2010 to 2014 based on its new strategic plan providing core support to selected country programmes.
- Support the preparation of an overall plan for the unification process clarifying the scope and long term goals for the process within the Alliance.
- Clearly operationalise its role as a partner organisation making the role and contributions of partners more visible in plans and reports.
- Review its human resource needs in view of the ongoing unification process. Prepare a plan with approaches and methods for improved qualitative and quantitative monitoring and reporting. Support the development of an independent and unified evaluation function

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### *1.1. Background*

Norad has decided to review the performance of major Norwegian NGOs providing humanitarian and long-term development support to countries in the South. Save the Children Norway (SCN) is one of the five largest NGOs in the country receiving significant funding from the Norwegian Government.

According to Terms of Reference<sup>1</sup>, Norad will in dialogue with Norwegian NGOs increasingly focus on strategic issues and results and consider moving from programme level to strategic level funding. Reviews and analyses of systems and procedures, capacity and capability to deliver effective aid will be used to inform decisions about form and level of support. This review will be used as a basis for the dialogue about a new cooperation agreement between NORAD and SCN from 2010.

### *1.2. Purpose and Analytical Model*

The purpose of the review is to examine SCN's ability to provide effective aid given its financial, human and professional resources and working methods. The main question is whether SCN together with its partners – has the capacity and professional expertise required to achieve its goals. After the assessment, Norad should be able to:

- Determine whether the organisation has the required systems for management and control of its own activities, including expertise with respect to developing and applying methods and systems for the documentation of results and long-term effects.
- Determine whether the organisation's reports to Norad give a true picture of partners and programme and provide Norad with an adequate basis on which to decide further support.
- Determine whether the organisation is capable of adapting goals and means to each other, and adapting means and goals to the situation and the context.

The review should focus on “performance of the system for service delivery” and not services themselves or their results. This is not an impact assessment, but a review of systems and procedures for creating results. It should also be noted that the review does not cover humanitarian assistance (funded by MFA) and information and advocacy work in Norway (Norges programmet).

The ongoing unification process among members in Save the Children Alliance will increasingly affect SCN's work at country, as well as head office level. Hence, it was decided to focus the review on the unification process – on the implications and effects for SCN in relation to policy, programmes, systems and ability to deliver effective aid.

It is important to emphasise that the unification is an ongoing process and SC organisations are continuously working to adjust policies, programmes, systems and procedures to new forms of cooperation. What is reviewed are moving targets and not

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex 3.



final outcomes. As such the review could potentially make a constructive contribution to the ongoing reflection and adaptation of the global processes.

The analytical perspective is that SCN needs four key abilities to provide effective aid<sup>2</sup>. Those abilities determine to a large extent organisational performance. One of them in isolation is not sufficient. It is the successful combination of all four which provides the basis for and shape high performance. The four abilities are explained in the Inception report together with questionnaires and checklists and summarized below.

### Box 1. NGO abilities

- **ABILITY TO BE**

To maintain an identity reflecting important purposes, values and strategies, and leadership to direct and manage the organisation.

- **ABILITY TO ORGANISE**

To establish effective managerial systems and procedures, and ensure that human and financial resources are available.

- **ABILITY TO RELATE**

To respond and adapt to new demands among its users and changing needs in society, and retain standing (legitimacy) among its stakeholders.

- **ABILITY TO DO**

To provide relevant services for its users and/or members.

### 1.3. The Unification Process

Save the Children Alliance used to be a loose network of 28 national organisations – united by a common mission, but with members working independently. Several SC organisations had separate offices in the same country with different approaches and programmes, systems and requirements. This was recognized as a problem and the ‘Unified Presence’ (UP) initiative was developed in 2004 in order to create a stronger and more united voice nationally. Through an integrated management approach, one member would coordinate the different programmes in-country. UP would be beneficial for children through greater efficiency in scale, sharing of knowledge and expertise, coordinated fundraising, programming and advocacy effort, and enhanced local presence and relations.

The UP process has been led by a team in Save the Children Alliance. Pilot countries were selected to test, refine and validate the new methodology. By the end of 2006, Alliance Members reviewed the results and approved a roll-out plan for 2007, authorizing the beginning of the unification process. The ultimate goal is to unify all countries where there is more than one member operating. At the present 11 countries are unified out of a total of 30. The aim is to unify five countries per year.

The explicit aim for the process was to achieve more for children by:

- Achieving greater programme impact
- Raising credibility with governments and donors by having one voice
- Increase funding and access to international donors
- Better access to more expertise

<sup>2</sup> The framework is adopted from Stein-Erik Kruse, “How to Assess NGO Capacity”, Oslo 1999.

- Having greater capacity to respond quickly to emergencies
- Increasing efficiency and reduce transaction costs

The first step in the unification process was to move all SC organisations working in the same country into one “big tent” – allowing flexibility and differences, but with an explicit long term aim to harmonise policies, programmes and systems. A cross-Member Steering Group has been established to undertake the core process harmonisation work – in particular field related financial management processes and annual country planning and reporting for unified programmes.

SCN is:

- Managing Member of the unified SC programmes in Uganda (<2008) with SC Denmark, UK, US, and Sweden; Nicaragua with SC US, Canada, Spain and Sweden; and Nepal (<2009) with SC US, Sweden and Japan. SCN will become Managing Member in Cambodia with SC Australia; and Zimbabwe with SC UK during 2009-2010.
- Participating Member with seconded staff presence in Sri Lanka with SC UK and Sweden (<2003)
- Participating Member in Mozambique with SC US and UK (<2008) and Angola with SC UK and Denmark (<2008)
- Lead for a joint programme in Albania and participating in a programme in Kosovo with SC UK, Sweden and Italy (<1999)
- Participating in a joint programme in Afghanistan with SC Sweden (<2002)
- SCN is a project participating member in Burma (Myanmar)

#### *1.4. Work Processes and Country Selection*

The review was carried out in three consecutive phases. The first step was to collect and review relevant reports and documents, like cooperation agreements and contracts with Norad, policy and strategy documents, previous reviews and evaluations, Norad guidelines, etc.<sup>3</sup> Introductory interviews with key staff in SCN were conducted collecting basic data and information in order to describe SCN's platform and coverage in Norway and internationally.

The study phase consisted of four interlinked activities: The consultants started by conducting interviews with key staff at SCN HQ.<sup>4</sup> Then two country visits were undertaken – asking partners in the South to assess SCN's performance and for the team to make an independent assessment of country programmes. Fourthly, a survey was carried out in “unified” countries in which SCN had been involved. Finally, data and information from the survey, interviews in Norway, interviews and observations from two country visits were combined and triangulated. In the last reporting phase, a draft report was prepared. The report was finalised based on written and verbal comments and inputs.

Terms of Reference suggested two case countries: Sri Lanka in Asia and Uganda in Africa. There are five main reasons for selecting those countries:

- SCN has been involved and provided support to both Sri Lanka and Uganda for a long period of time.

<sup>3</sup> Annex 2

<sup>4</sup> A list of guiding questions can be found in Annex 1.

- In Uganda, SCN is the Managing Member with SC UK, US, Denmark and Sweden as Participating Members, while SCN is Participating Member in Sri Lanka with Sweden under the leadership of SC UK.
- In Uganda the unification process is quite recent from July 2008) and still underway, while the process started earlier in Sri Lanka and has progressed much further.
- The two countries represent two different regions and socio-political contexts.
- The two countries are both important long term partners for SCN, but the organisation operates differently in each of them allowing a comparison between SCN being a Managing and Participating member.

### *1.5. Limitations*

There are threats to the reliability and validity of findings in such a review. The findings and conclusions should be treated with caution as:

- The review was completed in a short period of time.
- The entry point was a review of Save the Children Norway, while the unification process is global and involves all members of the Save the Children Alliance. Hence, the unification process is discussed from a limited perspective.
- The unification represents an ongoing process of change in which certain criteria and standards may be modified and adjusted.
- Findings and conclusions from the two case countries may not be representative and possible to generalise.
- A relatively short report is not able to do justice to the broad range of reports and the rich and complex country programme experience.

In other words, we will not have been able to present a complete picture of SCN, but hopefully an important part.

### *1.6. Guide to the Reader*

This introduction is followed by four chapters – analysing and discussing each of the four abilities - their strengths and weaknesses. Chapter 2 looks at the “Ability to Be” and reviews the identity, governance, strategy and leadership dimensions. Chapter 3 covers “Ability to Organise” and assesses organisational structures and coordination, human and financial resources, control measures and planning systems. Chapter 5 is about “Ability to Relate” and looks at issues of partnerships in particular at country level. Chapter 6 or “Ability to Do” covers reporting, monitoring and evaluation systems and not least categories of results.

A more in depth thematic study of child participation was included as part of the review. Findings are mainly presented in Chapter 2, 4 and 5 with regard to children’s participation both as a global strategic focus, and secondly results and dilemmas when putting Children’s Participation into practice. With a basis in key questions from Terms of Reference Chapter 7 presents the main conclusions and also a set of recommendations to Norad and SCN. Annexes contain information about references, names of people interviewed and Terms of Reference.

## CHAPTER 2: ABILITY TO BE

This chapter discusses the first of the four abilities elaborated in the review model. The *ability to be* makes explicit the organisation's capacities to create its identity; formulate a vision, set up a governance system, and to translate vision, mission and governance to action through the formulation of policies and strategies.

### 2.1. Identity

In comparison to many other organisations, SCN appears to have a very strong identity. It is quite remarkable that during our more than 50 interviews with management and staff not even one respondent expressed any doubts about the identity of the organisation, split mandates, roles that could not be combined, or other similar issues related to the identity of the organisation.

The identity is anchored in the formulation of the overriding purpose of the organisation – to contribute to creating a world that *“respects and values each child, that listens to children and supports their influence, where all children live a life in freedom and security.”* The strength of the identity is also confirmed in the survey of the organisation, and in the internal work place surveys that have been completed in recent years.<sup>5</sup>

While the strong identity is an asset, it also brings problems. The unification process is of course unique, but as far as we can see SCN has not made any determined effort to assess similar experiences from other organisations. There are many international NGOs that have gone through unification processes – both in the humanitarian field, environmental NGOs, political and civic rights organisations, and so on (as for example IFOAM, Amnesty International, IPPF, Medicine Sans Frontier, PLAN International, etc.). We have often asked about learning from these, but found no knowledge or even much interest in the experiences of others. The strong identity and the feeling of uniqueness may be one factor that blinds decision-makers to the fact that other organisations have similar managerial problems and may have solved them better than the Save the Children Alliance has. Another challenge is the issue of children's participation, which is expressed as a working principle, as a goal and a mean. This inherent ambiguity makes it difficult to determine what the expected results are, apart from participation itself. And, being so closely related with SCN's identity and ideological basis, the risk is that participation as such is perceived as a success *per se* - whatever the outcome may be.

At times, the organisation also seems preoccupied with its internal differences and of being unique. The unification process is said to have made it clear to the members of the Alliance how different they are – and there are indeed also significant differences, but partner organisations on the ground usually say that *“they're all the same, it's all Save the Children”* (to quote one government respondent in Uganda). The organisation appears at times too preoccupied with the differences that surface in the unification process, and that have some meaning internally, but are uninteresting, marginal and not so important to partners and other external stakeholders. It is thus a challenge for the unification process to reinforce the strong organisational identity,

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<sup>5</sup> See for example the SCiUG “Evaluation of Employee Satisfaction: October 2008.

while at the same time making sure that boundaries are open and that the Alliance may learn from others and interact with the broader NGO community.

## 2.2. Governance

### Box 2. SCN Governance Structure

Save the Children Norway (SCN) was founded in 1946. It is a member of the International Save the Children Alliance working in more than 110 countries and comprising 27 member organisations. The work of SCN is anchored in its *Statutes and Rules*. The Statutes are adopted by the National Congress, while the Rules are adopted by the Council of Representatives. Save the Children Norway is based on individual membership, and members are organised in local branches and local activity groups.

*The National Congress* is the highest authority and meets every two years. *The Council of Representatives* exercises supervision within defined areas; it is also a consultative body for SCN's development work and contributes to the active engagement of members. *The Board of Directors* provides strategic direction, ensures sound administration and organisation of work, and decides on plans, policy guidelines and budgets. *The Council of Representatives* appoints the Executive Director.

The organisation has a domestic department and an International Programme Department. The domestic programme is advocating for and on behalf of vulnerable groups of children in Norway. The various projects and activities also aim at generating new knowledge and methods on effective and action-oriented advocacy-work. The domestic programme is not covered by this review. The programme for development cooperation is managed by the International Programme Department.

There is a clear division of labour between the above mentioned governance bodies and the International Programme Department. While the Executive Director is closely engaged in the evolution of the Save the Children Alliance, the Director of the International Programme Department manages the development cooperation programme. The governing bodies assume responsibilities for strategic decisions and approve strategies and policies, but these are developed by the International Programme Department. The governing bodies have a keen interest in the development cooperation programme and follow it through reports and visits. The initiatives for strategic changes, new policy developments, as well as for management of the programme, clearly rest within the International Programme Department.

The review concludes that the governance function of SCN is solid and has proven effective through the history of the organisation and it builds on a clear line of delegation, responsibilities and reporting, from the field to the highest levels of the organisation. At present the main challenge in terms of governance comes from the evolution of the global alliance and the forms of governance that will be developed when the different organisations jointly engage in development cooperation. The solutions that have been developed for Uganda and Sri Lanka have a clear structure and the review found them to work well, from the governance point of view.

However, the governance structures put in place for Uganda still require the country to report on the programme to different national organisations that contribute with funds to the programme. While the governance structures are clear and effective, the reporting structures have not been sufficiently streamlined yet and the current set-up with a few Managing members may not be a long-term sustainable solution as

discussed in Chapter 4.6.<sup>6</sup> A dilemma is how to create a unified reporting system, without risking losing ownership from different national SCs. Yet another question concerns what would happen when the members of the Managing Group cannot develop a consensus. If that consensus is slow to emerge or cannot be achieved, it may well be that the present governance system is not sufficiently elaborated.

The major question-marks concerning governance thus arise around the mechanisms that are currently being developed at global levels for the alliance. There is a risk that these affect the capacity to deliver aid negatively in the short run, as the change process takes up too much managerial time and creates uncertainty. In the long run much stands to be gained by developing the global governance system, but the change process is slow and lacks a vision of where the Alliance wants to go.

### *2.3. Policy and Strategy for International Development*

In this review of the strategy, we first look at how the strategies are formulated, that is, to the strategic processes. Then we analyse the content of the strategies and reflect on whether that is clear and consistent, and relevant. While the identity of the organisation is quite clear and strongly articulated, there is more diversity at the level of strategic choice and, in fact, quite different approaches concerning how to work towards the overall vision of the organisation.

#### **Strategic Processes**

Often more important than strategy itself are the processes through which strategies are developed. The review found several positive aspects of the strategic processes in SCN:

- *Timing* – a new strategy for the period 2010 onwards is presently being drafted. The strategy is expected to be presented and decided at the National Congress meeting in September 2009, well in time before it is to be operationalised into annual plans and country strategies.
- *Coordination* – the new strategy is being developed parallel to the new global strategy for the Alliance. The global strategy is expected to be adopted by the Alliance four months ahead of the Norwegian National Congress in September. The SNC strategy can thus build on the work done on the global strategy and it can also feed into that process. As far as the review has found, it is only the SCN that coordinates its strategy formulation process so closely to the global strategy.
- *Participation* – as the process is clearly planned and transparent. There is plenty of time between the autumn of 2008 when the process started and September 2009 when the new strategy should be adopted. The review found that staff at many levels have an opportunity to be engaged in the strategy process and can influence the process. The processes to develop Country Strategies in Sri Lanka and Uganda are also well timed, coordinated and participatory. However, the Country Strategies have to be coordinated not only with the global Alliance strategy, but also with the strategies of, for example,

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<sup>6</sup> A cross-member working group has harmonized guidelines and formats in financing, planning and reporting processes (Core Process Harmonization). Common guidelines and formats for planning and reporting were approved by the Alliance in November 2008 and will be implemented as from the planning for 2010 (starting early summer 2009).

Save the Children US, UK, Sweden, Denmark, and possibly others.<sup>7</sup> The country visits did not throw sufficient light on how exactly this was being done. But it is certain that the new Country Strategy for Uganda, which is being developed now with the aim of being completed 2009, has to take into account and build on the strategies of those SC organisations that contribute financially to the programme in Uganda. Against the criteria of providing effective aid, the Save the Children Alliance has some way to go in coordinating the strategic inputs to the planning processes at country level. It cannot be effective as long as major country operations have to tune in to strategic directives from several different organisations.

It is also a question to what extent unification will lead to a broadening of country programmes since they have to accommodate several members and their favoured priorities. This is not necessarily a problem and can be seen as an advantage. However, the harmonisation of strategic priorities is critical and will be more challenging in terms of maintaining focus and having sufficient skills and capacity with many thematic priorities.

### Strategic Content

As far as strategies are concerned, SCN's most recent strategy document (2006-2009) can in many ways serve as an example of good practice<sup>8</sup>:

- *Brevity* – it is admirably short at a total of four pages of text. Many strategies of similar organisation are some 20 to 40 pages long. At four pages, it is possible to get a good grasp of strategic direction and more people will read it.
- *Focus* – the strategy builds on three dimensions; (1) overarching vision and working principles, (2) objectives and expected results, (3) organisational objectives. These three dimensions are key and reflect a strategic choice.
- *Concretion* - the substance of what is being expressed (particularly in respect of objectives and expected results) is not self-evident, other choices would have been possible. The SCN strategy does not state the obvious and is to the point.
- *Communication* – the language is clear and direct and makes sense, at least for a reader who is reasonably familiar with the jargon in development cooperation.
- *Time span* – four years is a suitable time span for strategic planning of an organisation like SCN. Three years tends to be short and makes a mid-term review or assessment almost meaningless. Five years, on the other hand, is quite long and may make it difficult to coordinate the strategy with other processes<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> According to SCN SCiUG have to coordinate their Country Strategies with SCN and the Alliance, but not with each of the participating members in country. The Alliance and SCN strategies will be broad enough for SCiUG to design their strategy both in line with the overall strategies and the Ugandan context.

<sup>8</sup> The texts are not replicated in this document nor do we describe the strategic content. The reader who wants to see the examples should consult the documents mentioned in the text. Publication dates and location are found in the reference list.

<sup>9</sup> The strategy being developed for the Alliance appears to be a five-year strategy and the next SCN strategy will also cover 5 years.

The strategy starts by painting a picture of the kind of a world it strives to create, one that: *“respects and values each child, that listens to children and supports their influence, where all children live a life in freedom and security.”* This is a powerful vision and it helps to mobilize people to work for and with the organisation. It is connected to the international conventions and it gives expression to the underlying values in a clear and direct way.

The key guiding principles are three: Child participation – facilitating children’s meaningful participation in matters that concern them, in different contexts and at different levels in society. Strengthening local capacity – contributing to strengthen local capacity to fulfil children’s rights including parents, local communities, child rights organisations and networks, local and national authorities. Influencing causes – addressing causal relations at local, national and international level in order to prevent violations of children’s rights and achieve positive, lasting results for as many children as possible. While these are clear as guiding principles, the review found that the first two need critical reflection. The issue of child participation is further elaborated below, and chapter four discusses the concept and the practice of partnerships critically.

### Box 3. Strategic Objectives and Expected Results

<i>Strategic objective</i>	<i>Expected result</i>
1. <i>Children’s rights to education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More school going children benefit from improved quality in education.</li> <li>- More out-of-school children, especially girls, have access to education.</li> </ul>
2. <i>Rights of children affected by armed conflict and disaster.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More children receive protection and enjoy a normalised living environment.</li> <li>- Children’s rights are prioritised in peace processes and reconstruction.</li> <li>- Children’s rights are protected in humanitarian actions.</li> </ul>
3. <i>Children’s rights to protection against physical and psychological violence and sexual abuse.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased focus on psychological violence towards children.</li> <li>- Stronger systems for protection of children.</li> <li>- More children exposed to violence and sexual abuse are protected and cared for.</li> <li>- More children participate in prevention of violence and abuse.</li> </ul>
4. <i>Children’s right to protection against the impact of HIV/AIDS</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop and implement an African led strategy for SCN’s HIV/AIDS programme with a clear focus and expected results.</li> <li>- More children know how to protect and support themselves and act as agents within their community.</li> <li>- More orphans and vulnerable children are adequately protected within the community.</li> </ul>

The strategic objectives seek to realise children’s rights - four objectives directly concerning children’s rights and three related to external conditions (Box 1). This is the most important part of the strategy document. The review is particularly impressed by the way the strategy explains the four thematic objectives. Each of them is directly derived from the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Thus they articulate the rights-based approach at the most central level of the organisation. The objectives express an end state of what the activities should contribute to (contribute, not cause)



and they do so in a clear and powerful language. Furthermore, each objective contains a selected number of results to be achieved during the period. The targeted results are also clear and relevant, but they are of an excessively quantitative nature. There is a risk that the organisation focuses too much on quantitative targets and results. The risks are that the quality of work does not get adequate priority and that easily measurable outputs are optimised while the less easily measured, but equally or more important results are left to the side.

The strategy mentions three more strategic objectives. One of them is actually not a strategic objective comparable to the first three. It is an objective to strengthen the Alliance through the Unification process. This is an organisational objective and should not be confused with the substantive objectives and results that are first mentioned. The two following objectives concern modes of operation rather than any specific objective. The first four strategic objectives are very clear and well expressed, what follows confuses the picture and blur the distinction between what to do and how to do it.

### **Children's Participation**

SCN's overall strategic vision is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in which children's right to participate is promoted by listening to children and supporting their influence. As a guiding principle, children's participation (CP) is to be facilitated by children's *meaningful participation* in matters that concern them, in different contexts and at different levels in society. A second principle is to contribute to strengthening local capacity to fulfil children's rights including parents, local communities, child rights organisations and networks, local and national authorities. A shift to rights based programming has led to a shift in which not only children have a right to participate in matters that concern them, but also that their participation should be an integrated part of programmatic planning, through partners, in implementation and monitoring, and is to be encouraged in all social and institutional spheres<sup>10</sup>. What SCN is aiming at achieving is two-fold: (a) to have CP mainstreamed at all levels of SCN interventions, and (b) to change social and political structures to allow children to participate.

There is consequently, a strong underlying basis on CP which is closely related both to SC's identity and overall ideology as a rights based organisation. Differences in social and political structures at the local level necessitate adaptation of CP to a variety of contexts. Otherwise, the concept runs the risk of not being particularly meaningful within the local context. SCN has defined meaningful participation as:

(...) meaningful child participation involves a philosophical, a mind exercising approach rather than a set of mechanical steps, and is a process. Participatory work should be flexible and focus on process rather than output. Participation is also a process in which people are involved in constructing their autonomy and their influence in decision-making that affects and concerns them. Participation is a way of relating to oneself, to other people, to objects and to spaces. It is a capacity to educate, to learn, and to develop, and has to be experienced personally.

*SCN's 2006-2009 CP policy document*

<sup>10</sup> This is stated in several strategy documents such as the 2006-2009 SCN strategy (as a "working principle" as well as specifically referred to under Strategic objective no. 4), SCN's policy document on strategic objective 6, SCN's statutes (underneath "aims"), and others. SCN has also developed a 2006-2009 policy document on CP with the purpose of supporting the quality implementation of the strategy within each country programme.

Despite the emphasis on CP as a process at an individual level, there is still a focus on influencing decision making. And, assuming that children are largely excluded from such processes, there is an underlying weight on expected changes in attitudes, behaviour and social structures. This may cause paradoxes and controversies, something SC is aware of and has as a consequence developed ten key quality elements within its *Framework to improve quality in work on child participation*.

Nevertheless, CP is formulated both as a working principle, as a goal and simultaneously as a mean to obtaining this goal. As such, it has an inherent ambiguity. Despite an attempt to phrase participation as a process rather than output, there is clearly an underlying expectation that CP should result in some sort of social change. Hence, an important question is how such a concept is met, interpreted and acted upon at the field level. When is CP relevant and when can CP be expected to produce tangible results? At what level can children be expected to provide *meaningful* input to SC interventions? Although the 10 Key Quality Elements<sup>11</sup> developed by SCN are sufficient to assess quality of CP, the question is to what extent these are actually utilised at the field level. Without proper analysis and empirically based experiences, there is a risk that participation is reduced to an ideological principle rather than responding to actual needs on the ground.

In interviews with SC staff, CP was never considered irrelevant, but it became apparent that many activities are undertaken without directly involving children. It seems a contradiction then, that when every staff member would emphasise the importance of CP during interviews, it is not always utilised in practice. Perhaps there is not a real need to involve children in every aspect of programming. And perhaps there are limitations and/or obstacles such as time and resources, to utilising it. But this is seldom clearly expressed.

### Country Strategies

The review has not completed any full review of country strategies, but in the course of field visits we did look at the planning documents at that level. The country strategy for Uganda 2007 – 2009 is in many ways an incomplete document, but still has some relevance as a steering instrument.<sup>12</sup> However, many of the virtues of the SCN strategy are not visible in that country strategy. It is a long text at 25 pages. It has a wealth of dimensions. When it is revised, we would strongly advise to develop a strategy that is clear, focused, and decisive, in line with the SCN strategy.

For Sri Lanka, there are four principal programmes:

- Protection of children from violence and abuse, with a focus on children affected by the conflict and disaster, children without parental care, physical and sexual abuse and violence (within the family, school and community)
- Basic education and Early Childhood Development (ECD)
- Realising Child Rights in Sri Lanka
- Household Economic Security (HES).

<sup>11</sup> Save the Children Norway (2005a) Framework to Increase Quality in Work in Child Participation. Mozambique, October 2005.

<sup>12</sup> CLG accepted the country strategy for the unified programme in 2008 as an *interim* strategy since a full fledged new strategy for 2009-2014 was to be developed just one year down the road.

For each of the priorities a thematic programme document is prepared with a problem and stakeholder analysis, scope and objectives, strategies, M&E plan, human and financial resource requirements. The documents are of high technical quality, provide direction, but they are not short and simple.

There is no common approach to country strategies. Assuming that all country offices would need to set their strategic priorities in a short and concise document, four highly technical programme documents cannot serve that purpose. We are not aware of the practices in other countries, but it should be a priority in the unification process to establish common norms for such country strategies. It would be more important to harmonise the strategic documents than to harmonize the formats for project and programme documents, as these are more likely to be adapted to different contexts.

### **Alliance Strategies**

The global strategy is being developed and it is much too early to have some evaluative reflection on it, although we have received two documents that describe the emerging global strategy. The main thrust of the strategy is described in eight thematic areas. As the thrust of the SCN strategy was also expressed in thematic sectors, this makes it easy and clear to relate the two strategies to each other; and to see how different donor country strategies may differ from each other. The future SCN strategy may, for example, choose not to work in thematic areas such as health or livelihoods, while the US or UK organisations may choose to focus on these areas. It should thus be possible to relate the different national strategies, compare them to each other, and take decisions in respect of the global strategy.

One of the strong features of the SCN 2006 – 2009 strategy was that it had a clear focus and sets priorities in some few thematic areas. There is a risk that the Alliance strategy will lack such a clear focus. The box below is fetched from the working paper on the emerging strategy. With only 65% of resources spent on nine broadly defined thematic areas, it is no longer meaningful to speak of priorities and focus.

#### **Box 4. Emerging Thematic Areas in the Alliance strategy**

By 2015, we expect to see 65% of our resources being used for the following areas:

- Basic education in conflict areas, in fragile states and the poorest countries
- Early childhood development
- Maternal and new born health
- Child health
- New born and child nutrition and the prevention of child hunger
- Monitoring the application of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and strengthening national systems and awareness
- Protection of children without care and children affected by armed forces
- General relief management in emergencies with particular expertise in respect of education, protection and health and nutrition
- Support for orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS who are without adequate care as well as the prevention of HIV/AIDS

We have not seen any examples of emerging Country Strategies, but these could bring in other dimensions of strategic choice. The review has seen some of the “work in progress” on the strategy, but the texts so far show some of the difficulties facing the Alliance. They lack clarity of purpose such as that was expressed above, they contain a plethora of strategic dimensions, the focus is diluted, and there is much less clarity

about the organisation's roles. This may affect the organisational identity, but on the other hand, what we see might be a prelude to a more focused and comprehensive strategy for the Alliance.

### **Strategy and Identity**

It is often assumed that an organisation that has a strong identity would have a clear and focused strategy. Interestingly, the various strategic processes of SCN (at Alliance level, at headquarters and at country level) are quite diverse and exhibit different characteristics. There is and has certainly been a discussion around the allocation of funds, balance between child targeted interventions and broad community approaches, direct service delivery versus advocacy and capacity building, but these discussions do not seem to have any impact on the organisational identity. Choices are handled within an overall framework of children's rights, and that is the concept around which the organisational identity of SCN is constructed. Hence other choices (strategic and operational) can be handled at another conceptual level and seen as instrumental in relation to the overarching goals of the organisation. Many NGOs face dilemmas around their organisational identity and the way SNC distinguishes between identity and strategic choices is a good example of how to manage abstract concepts creating "the ability to be".

## **CHAPTER 3: ABILITY TO ORGANISE**

This chapter assesses the capacity and capability to organise and establish effective systems and procedures for translating objectives into activities and results. As SCN is a rights-based organisation, it is particularly important to assess to what extent it has the "right" staff and relevant systems and working methods. Sources of funding and the current financial situation are also assessed. In light of the unification process, it is relevant to discuss to what extent solid organisational systems and managerial procedures are put in place, whether more financial resources are mobilised and the human resource base is broadened and strengthened.

### **3.1. Organisational Structure and Coordination**

The management of SCN is based on a division of responsibilities between HO in Oslo and Country Offices in countries where SCN has country programmes or where SCN forms part of a SC organisation through unified presence. The ultimate responsibility for the international programme rests with the General Secretary and is managed by the International Programme Director (IPD), but the implementation is carried out in cooperation with local partners and delegated to country offices. Local partners are selected by country offices and partnership agreements are held directly between the country offices and partners.

Support from Head Office is organised in regional sections and one global section of thematic advisers on core priorities complemented by M&E and Policy and Planning advisers. Finance and HR systems are set by HO which also offers support to country offices. Head office coordinates with all major donors while country offices do fundraising at country level with Embassies and international donors present in the country. All Head office staff visits country offices regularly to offer supervision and competence building on the one hand and bring field experiences back into programme development on the other.

SCN has long experience in managing their own country programmes and efficient systems and procedures for all the processes mentioned above are formalised in the SCN Programme Handbook. We have no questions about the well established systems for country programme management. However, the unification introduces changes and most of them are too early to assess since the new systems have either not been operational for a sufficiently long time or not yet been introduced. The following is a preliminary assessment based on our country visits.

### **Unification and Country Coordination**

According to the guidelines, the Country Leadership Group (CLG) provides strategic direction for the country programme. It delegates the operational management within the country to the Managing Member. The CLG performs the following roles:

- Approving the Country Strategy and Fundraising Strategy
- Approving the Annual Plan for the Unified Programme
- Approving the budget for the Unified Programme and reviewing the budget if there are material changes
- Being involved in the selection of the Country Director

The Leadership Group is chaired by the Designated Representative of the Managing Member, who will have direct line management control of the Country Director. Decisions will be by consensus.

The Managing Member has the responsibility for developing strategy, plans and budgets for the Leadership Group to review and approve. The Managing Member serves for an initial period of five years and shall be responsible for employing and managing a suitable person to act as Country Director, to act on behalf of all the Participating Members. The Leadership Group shall be consulted on the appointment and termination of a Country Director, but the final decision rests with the Managing Member.

Each Country Participating Member and the Managing Member shall nominate a suitable person from their headquarters or regional office to act as the Designated Representative of their organisation and to be a member of the Leadership Group. Managing Members are selected by the SCA following a systematic assessment process. In practice, only a small group of countries in the North are such members and are considered to have sufficient capacity to become Managing Members or Participating Members for that matter.

SCiSL finds the country coordination mechanism established for unified presence clear and effective. So far the cooperation between the Managing and participating members have also been cordial and free of any serious conflicts. However, in our opinion it is a question how the current set up will be able to handle serious internal disagreements or conflicts. It seems that a Managing member can delegate tasks and also encourage consultations and building of consensus, but not delegate responsibilities to a broadly composed board and allow to be overruled by a majority in such a group– if or when a conflict or disagreement arise. It is also a question to what extent small participating members are given too much power in such a system.

In other words, the current management system works well, it is a considerable improvement in terms of planned and agreed collaboration between Save the Children members. On the other hand, it may not be a satisfactory long term solution consistent with principles of global harmonisation and/or national ownership. The current arrangement appears as a pragmatic compromise in which a small group of SC members (donors) have divided up the world and decided who should manage what country programme. It seems pertinent to prepare a unification plan for the entire Alliance – including members in the North. The concept of a big open “tent” has driven the unification process so far providing flexibility and freedom to experiment and encourage incremental mutual adjustment. Time may have come to address and spell out more clearly models for global governance within the Alliance and country management.

### 3.2. Financial Resources

We have also looked at SCN’s current financial situation and trends in income over the last few years. What is and has been the total income, the main sources of funds, growth or decline in any of them, balance between public and private donors and future prospects.

Total income between 2002 and 2008 shows a steep increase from 325,6 Mill in 2002 to 567,3 Mill in 2008 or a 75% increase. SCN benefits from a solid and diversified financial base with both public and private donors, and has a high level of private funding. Funds from private Norwegian donors exceeded donations from Norad and MFA in 2008 with 34%. There has also been a steady nearly 80% between 2002 and 2008.

Funding from Norad has remained stabile - a disappointment to SCN because of its perceived ability to create results for children. The most significant increase is in overall country programme fundraising including also new strategic partnerships with Norwegian Embassies, There is also an overall increase in humanitarian funding from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but more erratic depending on context and circumstances. Humanitarian assistance does not absorb more than 6% of total international expenditure, but Save the Children globally aims to become the leading agency in providing humanitarian assistance to children. SCN has no income from other international donors (bilateral or multilateral like UNICEF), but UNICEF makes contributions directly to country programmes.

#### Box 5. Sources of Income 2002-2008

Sources of Income	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008 B
<b>Income from public sources (in Norway)</b>	159 876	157 529	166 127	180 633	152 686	160 499	176 732
Private donations	133 707	156 757	176 888	220 584	182 563	175 021	236 850
TV- campaign		158 276	463			-	
SC Alliance (MDP)	4 619	4 115	7 630	17 543	21 358	18 570	10 560
<b>Fundraising by country programmes</b>	16 976	16 723	28 859	43 212	81 679	88 735	99 486
Transfer from sister organisations			47 400	31 776	34 494	34 443	36 840
Other	10 416	5 801	1 723	1 659	6 744	8 076	6 857
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>325 594</b>	<b>499 201</b>	<b>429 090</b>	<b>495 407</b>	<b>479 524</b>	<b>485 344</b>	<b>567 325</b>

If we look more in depth at income from public sources, the following picture emerge:

**Box 6. Income from Public Sources 2004-2005**

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Norad frame agreement	105 174	107 493	105 510	103 421	105 700
Norad Europe		-			
Norad information support	2 000	2 000	2 000	2 000	2 000
Others Norad	16 730		2 880		
MFA, RtF			10 000	20 000	25 000
MFA – Europe	10 172	10 580	11 567	13 421	9 765
Others MFA	5 785	12 696	4 465	1 759	3 697
Health and rehabilitation	4 280	4 489	5 007	5 251	3 570
Others	4 909	630			
MFA emergencies	17 077	42 745	11 257	14 647	27 000
<b>TOTAL PUBLIC SOURCES</b>	<b>166 127</b>	<b>180 633</b>	<b>152 686</b>	<b>160 499</b>	<b>176 732</b>

SCN has a solid and diversified financial base which is also relatively predictable and well managed. There are no immediate signs that the current economic crisis has negatively influenced private contributions – not even donations from private companies. Long-term prospects are much more difficult to predict. The most imminent challenge is not reduced income, but a rapid increase in expenditure due to the decreasing value of Norwegian crowns. The loss for 2009 is estimated to approx. 30 Mill. NOK to be covered from existing reserves.<sup>13</sup>

The unification process has not had any impact on fundraising in Norway. It is uncertain whether new donors have been attracted to SC or current donors have increased their funding because of the unification. The large and rapid increase in for example the SCiSL budget from 2004 can better be explained by the tsunami.

The administrative percentage for SCN (HO) is estimated to 5% - an extremely low figure by any international standard. However, the accuracy and usefulness of such a figure is questionable for a number of reasons. The 5% overhead is a poor measure of administrative efficiency - and does not mean that 95% of all funds reach children directly. The virtue of a low percentage is also questionable since insufficient managerial and technical support has a negative impact on quality and level of results. It would be useful if Norwegian NGOs could develop a set of more appropriate indicators for measuring organisational/administrative efficiency.

### *3.3. Financial Control and Conflict Sensitivity*

KPMG is SCN's auditor and was re-elected for two years at the National Congress in 2007. SCN has been a member of the Control Committee for Fundraising in Norway since 1995. Activity accounts are prepared and submitted annually in accordance with guidelines published by this committee.

SCN Head Office monitors programme implementation through quarterly written reports from Country Offices (where SCN is managing member) and telephone conferences, two audits per year in each country programme and day to day financial monitoring (with the use of the AGRESSO accounting system). These formal management instruments are complemented with regular contact between Regional

<sup>13</sup> SCN makes commitment to country programmes in local currencies, and will hence have to cover the costs of currency fluctuations.

Coordinators and country offices. Financial and administrative controllers at HO have country specific responsibilities and this dialogue is also frequent.

SCN has introduced partner audits and KPMG has instructed Norwegian managed country programmes to carry out separate fraud assessments. We have not come across any examples of serious fraud or financial irregularities in Sri Lanka and Uganda. There are examples of petty corruption and some unfortunate losses, but the control systems and measures are well developed and enforced with diligence. SCiSL follows a comprehensive and strict control regime – with Price Waterhouse as the external auditor and another audit firm for the internal audit function. The organisation strives to be free from any kind of corruption – a mandatory requirement for partnership with the organisation.

SCiUG has taken a well articulated stance on financial control. There is a zero-tolerance policy on a number of clearly specified ethical issues, ranging from corruption, sexual harassment, and abuse of drugs and alcohol to lesser offences. All employees are made familiar with this at recruitment. The zero tolerance policy was implemented in January 2005 and looking at the staff turn over since then, the majority of staff departures have been due to this and the introduction of an Internal Audit function the same year and forensic audits in 2005, 2006 & 2007.

Over the past year, application of the zero-tolerance policy has led to around 30 people being asked to leave the organisation. This is a rather large share, almost 10% of the more than 300 employed by SCiUG, but it seems that there had been little action and limited personnel supervision in the previous years and hence a need for radical and tough measures during 2008. Management has certainly shown a willingness to investigate offences and to follow-up with giving notice to leave. A similar zero-tolerance policy is also being applied with partners, although responses and level of sanctions may vary according to what action the partner takes vis-à-vis the individual person responsible for misbehaviour.

For SCiSL conflict awareness and sensitivity are continuous concerns – since they all the time have to take into account and ensure an appropriate balance between the parties in the ethnic conflict – in planning, implementation and reporting. The conflict issues are not always articulated in plans and reports (to avoid problems with the Government), but are systematically taken into account in selection of target districts, children at risk and interventions and further in recruitment of staff, monitoring and evaluation and security measures for staff. SCUK is said to have more elaborate systems and procedures for conflict assessment and security management than SCN – as such an example of a unification benefit.

### *3.4. Human Resources*

What is the level and increase in staff capacity at SCN's Head Office? Is the skill profile relevant, what are strengths and weaknesses and lastly what are the actual and potential effects of the unification process?

SCN will in the beginning of 2009 have 111 staff positions – a 73 % increase since 2000 while the International Programme Department had 28 employees in 2007 compared to 16 in 2000 – a 75 % increase. The department for fundraising has benefited most from additional staff during this period.



The increase in total turnover for the International Department increased 50% between 2002 and 2007 and 75% between 2002 and 2009 – in other words budget and staff increases have been at almost the same level. The overall workload is said to be greater than before, but whether this is due to managing more funds, more demanding working methods, new initiatives or the unification process is not clear and would require a more in depth study. Unification should in principle be cost saving for SCN - reducing the number of self-managed country programmes and less need for follow up and supervision. So far it seems to have resulted in more work for the International Programme Department, but this could be explained as a temporary and short term up front investment. In the long term, unification could reduce the need for programme management capacity in Oslo, and if this is not happening one of the objectives for the unification process is not achieved.

**Box 7. Number of Employees 2000 – 2008 in Norway (at year-end) 14**

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Headquarters Oslo (HQ) total	73	76	73	77	78	80	89	99	103	111
HQ International Development	16	18	18	17	16	20	21	25	28	28

Total number of expatriate staff working abroad has remained at almost the same level - reflecting that there has not been any significant “nationalization” of expatriates so far – seen from SCN’s perspective. However, a more interesting analysis would be to look at staff composition for each country programme and level of expatriate staff. In Sri Lanka, where SC UK is managing member, there are still many expatriates and key management positions are filled by expatriates, but there is a plan to gradually recruit more senior national staff. SCN has traditionally had one expatriate employed in each country programme and a deliberate policy to employ and build national competence.

**Box 8. Number of employees 2000 – 2008 Country Programmes<sup>15</sup>**

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Expatriate staff: Norwegians and other nationals (i.e. non-host country staff)*	*				14	15	12	15	19

\* During the period 2000-2003, the total number of expats has been +/- 15 staff.

<sup>14</sup> Source: Save the Children Norway’s Annual Report to the Board (Årsmelding 2007), dated April 2008. (Fast ansatte i Redd Barna 2000-2007, inkludert ansatte i permisjon. Tellingstidspunkt er 31. desember og viser antall faste ansatte uavhengig av stillingsprosent og midlertidige ansatte. Generalsekretæren har åremål og er ikke medregnet i oversikten.

<sup>15</sup> Source: Save the Children Norway’s Annual Report to the Board (Årsmelding 2007), dated April 2008.

SCN has well qualified thematic advisers in basic education, children affected by armed conflicts and disasters, violence and sexual abuse of children, and children's participation (currently nine advisers – see text box). In some country programmes, SCN has developed expertise within HIV and AIDS. Cutting across these disciplines is knowledge on country-specific issues where SCN works, vested in both local and Head office staff. In areas where children are affected by armed conflict and/or disaster, staff has competence in addressing the consequences that the conflict put on children and initiating or supporting relevant action.

**SCN Technical advisers:**

Child participation (1)  
 Education (1)  
 CRC (1)  
 Education RtF (1)  
 Children in War (1)  
 Violence and abuse (1)  
 HIV/AIDS (1)  
 Evaluation (1)  
 Planning and reporting (1)

SCN holds relevant management capacities, and puts emphasis on financial management skills and practice in particular. Management routines are compiled in the "Programme Handbook".

### SCA Capacity Assessment

Save the Children Alliance carried out an external capacity assessment of SCN in 2007 to determine its capacity to execute the Managing Member role. The team found the management style of SCN as one of delegation and trust. Head office does not interfere in day to day decisions, but relies on formal reporting, follow up and communication between regional coordinators and local offices. SCN has a pool of experienced experts in specific thematic areas, and it is committed to developing its partners as well as its country offices and head office. SCN is also able to provide strong country directors for leadership of Unified Presence countries.

SCN was also found to have appropriate policies, procedures and systems for supporting large country programmes, a human resource system that includes effective recruiting, development and performance management, financial planning and reporting systems that can efficiently support country programmes with annual budgets from US\$10 to 25 million.

The team identified certain weak areas: SCN was not ready to provide efficient support for international proposal development in large programmes, its advocacy and media capacity was rated low and SCN did not have sufficient procedures for providing efficient security management in countries with serious political insecurity. As a follow up to this assessment, SCN management implemented several remedies with the clear aim of being rated higher on all dimensions. This is a natural reaction from SCN, but not necessarily consistent with the concept of unification. If SCUUK has excellent skills in security management, is it then necessary for SCN to have similar skills? Would it be more strategic and relevant if SCN tried to be better in areas where they already are good as a result of a strategic discussion in the Alliance of division of labour?

### Human Resources and Working Environment

The Human Resource Policy (March 2007) provides a sound basis for human resource management defining organisational values and principles, leadership behavioural

norms, clear guidelines for learning and professional development, work-life balance and non-discrimination, salaries and compensations.

There is a large majority of women (75% women and 25% men) among all staff<sup>16</sup>. Five women and four men make up the leadership group. Average age was in 2007 44 years and 54 years in the International Programme Department. New recruitments have recently lowered the average age and management is aware of the problem with too many senior staff retiring at the same time.

General sick leave is low, but long-term absence more frequent. Salary levels have recently improved, but SCN has problems attracting certain categories of personnel with an alternative carrier in the private sector. A large majority of staff finds the working environment in SCN positive and rewarding with strong support from colleagues and managers. Most staff shows a strong ownership to the organisation, are driven by internal work motivation and willing to invest extra time when required. The downside of high commitment is that around one third finds the general workload too high – having a negative impact on their personal and family life. The increase in long term sick leave indicates stress and that staff are not able to cope well.

### **Competence and Innovation**

SCN sees itself as a knowledge based organisation. The human resource policy is also emphasizing the need to foster a culture of learning and support professional development. Staff training is planned for and budgeted – on the job training and several internal and external courses, but there are some concerns and constraints.

Staff complains there is no time for professional development due to a high daily work load. A more serious concern is the relatively limited capacity in thematic areas. The International Programme Department has a group of well qualified general development practitioners, but the group of thematic advisors is small and has not increased and certain important thematic areas are not covered. There seems also to be a general reluctance at senior management (and in the Executive Board) to increase number of staff in Oslo.

Innovation will be a key priority in the new Save the Children Alliance global strategy – which is a demanding and costly priority in terms of staff. If SCN wants to take innovation seriously – having staff with sufficient technical knowledge, participating in global partnerships, documenting and disseminating lessons learned, assisting country programmes, etc. – more technical capacity will be required. SC Alliance needs also to define clearly what it means with innovation. The first step in an innovative process is research and development, and it is a question to what extent SC should and will have the skills and capacity to be involved in a highly technical and often long term research process. The next step is field testing and adaptation of innovations – a more appropriate role for SC and also a role in which it has comparative advantages with its country and field presence.

The SC Alliance wants to introduce a three pronged strategy: advocacy, innovation and scaling up. This is challenging from a human resource point of view since all

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<sup>16</sup> The gender balance in the country offices may differ. Among the approximately 350 staff members in SCiU, some 35% were women and 65% were men.

require different skills and experience. Advocacy is about communication, dialogue and information, innovation is about research and development while scaling up involves technical support and programming. As with innovation, SC should define clearly what is meant with scaling up. Scaling up services at district or national levels would normally be the responsibility of the government or major multi- or bilateral donors and not NGOs.

### **Unification and Division of Labour**

The unification process provides opportunities for SCN – broadening the access to technical expertise from other countries and opportunities for specialisation between member countries. There is evidence that SCN has benefited from health adviser from US and UK and vice versa, but the challenge is to streamline and systematise further research and development, evaluation and learning within the Alliance. At the moment the division of labour and specialisation appears too ad hoc.

As discussed previously – what the unification process means for member organisations in the North is not yet spelled out. So far the focus has been on country coordination in developing countries. It would be logical to include new forms of coordination mechanisms for global programme management – which could have significant consequences for staffing and mode of work in the International Programme Department in Oslo.

### **3.5. Planning and Programming Processes**

SCN has a comprehensive and clear planning and reporting framework supported by well established guidelines, procedures and formats. The main SCN governing documents are a four year strategy; a corresponding four year plan; annual plans and budgets; policy documents for each of the prioritised thematic areas and working principles; and a Programme Handbook. SCN HO revises and approves country specific four year plans, annual plans, budgets and reports and ensures that these are in line with HO directions.

The cooperation with and funding from Norad is based on the four year strategic plan (2006-2009) – presenting the overall strategic objectives and all country programmes. SCN submits annual plans followed by annual reports covering overall aggregate achievements and progress for each country programme. Each country programme submits to SCN a four year country programme followed by annual country programme plans and annual reports. What Norad receives from SCN is synthesised and condensed versions of country programme documents.

### **Planning Framework and Documents**

The overall planning framework is sound and formats and procedures for project and country programme planning and reporting appear solid and well thought through. The format and size of planning documents should be discussed with Norad for the new agreement. The current four year plan (2006-2009) is a document of 292 pages with an introduction presenting geographical and thematic areas, strategic objectives and key working principles, a budget and an M&E plan. The bulk of the document (page 19 to 92) presents all country programmes, country strategies and detailed information about the situation for children and programme priorities should of course be prepared and available, but in the application to Norad it would be sufficient to present criteria for country selection and key thematic and programme priorities for

each region and country. If so, the key proposal to Norad would consist of 40-50 pages. If Norad wanted to discuss specific country programmes, such documents should be made available.

In Sri Lanka, the planning started with a comprehensive situation analysis of Child Rights. Surveys and assessments were carried out in selected locations, including consultations with communities, government and civil society. A Logical Framework Approach (LFA) was used for planning. The country programme is made up of four thematic plans (one for each strategic objective). All the thematic plans have a complex hierarchy of objectives, targets and indicators, but are of high technical quality. The country strategy is quite different as for instance in Uganda. Such a mixed practice may not be any problem at country level, but the Alliance could benefit from a more standardized approach to country programming. Each country should have a brief overall strategy following a uniform format. Then more variation could be allowed at programme document level reflecting regional and country differences.

We have not been able to assess fully the quality and level of partner participation in Save the Children's country programmes. At the strategic level it seems to a large extent been determined by internal organisational priorities including consultations with partners. The weak visibility of partners in overall plans and reports are discussed in the partnership chapter. The planning of specific programmes is much more participatory, but we have not been able to assess to what extent country programmes have influenced and potentially changed partner priorities and programmes.

The question of how the planning processes are aligned with the processes of other organisations has been addressed at global levels as well as during the country visits. The issue can be addressed at three levels; in respect of timing, in respect of formats and reporting, and at the level of content. (1) The planning cycles, when strategies and policies are set and what time period they apply to, are decided by SCN and the Alliance members according to their own requirements. The review did not find any initiative to align these processes with those of other organisations, nor would be it relevant to do so. (2) The format for the project documents as well as the requirement to organisations that are funded, for example Ugandan and Sri Lankan NGOs, are clear and consistent, but not aligned with others. A Ugandan NGO that receives funds from, for example, UNICEF, Plan, SCiU, will have to comply with three different, non-aligned, reporting formats. There is obviously a large scope for making life easier for other organisations through aligned formats. On the other hand, the differences are not large as most use log frames and similar tools for planning and reporting, with only minor variations. (3) In terms of content, alignment is ad hoc. It is quite clear that SCN, and the Alliance, at times align strategic initiatives with other organisations, but at other times they find it more effective to operate alone. The review concurs that the effectiveness of action is more important than alignment per se, and we have not found any reason to suggest that results would have been better if there had been more alignment.

## Mode of Support

There are in principle three ways SCN could provide support to country programmes:

- (a) As *project support* for a set of activities with clear objectives, expected targets, defined time frames and budgets.
- (b) As *programme support* for broad priority thematic areas guided by objectives, strategies, targets and budgets – not linked to individual projects or activities.
- (c) As *core support* to the agreed country programme no earmarking or reference to any programmes or projects.

What kind of support does SCN provide? It seems that SCN receives the entire country programme from Uganda and Sri Lanka, reviews the entire programme document and provides core un-earmarked funding, but this is not entirely clear for instance in terms of programme and financial reporting. SCN support is accounted for under particular priority thematic areas and Norway is for instance credited for its special interest and support to education. As such, SCN provides de facto core support during the funding process, but this is treated as programme support when accounted for.

In Uganda, district offices have to prepare concrete project proposals for all funds, which are approved through a lengthy and cumbersome process at the country level. Even though approximately 50 % of funding to SCiUG is not earmarked, the flexibility achieved is only at the central level - while district level is largely unable to respond adequately to emerging needs on the ground. The fact that planning processes starts already a year in advance further necessitates a need for improvement in providing flexibility also at the local level.

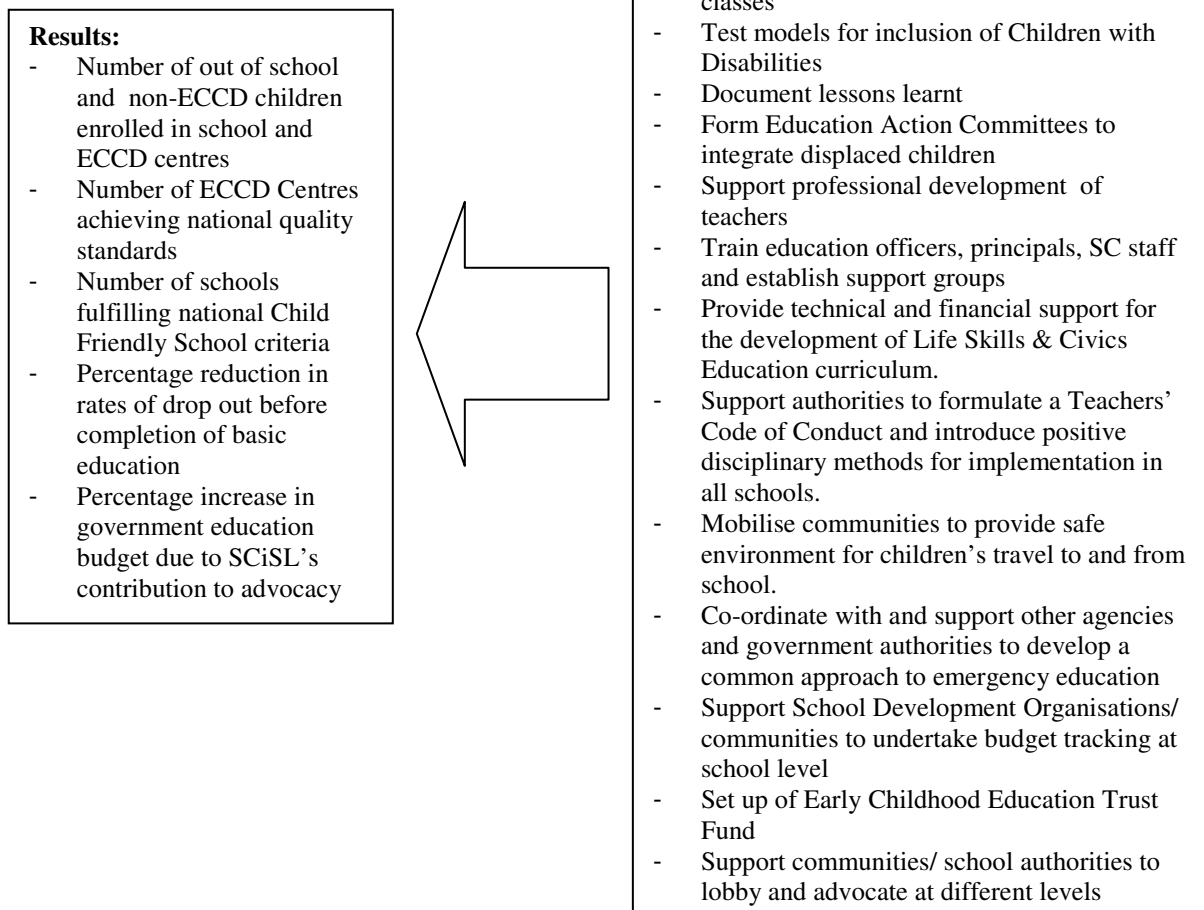
If SCN provides core country programme support, it would make sense to report on the entire programme – unless there is a special concern and interest in particular thematic areas. Several SC members provide earmarked funding since their back donors insist on such mode of support. In other words, country programmes still have to prepare a large number of special reports to donors. The most logical from a unification perspective would be to prepare country programmes – reviewed and approved by CLGs and then request members to provide core basket funding – a fund in which all donors put their resources.

It seems that SC is willing to make compromises in the harmonisation of funding and reporting systems. If all SC members agree to a country plan and budget, it is the total budget that matters. If SCUS earmarks funds for a health programme in Uganda, SCU can spend funds from Norway on education – but since both US and Norway have agreed to the original country programme – the end result would be the same without any earmarking. Cost recovery systems for administrative overhead is developed for both Uganda and Sri Lanka based on relative shares of country programme budgets.

## Programme Theory and Causal Linkages

All development programmes are based on an explicit or implicit programme theory with a set of expected linkages between inputs, activities, short term outcomes and long term results. In a programme based on a sound theory, it is likely that the mix of interventions will lead to the expected results alone or in combination with other efforts.

To what extent do country plans and documents present a valid programme theory? We have identified weaknesses in some plans and reports, but they may not exist in others – so this is not a general criticism. In the plans and reports from Sri Lanka (2007), objectives and targets are presented and the report contain qualitative and quantitative achievements and results, but with insufficient information about partners, programmes and activities that transform intentions into realities. The plan and report present the following picture:



From such information, it is difficult to judge if the programme theory is sound. There is no direct causal relationship between most of the listed activities and expected results. The activities may contribute to the achievement of the results, but more or less directly and only in combination with other interventions. The expected results or performance indicators are at a very high level. There are intermediate outcomes between e.g. setting up an Early Childhood Education Trust Fund and increased enrolment in early childhood centres which would be more relevant for assessing Save the Children performance, but also to understand the causal linkages between inputs and achievements. A more comprehensive programme theory may be implied – only not fully articulated in the document. On the other hand, a design weakness may exist – meaning that the planned activities will not or are not sufficient to achieve the planned results. It is also a problem that the role and efforts of key implementing

partners are not well explained – leaving the impression that all is achieved by Save the Children alone. The same problems were not identified in the Uganda programme.

## CHAPTER 4: ABILITY TO RELATE

This chapter deals with various aspects of Save the Children's ability to relate – mainly cooperation with partners at country level. During the 1980's, SCN was largely a self-implementing organisation with a strong country presence, but moved gradually towards working with and through partners. Save the Children has a clearly defined target group – children. This is a special strength and gives the organisation a clear identity as explained in Chapter 2. It is easily understood and communicated – to fulfill the rights of children. On the other hand, it is not equally clear how this should be achieved and who the partners are. Churches work with churches, Red Cross with Red Cross, disabled with disabled, but children's organisations represent a much more amorphous entity and few with a clear rights agenda – making it more difficult for SC to select strategic partners.

### 4.1. Partnership Strategy

As partnerships are so central to the achievement of objectives, and as it is one of the working principles in the strategy, SCN has formulated a policy on the subject<sup>17</sup>. As far as we know, SCN is the only Alliance member with a partnership policy and it seems that SCN is at the forefront among Alliance member when it comes to thinking strategically around partnership.

According to the policy, SCN seeks to strengthen local competence and capacity with the aim to promote children's rights. Local partners have the primary responsibility for implementing activities. In most countries somewhat more than half of the partner organisations are local NGOs/civil society organisations and slightly less than half are local or national government/authorities. The working principle "strengthening local capacity" reflects the acknowledgement that international NGOs can provide limited contributions. As the policy says: *"Sustained impact can only be achieved when national and local government and local people take responsibility for their own future"*.

SCN operates with five types of partnerships:

- A formal agreement between SCN and a partner including some kind of financial support.
- A long term formal working relationship based on mutual values.
- An ad hoc working relationship related to a specific project or a common issue.
- Contracting limited to delivery of a specific service.
- Networking or alliance building between key stakeholders which may or may not include financial support.

SCN believes that the State bears the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that children's rights are implemented. Through the process of signing and ratifying the CRC, countries have become accountable to its children, and more broadly to society,

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<sup>17</sup> SCN, Policy for strengthening local capacity 2007 - 2009



for these rights. The State is under the obligation to ensure that the rights of all children are respected, protected and fulfilled, at all times. This is the core of the rights-based approach.

The goal of SCN support to civil society partners is therefore to build their competence to influence duty-bearers to fulfil, respect and protect the rights of children and to implement the CRC. The civil society also has a role to play in informing the general public of their rights and in enabling rights holders to claim their rights.

On the other hand, SCN seeks not only to hold governments accountable. There are two important modifications. SCN can work for the realisation of children's rights in countries where it is impossible to find relevant national or local partners, for instance in emergencies or when civil society does not have the capacity to implement the activity and/or no legitimate government exists. In such situations, SCN may still implement programmes directly. Self implementation can be also be used as a tool in an innovation phase to gain experience and to build models and in conflict sensitive geographic and thematic areas.

According to the policy, SCN prefers a mix of government and civil society partners. The most common in civil society are NGOs, CBOs and more informal groups such as child groups at the local level. Government partners are institutions or agencies of the national and local governments – including ministries of education, health and justice, human rights institutions with statutory powers, judges, police and social welfare institutions including bodies of child authority. A guiding principle is never to fill gaps in government capacity nor establish parallel structures.

It is important for SCN to share values, policies and practices related to child rights and non-discrimination with local partners. Equally important is to identify what divides the two. In order to assess a partner's ability to achieve impact for children, assessments of organisational capacity are carried out.

#### *4.2. Partnerships in Sri Lanka and Uganda*

SCN has similar histories in respect of partnerships in both Sri Lanka and Uganda. The SCN has worked in Sri Lanka since 1974 and in Uganda also since the late 1980s. In both countries, SCN was highly operational until the early 1990's when a partnership approach was adopted, but around 2003 the situation changed. In Sri Lanka, SCN worked with and through several national and local partners. Late 2004, Sri Lanka was struck by the tsunami, needs for quick action arose, budgets skyrocketed from 1.7 to 27 Mill GBP with eleven Alliance members contributing, SCN and SCUK went through a consolidation during the latter part of 2002 and merged in 2003 with SCUC more self-implementing than SCN and staff increased to nearly 400 in the aftermath of the tsunami to cope with the need for efficient delivery of services. Number of staff has later been reduced to some 200, but SCiSL is still in the process of changing the direction of a large heavy "ship" and adapting the organisation to a more normal situation (from 2009 when there will be no more tsunami funds). The number of partners has been reduced from more than 200 to 34 and the support will also cover fewer districts. This is a painful process with conflicting interests and different perceptions of what the final outcome should be.

There is still a high level of self-implementation in the country programme in Sri Lanka (estimated to 60%), but the aim is to reach 60% partner- and 40% self-implementation. The government is increasingly establishing infrastructure and resuming services in the East and North. Deliberate efforts are underway to reduce level of self-implementation, reduce staff, identify new partners and gradually hand over more responsibilities and projects to local civil society partners. In the area of education, Department of Education is the main partner for SCiSL. SCiSL is also an active member of the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies – consisting of international NGOs and UN agencies.

SCiSL has been in implementation mode for four years since the tsunami and perceived as an international NGO providing efficient services with the support of its own staff or through contractual arrangements. It was most likely easier to move from partnerships to implementation as a result of the tsunami than now the other way around. It is not only a question about changing working methods, but also attitudes and perceptions among SC staff and external stakeholders.

SCiSL has to reduce staff – a process creating uncertainty and worry in a country with high level of unemployment, but even more important – SC needs to change staff – recruiting new people with other skills in building capacities among partners. It is not only new skills which are required, but staff with a new mindset and understanding of development. This is acknowledged by SCiSL, but not yet sufficiently addressed as a precondition for effective realisation of the new partnership strategy.

In Uganda, the first steps towards a unified presence were taken in 2003 and 2004. Here organisations with different approaches to the balance between self-implementation and partnerships had to develop a joint approach. This has been a painful process and discussed in the previous chapter. It should be recognized that one of the main factors that has made the unified presence so difficult to achieve is the approach to partnership and all that entails in terms of staff, organisation, working processes, etc. At present, there are around 50 partners mentioned in the Country Programme and that seems to be a number that is not disputed; there is no specific aim either to increase or decrease the number of partners.

The partnership policy outlines different forms of partnership and we find that distinction very useful and potentially strategic in nature. However, we do not find that it is followed much in practice. Partners are partners and they seem to be treated more or less alike, although in theory there is a distinction between them. At the field level most partnerships are based on formal agreements and based on SCiUG providing financial support for a project, often in combination with financial support for capacity development in the partner organisation. SCiUG divides between regular partners (usually CBOs), strategic partners and Governmental partners. Although the latter may be perceived as “partnerships among equals”, that is, where there has been a formal agreement with an organisation based on similar values to pursue objectives jointly, most of the partnerships have a straightforward donor-recipient relationship with a clearly defined beginning and an end.

Partners are to a lesser degree formulating projects and agendas on their own, and projects are developed and closely monitored by SCiUG. Although this has increased the capacity of many weak CBOs and substantially strengthened their ability to apply

for funding from other sources, the power relationship is still very clear. The fact that several of the “strategic partners” we visited reported a lack of transparency from SCiUG regarding decisions and prospects of continued funding, is also an indicator of a distinct donor-recipient relationship. This is the case also in SCiSL, and the fuller spectrum of partnerships that is outlined in the policy does not seem to fully materialise in practice.

To some extent the same staff resource concerns arise in Uganda in the wake of the unification process. Many staff members that have valuable working experience from managing self-implemented projects have to find new roles and adapt to working with partners. But it is a less dramatic process in Uganda than it is in Sri Lanka, and it is also recognized that the experience of self-implementation is valuable to have in relationship to partners, not least when it comes to capacity development. SCiUG is in a position to be a strong and valuable partner with lots of experiences from hands on management to share with its implementing partners, both among the local civil society organisations and government partners.

#### **4.3. Critical Issues in Partnerships**

Partnership is a key word in the development practice – and rhetoric. Against the overall background of the policy on local capacity development and the practice that was seen during the field visits, there are some key issues that stand out:

- The asymmetric power relations (persistence of donor – recipient relationships).
- When projects end and accountability for results.
- Choice of partners and implications for advocacy.
- Global partnerships and “working with equals”.

There are of course many other issues to discuss, but we choose to highlight these because they are also to a great extent influenced by the unification process and the different practices around partnership that the SC Alliance members bring with them.

#### **The Persistence of Donor – Recipient Relations**

The policy on capacity development recognizes that SCN is often a dominant partner and that there is a risk of creating dependencies: *“Being a donor often gives an asymmetric relationship with a partner, though the power of financial resources can be balanced with local expertise and knowledge. To combat an asymmetric relationship, transparency and openness are important.”* (p.5). The issues around partnerships are well understood and clearly communicated in the policy, but while the theory and the principles are clear enough, they are more difficult to translate into practice. In the following, we treat some of the dilemmas in the practice of partnerships, that is, where SC has to tread a balance between different objectives that cannot be obtained at the same time.

SCiSL is a major international NGO with a large head office in Colombo (60 staff), five district offices with 20-30 staff, 16 expatriates, a fleet of cars with SC flags, stickers and blue lanterns (as security precautions) – all well justified, but in stark contrast to resource poor local organisations with limited capacity and expertise. The same image appears in Uganda. The contrast between SCiUG offices and those of, for example, the Concerned Parents Association, or the NGO Network, is striking. In

other words, there is an imbalance which may not provide the best and most conducive basis for partnership – certainly not for more mutual and reciprocal partnerships, and maybe not for effective capacity building. We are not arguing that strong organisations cannot partner with weaker, but the asymmetry may be too significant and a constraint.

The question can also be discussed at a more fundamental level: How can international NGOs best contribute to building civil society and its organisations in developing countries? Save the Children has opted for a model with strong country presence in most places, mixed partnerships and a certain level of self-implementations while other alternatives could have been: (a) working through one or a few national organisations, (b) providing financial and technical support from regional or sub-regional offices, (c) establishing national Save the Children organisations, etc.

It is not entirely clear to what extent SCN considers partnership as a means to an end or an end in itself. On the one hand, SCN could define its overall role to build child rights organisations in third world countries and focused all its efforts on capacity building of national civil society organisations. On the other hand, SCN could define its primary objective to fulfil children's rights and use capacity building and local organisations to achieve this objective. This may sound as a semantic difference, but represents two approaches with significant operational differences.

It seems that SCN and more broadly to SCA sees partnerships more as a means to an end – meaning that partnerships are important for SC – but only to the extent that they contribute to the fulfilment of child rights. If such capacity is not there – SC will come in and help. It will remain a constant temptation for SC with its strong country presence to compensate for obvious local capacity gaps. SCN and Save the Children country programmes have most likely been more effective in fulfilling rights for children than strengthening civil society through local partners.

### **When Projects Come to an End and How Results are Described**

If not before, the issues around the imbalance of power and resources will surface when projects come to an end. At that time, SCN is expected to hand over projects and activities to partners, but such a process is often constrained by a lack of ownership by new partners of what is handed over and exit strategies are not so well developed in the programme documents. The actual size of projects is a problem in its own right<sup>18</sup>. That the issue is real was clearly seen in Sri Lanka. The annual budget for SCiSL in Batticaloa District is about 10 Mill NOK. The District Office needs implementing partners with the ability to absorb and use relatively large resources – ability many local partners don't have. A way out of the dilemma is to partner with organisations created by Save the Children. There are three organisations in Batticaloa which were established as a result of Redd Barna's work during the 1990's. PPDRO is one of them with six unit offices and 112 staff and implementing projects for SCiSL, GTZ and others. This is technically an NGO and most likely an effective and efficient NGO, but a typical example of what could be called an "aid construct" – an organisation that lives on and off international aid. Such organisations are not formed

<sup>18</sup> This is a very well known and well documented fact and it has been an issue in the debate on aid effectiveness for at least the past 25 years. But it remains difficult to resolve in practice.

by interests and values in a local civil society, but serve more as tools for international NGOs. This is not necessarily wrong, but such kind of partnerships are more about project implementation than strengthening civil society, and may undermine the legitimacy and ownership among members and local target groups.

One aspect of treatment of partners is visible in respect of how one talks about results. In the plan from Sri Lanka, it is claimed that the results will be achieved “*due to Save the Children’s interventions in seven target districts*”. Also at the global level, it is often seen as if results are created by Save the Children. One has to read strategy documents and plans closely and carefully to see that, in fact, most objectives are reached in cooperation with partners. SC has most likely made a contribution, but in most cases it not possible to measure their relative contribution. We would think that many partner organisations would be surprised and perhaps dismayed if they saw the plans and reports of Save the Children, where the activities that they have actually initiated, were given finances, and then implemented with their own manpower, are merely reported as the results of Save the Children’s work.

The plans express SC intentions while implementation happen through a broad range of government and NGO partners. However, few of them are presented in plans and reports except for general references to “civil society organisations” and government authorities. The readers of plans and reports don’t know who the partners are, what their roles are and what they are expected to do and have done. There is an urgent need to change the vocabulary of planning and reporting to better reflect the realities at field level.

### **The Choice of Partners and Legitimacy in Advocacy Roles**

SCN pursues two strategies – working with and strengthening both civil society and government partners and argues convincingly for such a position. If SC wants to work on a large scale in the area of education in Sri Lanka, for example, the organisation has to work with and through the Department of Education. The same is true in Uganda (and most other countries). SCiSL has also focused its interventions on issues of quality, innovation and model development – in order to avoid duplication, parallel structures and filling gaps in government implementation.

Certain rights based organisations argue that the role of NGOs is to hold the government accountable – monitor and identify gaps and violation of rights and make sure that duty bearers fulfil their obligations. In order to maintain such a role, they have to be and also be perceived as independent of the Government.

SCN seeks to maintain a difficult balance between loyalty and independence, between government and civil society – trying to make the best out of a deliberate strategic choice. In Sri Lanka, the problems are more with the Government – criticising SCiSL for being too supportive of LTTE than with NGOs finding SCiSL too government friendly.

The combined government/civil society could be seen as both a comparative strength or as a weakness – to a large extent depending on the country context and the perceived role of NGOs. SCiSL is able to insert new dimensions in government educational programmes. What we observed in selected schools were true quality innovations which would not have been implemented without support from Save the

Children. On the other hand, international NGOs are heavily criticized by the Government and not well placed to influence government policies.

While the approach to working with the government created discomfort in some areas of Sri Lanka, we saw no evidence of that in Uganda. On the contrary, SCiUG has worked closely with the Uganda People's Defence Forces and has helped set up a Human Rights Department there. SCiUG has also brought public attention to atrocities committed by the UPDF during forced disarmaments among the Karamojong in northern Uganda, and has raised many issues regarding the protection of children in refugee camps over the years. All we met noted that SCiUG has been able to combine strong criticism with serious engagement with the armed forces as well as other parts of government. If the activities are carefully designed and well executed, it is possible to combine criticism and partnership – and this seems to be an area where there is good practice that needs to be documented and disseminated.

Another question is to what extent such a strategy is in line with the proposed new principles for Norad support to civil society (Prinsipper for Norad's støtte til sivilt samfunn, Oktober 2008). The principles are based on the assumption that Norwegian NGOs support civil society in the South – *“which is an arena separate from the state, family and the market”*. Partnerships between Norwegian NGOs and governments are not discussed at all in this document.

The main focus is to support civil society organisations at all levels to fight poverty and exploitation. Norwegian NGOs should look for alternative partners among traditional organisations, new social movements of landless, workers and broad political alliances fighting for development, debt relief and public goods. It seems that neither the public private partnership policy nor its implications have been much discussed at SCN, nor in the Alliance – and in parallel, the Norad principles seem not to take into account SCN's mode of operation.

### **Global Partnerships**

This review is focused on SCN as an organisation, the field visits in Sri Lanka and Uganda, and issues surrounding the unification process. We have not pursued how the Alliance works with other international organisations, for example UNICEF, UNDP, or NGOs in related fields, such as IPPF, the Red Cross, Amnesty International, PLAN, and many others. It is perhaps significant that the SCN policy document on partnership is actually a policy for capacity building in respect of partners. Partners are organisations through which one works to accomplish organisational objectives and they inevitably end up as being funded by the SC Alliance.

Neither this policy nor strategy documents articulate how one should work together with other organisations. Hence, the relationship varies, sometimes it is amicable and sometimes it is also close and fruitful. At other times, it is tense and difficult and there is substantial “fighting over turf” or competition for scarce resources, or disagreement on how best to achieve objectives. It depends much on personalities, in all the organisations concerned. In the lack of policies, it is natural that it is the leading persons on the ground who shape the nature of that kind of cooperation. In the case of Uganda, the review found that Plan had worked with advocacy on children's registration at birth for many years. To some extent, this had been successful and there were new Government policies in place. SCiUG entered the scene last year and

called for government action, and the fact is that though a new Government policy is in place, the country has a long way to go before that is put into practice. There is certainly a need for more advocacy – as well as concrete practical advice on how to implement the policy. But there was some risk that Plan and SCiUG developed activities without being aware of each others past work, with diverging assessments of the state of reform in Uganda and without a clear view as to what could realistically be achieved, and by whom.

SCiSLs a member of the coordinating body for international NGOs and works for instance closely with UNICEF, but as mentioned previously a cooperation more based on similarities than complementarities – to a large extent determined by UNICEF's particular "NGO profile".

#### *4.4. Relating through Ideology*

A separate issue is how SCN is relating to its partners and constituencies through its ideology, based on the CRC and made explicit through children's participation. SCN has as a goal to develop a common understanding with partner organisations, and finding ways of promoting CP that may last and be further developed. But there are many difficult issues to handle, such as when to involve children and on what level. Further, there are hierarchies in communication that may conceal a seemingly "open" and "democratic" process of participation, but where the reality is that children in the processes are only paying respect to their elders. Also, "children" can hardly be considered a homogenous group as they all belong to different families, social groups and hierarchies of their local communities. SCN is much aware of such pitfalls, and states quite bluntly in the policy document that often, children's participation only serves to legitimate adult conclusions. Thus, it is vital that CP interventions can be assessed thoroughly in order to enhance *meaningful* participation. How SC relates to the local context and puts to practice such an ideological standpoint, is crucial to ensure relevance to local stakeholders.

As an example of such an assessment, SCN has conducted a two-year evaluation of Children's Participation (CP) in armed conflict, post-conflict and peace building, taking place in the Balkans, Guatemala, Nepal and Uganda (funded by MFA). The country evaluation from Uganda found that SCiUG's Peace Clubs in Northern Uganda have achieved significant results on enhancing children's knowledge of CRC, dialogue with teachers has improved and teachers have become more accountable to children. Weaknesses were found concerning the processes including preparation, follow-up and feedback, and relationship between children and adults. Issues that need to be further addressed when promoting CP are the power relations between children and adults, i.e. teachers may become defensive when confronted with controversial issues.

In some instances there is direct resistance to empowering children to demanding their rights, because it either contradicts the cultural norm - or children make demands that are considered irrelevant: i.e. refusing to get firewood because it is "child labour," or children demanding more food when sufficient food is simply not available. Interventions may even be harmful, because disappointment due to unrealistic expectations has been created among the children, or adults may see the opportunity to get back at what they consider particularly "big headed" children. What happens then when SCiUG is no longer around is anyone's guess.

Capacity building that neglects local context is in danger of creating distance and opposition rather than awareness raising and social changes. The existing concept in Northern Uganda of “NGO-Children” and “NGO-women” (negatively), used to describe individuals that have attended workshops or worked closely with NGOs, is an indicator of how difficult it may be to promote CP as a meaningful concept. SCiUG is aware of these dilemmas, and have tried also to focus on children’s responsibilities within the local context, yet the dilemma remains.

One limitation mentioned in the Policy Document is assessing children’s participation and its impact; and in consulting with broader child groups at the Head Office and in the organisational decision-making structures. In order to provide *meaningful* participation, evaluation is necessary. Some country programmes have developed M&E systems to assess CP and its impact, but reporting and assessments on CP is often conducted in terms of quantitative indicators, such as number of participants in clubs, etc. Such indicators only indicate children as participants, not the level or quality of participation. What is meaningful participation? Are activities such as dancing, singing, playing, etc, “meaningful”? They might be meaningful to the children, but not necessarily within the global discourse on CP. Equally, children standing up to “demand their rights” is meaningful within the CP discourse, but might not be meaningful to the local stakeholders (i.e. the example of children refusing to collect firewood).

## CHAPTER 5: ABILITY TO DO

This chapter discusses the fourth and final of the four abilities elaborated in the review model; the ability to produce results. It is quite clear from the terms of reference for the review that SCN’s ability to create results should be analysed, but at the same time it is also clear that the review team’s ability to document results is limited. The review team spent one week at SCN headquarters in Oslo and one week in each of the two countries Uganda and Sri Lanka. Although we visited partners in both countries and had opportunities to meet stakeholders in projects as well as people targeted as beneficiaries, we cannot claim to have produced any evidence of results. Instead our discussion of results covers:

1. SCN’s knowledge of results and its presentation of results to Norad.
2. SCN’s monitoring and evaluation system:
  - a. Capacities to analyse results
  - b. Organisational arrangements
  - c. Quality of reports
3. Categories of results and the strategic orientation of monitoring and evaluation.
4. Results from Children’s Participation

### 5.1. Knowledge and Presentation of Results

In the course of the review, we have asked people what they consider to be the most important achievements of SCN. A fairly large number of respondents, particularly at senior management levels, could point to some significant achievements, such as the mobile education programmes with the Karamojong in northern Uganda, interventions in Ethiopia in basic education, and others. This reflects that they have an



overview of what the organisation does, that they have the ability to compare achievements, and that they reflect on activities.

Nevertheless, there were also many who could not point to any outstanding success, often at junior levels, newly employed and often locally employed. It is an important aspect of organisational culture that employees at all levels can share a sense of accomplishment. Lack of responses on the issue of achievements suggest that this is an area that needs increased focus. When staff cannot inform outsiders of the worth and merit of what SCN does, they are not good ambassadors of the organisation.

The most obvious place to look for a description of results would be the Annual Report to Norad. Two such reports were studied during the review, one for 2006 and the other for 2007. During 2008, Norad changed the directives on how the Annual Reports were to be written, but by the time SCN received these instructions the report covering 2007 was already well under way. Norad accepted that the 2007 report followed the old format, particularly as the first pages contained the kind of narrative analysis of results that Norad was keen to see.

The two annual reports from 2006 and 2007 contain 167 and 199 pages respectively, which immediately appear to be a substantial overkill. It should have been obvious that this is much more information than Norad could possibly cope with and it is information at a level of description and analysis that in no way corresponds to the needs of either organisation. While it is fine that Norad now has introduced a new and simplified format that is meant to provide more strategic information, there is a history of reporting which must have consumed significant resources over many years to little or no use.

The reports are structured in three major blocks. The first block (3 pages) contains a quick overview with financial information, presenting geographic and thematic areas of involvement. This is necessary information, particularly if the outcomes are compared to plans and any deviations analysed and explained. The second block (12 pages) presents strategic objectives and key working principles. While it is not necessary to repeat objectives and the need to, for example, fulfil children's right to education, it is useful to remind the readers of key expected results and to inform on progress in relation to these. The presentation in this second block is, in large measure, clear and concise, and could not be expected to be much shorter or more strategic than it is.

The third block (160 pages) contains detailed descriptions of the engagements in the 13 programme countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It must be possible to find other ways of presenting this information, if it needs to be presented at all. On the one hand, there are country programmes in these countries and it is necessary to analyse how these programmes unfold and what results are generated. This is an obvious managerial function. But is it necessary to report all that to Norad, in this aggregate form? We would hope that the new reporting format makes these 170 pages redundant. Apart from these three major blocks of text, there are some shorter chapters on organisational issues, monitoring and evaluation, the reform process and visions for the long-range future. But it is the 160 pages of narrative and descriptive text on country level interventions that need to be reconsidered. The remaining forty pages could make a clear and meaningful annual report.

While the overall structure in the reporting on strategic objectives is quite satisfactory, there are missing links in the connections between the objectives, the operational plans and the reporting. One of the major targets for the strategy period 2006 – 2009 was to contribute to the enrolment of more than one million children in schools. The Annual report for 2006 and 2007 both report that the expected result for the four-year period was reached already during 2006. While this is good in itself, it raises a number of critical questions: Was the target for the four-year period realistic? To what extent did it have any basis in reality? Would 1.5 million have been an appropriate four-year target? What does it mean, if anything, that it was achieved? There is a need to take the analysis further and to develop the narrative reporting into an assessment and interpretation of results. This need not be a much longer text than the present one. SCN could cut back on the descriptive elements, use references to plans and strategies rather than repeat information, and develop the critical reflection on achievements.

Yet another issue in the reporting to Norad concerns the balance between quantitative and qualitative information. Looking at the annual reports it is not quite clear how that balance is maintained. There is no doubt that most of the text is qualitative in nature, but that does not necessarily mean that it is a qualitative analysis of results, or an analysis of qualitative results. There is a discussion of qualitative targets and qualitative processes, and there are descriptions of different aspects of needs and rights. On the other hand, various aspects of quantitative presentation are prominent and are often shown up-front, as the supreme measures of success. First of all is of course the numbers of children reached. The first paragraph on the first page of the 2007 Annual Report says that *“SCN reached 2.7 million children in 2007, an increase relative to the 2.5 million reached in 2006.”* Each of the seven strategic objectives is presented with similar quantitative information, as for example in the area of children’s right to protection: *“Protection and care for 50.000 children exposed to violence: The set target was reached already in 2006, when approximately 153.000 children were offered protection and care through programmes run by SCN and partners. In 2007 this figure was approximately 121.000., and “70.000 children are participating in activities for the prevention of violence and abuse: In 2006 54.000 children took part in these forms of activities. In 2007 this figure increased to approximately 80.000 children”.*

The same level of detail is followed up in each of the country reports. Some mention exactly how many children were reached in each country, and we learn, for example, that 239,263 children benefited SCiUG programmes for 2007. It is obvious that these have benefited in different ways and the benefit of one is not equal to that of any other, and thus the aggregate figure is misleading in terms of results. Similarly, the annual report mentions that in Ethiopia:

- 415,896 children (197,373 -47.5% girls) (425,884 planned which includes 289 504 children of 2006) got access to first cycle basic education in Amhara and Southern Nations and Nationalities and People’s (SNNPR)-Hamer Woreda.
- 44,412 children (49.5% girls) (2,500 planned) got access to 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle primary education in Amhara Region while the SNNPR-Hamer children not yet transferred to 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle.

It possible to quote many more examples of misleading and hard to interpret quantitative information in the annual reports and throughout the monitoring and

evaluation system. At the same time, everybody knows that these figures have little meaning, managers know that to have a child enrolled in a school in Addis Ababa is much more difficult than to do so in an area with nomadic tribes. They know that quantity is not the same as quality. They know that one cannot count people that have listened to radio programmes and thus assume that they have been “reached”. In spite of that knowledge SCN and other alliance members continue to devote vast efforts to collect and disseminate information on such quantitative targets, and use them for planning and resource allocation.

It is often said that the organisation needs to present quantitative information. Donors require such information and also governments in developing countries. In the fundraising efforts numbers count, and the higher the numbers the better. However, that seems to be a truism. We are not quite sure whether qualitative information would be less valuable. In fact, it seems that many stories of effective aid are in fact qualitative. We would suspect it is a myth that the general public in Norway (and elsewhere) care much for the overall statistics. On the contrary, we would think that people are wise enough to doubt the aggregate numbers presented by SCN, and if they contribute to the organisation they do so for other reasons.

### **Global Impact Monitoring**

A workshop May 2008 concluded the two year SCN pilot project - testing the use of twelve global indicators. It was said that the twelve indicators were concentrated to priority thematic areas enabling SCN to say something about what the whole organisation delivers on a global scale, but not reflecting the whole spectre of programmes nor the total of SCN's activities.

The seminar gave an overall positive feedback to the concept and use of global indicators, while recognizing the challenges. The question is to what extent such high level indicators provide relevant information about Save the Children performance, how much priority and resources the organisation should use for such monitoring or more fundamental whether it is the role of an international NGO to collect such data and information. In light of the discussion above, we conclude the resources could be better spent on understanding and presenting more intermediate results and qualitative aspects of results.

### **5.2 Monitoring and Evaluation Systems**

In spite of the shortcomings of the Annual Reports and the quantitative nature of results information, there are many positive things to be said about the monitoring and evaluation function as such in the SCN, which suggests that a closer dialogue with Norad on the need for information, and perhaps also more strategic guidance for the evaluation function, could quickly and with little effort make that function more useful.

First of all, there is the issue of the overall capacities to analyse results. Many organisations find it difficult to recruit people with evaluation competence. Until recently, it was unclear what formal qualifications would be needed, and there were few graduate training programmes that people could qualify through. Nor was it clear what kind of practical experience people should have. Nevertheless, SCN has recruited people with good and profound evaluation competence. At headquarters, there are two persons specialised in evaluation and they have strong professional

backgrounds of evaluative work. It is a good sign, both that the need for that kind of competence has been identified, and that it was possible to recruit competent professionals.

Also the country offices seem to have the human resources they need. In Uganda, two staff members specialised on evaluation, both with strong professional backgrounds. On top of the two Kampala based M&E positions, SCiUG also has monitoring and evaluation staff (five in total) based in the field. The same is true for Sri Lanka having its own M&E staff. The monitoring and evaluation personnel thus make up a network of their own in the organisation. However, neither in Oslo nor in the field offices do they do the actual job of monitoring and evaluation, they compile results and they commission external evaluation studies. While that is one possible way of organising the function, it may mean that skills are eroded in the longer term. Evaluation staff needs to get exposed to doing the evaluative job occasionally – if not always.

There is also some staff training programme in the organisation. Even if monitoring and evaluation is a specialised function, many others get involved and it is necessary to upgrade skills throughout the organisation. In Uganda, evaluation skills have had a major share of internal training during 2008. While that kind of 2 - 3 day seminars does not meet the need immediately, it is a good sign that it has started and it needs to be followed up.

While monitoring and evaluation does not play a prominent part in the unification process per se, it is likely that these functions can be significantly strengthened – particularly when seen from the vantage point of SCN. It would seem as if the British and US alliance members have devoted more resources to monitoring and evaluation in the past and have stronger evaluation functions in their organisations. In Uganda, it was the former US country programme that brought the evaluation competence to the new unified presence. Monitoring and evaluation could easily be a winning function in the unification process as the different organisations supplement each other with different methodological skills and different approaches – all of which will be needed in the future.

Second, once the capacities are in place the question is how they are deployed. Organisational arrangements have varied between the alliance members and do so at field levels as well. In Oslo, the evaluation function is one of nine units that fall under the Director of Policy and Development. First, it could be questioned whether nine units is not too broad a span of control for any one middle manager. Second, this places the function two hierarchical levels down from the International Programme Director and three to four levels down from the management of SCN.

The point is not that evaluation should have an independent position – but that it should be strategically placed. SCN rightly sees the main purpose of evaluation to be “learning and programme development” and the question thus is, where to place the function given that purpose. At the field level, in Uganda, the evaluation function seems appropriately placed inside the unit for Programme Design. But at headquarters, the evaluation function is parallel to thematic advisers, because they are to play a role in evaluations and should benefit from the learning experience. However, the connection appears to be loose and the fact that they are part of the

same large organisational unit does not per se create the direct link and connection to a specific function that is seen in Uganda.

In the country office in Uganda, the evaluation function is part of the unit for Programme Design, which puts it two hierarchical levels down from the Country Director. Evaluation often benefits from being combined with another function. Many organisations combine evaluation with internal audit or something similar. However, to combine evaluation with design is better – it suggests that evaluation findings will come to use in planning new activities and it also means that evaluation can be part of the design of new interventions.

The organisational solution at headquarters is less fortunate, it puts evaluation too far away from management and it combines evaluation with documentation – but nothing else. There is a risk that the function becomes isolated and that the knowledge generated through monitoring and evaluation remains documented, but of little use.

The independence of evaluation is primarily met through the use of external consultants; that is, the staff of the evaluation function (and others as the need arises) commission evaluations from external consultants. While that independence is important, it also means that related functions need more attention, in particular:

- To possess skills in drawing up unbiased and focused terms of reference for evaluators;
- to manage tendering processes and selecting evaluators that really are independent, not only formally external to the commissioning organisation;
- to ensure the quality of evaluation reports;
- to make sure that the knowledge generated is put to use.

Neither of these functions is obviously and at all times managed perfectly and they need more attention for the organisation to be able to present results in an adequate way.

The third issue to discuss here relates to the quality of evaluation<sup>19</sup>. In all systems that produce a number of evaluations over some years, there will be a difference between the reports produced. Box 5.1 suggests two examples from the SCN experience. Some are better than others, and some fail to produce much that is new and useful. There could be any variety of reasons, from the beginning in how the evaluation is commissioned, to the work of the evaluators and their capacity to put findings on paper and report. In order to cope with that, organisations that commission evaluations need some form of quality control. It is necessary to define what constitutes quality, to have a process to check whether the money spent on evaluation leads to reports of high quality, and some guidelines on what to do when quality standards are not reached. We have not found evidence of any of these in SCN, or in the field offices that we visited. As SCN and other alliance members spend considerable amounts of money on evaluation, and as the function is necessary and many needs for knowledge and information must be met, it is quite urgent to approach the issue of evaluation quality.

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<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of evaluation refer to “The Program Evaluation Standards”, Sage Publications, 1994, and Sida Evaluation Studies; “Are Sida Evaluations Good Enough?”, Stockholm, 2008.

That finally raises the issue of how much is actually spent on monitoring and evaluation and whether that amount of money is adequate. SCiUG has an annual evaluation plan and we discussed the activities during 2008. This includes some ten studies - some that are clearly evaluation reports and others that are reviews, context analysis and other related products. The balance between monitoring and evaluation is well maintained. Overall, the quantity of work at the level of the country programme is adequate. It is more questionable whether the resources spent on evaluation at SCN are adequate, but that depends also on how the evaluations completed at country level are used and how the coordination with other alliance members is managed.

### **Box 9. Two Examples of Evaluation Studies**

#### **Violence Against and Abuse of Children**

SCN presented two strategic evaluations to inform our evaluation process. One of these was entitled “*Save the Children Norway’s work in the Thematic Area of Violence Against and Abuse of Children*”. It was published in 2005.

It is a study of 104 pages. It was led by a consultant working with teams of evaluators in ten countries. It describes how projects and programmes are initiated (up to page 32) and then discusses implementation (strategies, resources, activities) p to page 70. There is a section on monitoring and evaluation (which mainly deals with feedback on the evaluation itself). Impact is discussed on two pages, and then it concludes.

The study probably has many merits in describing and discussing activities within this important field, but it is not an evaluation such as these are commonly defined (being systematic and arriving at conclusions on worth and merit, see the programme Evaluation Standards)). There is no description of evaluation methods, no presentation of instruments for data collection or analysis, nothing on evaluation design. There are few conclusions on whether projects are successful or not and the reader is not informed whether the objectives in this field are reached or not, and if so why and how that should be seen. Perhaps the paper has other merits, but it does not qualify as an evaluation and an approach to quality control should have identified the weaknesses.

#### **Child Resilience Programme in Uganda**

During our field visits in Uganda we also looked at evaluations in the regional office in Gulu. One of the evaluations there was entitled “*Evaluation of Save the Children in Uganda’s Pilot Phase of the Child Resilience Programmes in Schools in Northern Uganda*”. It was written in 2007 by Anne-Kaisa Wilson.

It is a brief study of around 30 pages. It presents its methodology very clearly; the process of formulating questions, of arriving at valid questions through participatory processes, selecting interview respondents, etc. The data from the interviews are shown in the text and analysed, and the conclusions in respect of the programme are presented.

This evaluation can be seen as a best practice example, and it is quite clear that in any assessment of evaluation quality it would score very high. It is innovative and it shows how children can be meaningfully involved in evaluation design. It is thus also a form of best practice example when it comes to encouraging children’s participation in monitoring and evaluation. It is also transparent, as data are presented the reader may draw his or her own conclusions and can assess credibility or develop own arguments irrespective of the evaluation team. Finally, and most important, the evaluation has useful and clear recommendations on the future of the programme – and it appears to have been used.

A system of quality control would help to establish best practices and could spread information to other evaluators in the organisation.

### 5.3 Categories of Results

The global strategic objectives provide direction for SCN's international work and define expected results. It is not our intention to repeat those expected results or even to review progress against those targets. We have already discussed some of the information provided in that respect through the Annual Reports to Norad. Instead we are interested in seeing what the results really are. Our experience of seeing activities in Uganda and Sri Lanka suggest that there are indeed much to be seen in terms of results and field visits in combination with the reports of SCN and the evaluations that can be read together give a rather convincing picture of significant results. Let us point to three examples even if the same is relevant for Sri Lanka:

In central Uganda, SC/US worked with basic education. Through the project SCiUG reached a large number of children with access to education (we visited a school with a class of around 30 children). If the project had not been, the children had not gone to school. There is no doubt about that and the results are clear and straight forward and can be counted in numbers of children getting access to education. The quantitative measure is an appropriate indicator of success, though it is of course also possible (and necessary) to pursue a discussion around the quality of the education, the sustainability of the schools once the government takes over, etc.)

In Kampala, we visited the Uganda Child Rights Network (UCRN). This organisation was established in 1997 by nine founding members (private individuals). The aim was: (1) to monitor and report on how children's rights are met to bodies such as the UN Committee following up on the CRC, and to the African Union, (2) collective advocacy on child rights, (3) research and documentation on child rights issues. The network has thus, in light of the discussion on partnerships above, both been an instrument to achieve SCiUG aims and also an end in itself, it is part of the objective to strengthen such organisations. At present the UCRN has around 100 members. It has an office and a small secretariat, and it is also funded by several other organisations. It has a good mixture of public and private financiers and thus seems to be sustainable as an organisation. In terms of results generated by SC, it is obviously so that it has contributed to building the organisation. The fact that UCRN exists and is a viable organisation is a result of SC activities over the past 10 years, but it has of course not been alone in creating that result. SC has contributed to the existence of the network, and without that contribution it would probably have been a very different organisation.

SCiUG has also engaged itself in advocacy for children's registration. Representatives of SCiUG raised issues on the necessity to provide nationwide facilities for registration, cheap and easy access to these, and the need to legislate forcefully on the subject. Activities in this field started in October 2008 and it is much too early to say whether they will be successful, but if there is a result in this field, perhaps SCiUG will have played a role in achieving it.

These three examples all show results, but they are very different categories of results and they cannot be assessed with the same measures. We could point to many more examples of results in both Sri Lanka and in Uganda. However, here we would like to emphasise the fundamental difference between the results in these three cases. In the first instance, the result is that children are provided with some basic service related to

their rights. Results are that children's rights are better respected and children's rights are better provided.

In the second instance, the result is that an institution has been strengthened in terms of improved institutional capacity. In the long run, the work of such an organisation would also benefit children and, as the example suggests, these are organisational entities that in turn work to respect and fulfill children's rights. But the results from the intervention of SCN must be accounted for in terms of institutional development.

In the third instance, the results must be assessed in terms of legislative changes – and following that, how laws are applied and what effect they then have. This is not the same as results in terms of institutional development, nor can it be compared to results in terms of reaching children with services, as in the first instance.

These examples are also much in line with the conclusions from Norad's recent evaluation of Norwegian NGOs in Northern Uganda, in which SCN is credited for significant contribution to outcomes at individual level (awareness, empowerment, awareness raising), and on institutional/organisational level by improving the capacity of partners and institutions (i.e. implementing mandates, strengthening child protection and improved quality of education)<sup>20</sup>. Having reviewed the reports of SCN, having seen a number of evaluation reports, and not least, having visited Uganda and Sri Lanka, we can formulate some hypothesis concerning these different types of results.

First, the major allocations of funds go to creating results of the first kind, that is, reaching children directly and providing for their rights. This is also the area where SCN primarily shows results. When the organisation presents expected results in relation to its objectives (as in the strategy) this is the kind of results the organisation expects to achieve.

Second, if we are to look at all three categories of results and look for where most results are created, this is certainly in the first field. This would be followed by results in terms of institutional development, but less so. This is explained both by the fact that it is far less resources that are actually targeted at institutional development, but the relative lack of results may also be an effect of few evaluations undertaken in this field and nothing in terms of monitoring system to track institutional development.

Third, there are far fewer results presented from advocacy; changes in legislation, policy formulation, etc. This is rather surprising and to some extent also alarming. While advocacy activities cost much less than service delivery or institutional development, they are nevertheless a significant part of the organisation's portfolio of activities. Advocacy is also expected to be one of the three main arenas of action in the next strategic period. From that perspective, it is problematic that there is so little evidence of results. However, we are quite sure that results are there in practice. The problem is rather that SCN has no experience of monitoring or evaluation its activities in advocacy. We have not seen any evaluation of advocacy activities. During our conversations with staff and management at different levels, including among the evaluation professionals, we have not heard of references to any such evaluations.

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<sup>20</sup> See Norad's "Evaluation of Norwegian Development Cooperation through Norwegian Non-Governmental Organisations in Northern Uganda (2003-2007)"



Indeed, nobody seems to know much about how to monitor and evaluate this very important sphere of activities.

### **Results from Children's Participation**

As CP is a working principle and a crosscutting issue, there are no CP programmes as such. There are, however, some projects where the main goal is to enhance participation, such as children's clubs, children's radios, etc. Results are to some extent monitored and reported, but to a lesser degree on an outcome level.

One example is from a Peace Club in Gulu/Amuru, Uganda, funded by DANIDA through a Child Resilience Project until May 2009. The main objective is to empower children with skills to recover from psychosocial distress. The Peace Club provides an area for discussion and team work among the children, as well as creative participation in dances, plays, etc. SCiUG's district office reports that the project has *".. improved attraction and retention of children at school, improved concentration of the children in class and significant reduction of trauma."* In addition, SCiUG reports significant involvement of children in activities that affects them.

Despite a seemingly successful project, staff at the Gulu district office reported in interviews that limitations of funding will be certain to put restraints on actual results achieved when it comes to CP. This was supported by interviews at Kampala office and with the consultant undertaking the thematic evaluation/research on child participation in peace building. In many instances, project funding is restricted to one-year grants and continuous presence and follow-up is difficult to maintain. There is also the question of sustainability, as the Peace Clubs are yet to be mainstreamed by education authorities, and head teachers have not been involved in the training. In addition, the return- and resettlement development due to the peace process, will influence the capability to follow up such activities. The question then is really what happens when SCiUG is no longer around. The opinion of the evaluation team is that under these conditions, CP is less likely to be maintained at a meaningful level and will not have any significant impact on practices or social structures. Still, other clubs may have had longer and more systematic follow-up, and are as a consequence more likely to achieve results.

As demonstrated by this example, the issue of meaningful participation with long term results, is complex. Without long term follow-up, there is likely to be little effect. In worst case, it may even be counterproductive and possibly create disappointment. The risk of mainstreaming such a principle is that it may be given less priority by SC staff – who already are overloaded with other tasks. And as funding is usually provided on a project/short term basis, it is thus difficult to make sure that CP processes are properly followed up after a project has ended.

Still, there are many good examples of CP, and – being clearly expressed as a goal in the CRC – it is not possible to criticise the concept from a strategic policy point of view. Raising children's voices and increasing their participation is good, and there are many examples of how this has been done by both listening to children and communicating their messages to decision-makers. However, based on interviews with SCiUG staff, it does not seem likely that CP will have any impact on local decision making structures. People make decisions as always, based on structure of

society. Hence, at the best, CP may empower and contribute to shaping democratic experiences on children that could influence them later in life. This however, is not clearly expressed in any of SCN's strategic documents.

It is unclear to what extent programs are utilizing CP adapted to fit the local context. As a consequence, further monitoring and assessment of quality issues is needed. There are some good experiences on assessing CP and develop standards such as the 10 Key Quality Elements, but the real challenge is to make use of it at the field level – in particular considering the various constraints such as funding, personnel, work load, cultural/social context, etc. It is notably when projects have CP as one of the main activities/objectives and sufficient time and resources is allocated, that good results are most likely to appear. Mainstreaming CP as a general working principle in combination with a quantitative biased M&E system, increases the risk that CP is always reported and maintained as “good” within the global discourse (as CP is formulated both as goal and a mean), while it may not always be the case.

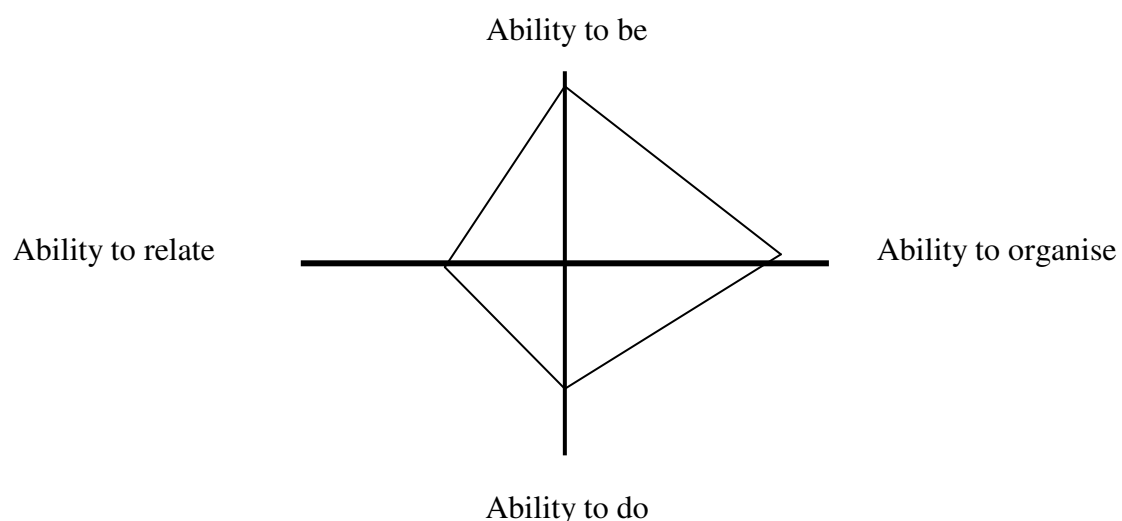
## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, we sum up the preceding analysis and conclude in respect of the four abilities that were analysed above. The analysis of the organisation leads onward to conclusions in respect of the purpose of the review. Based on that, we provide a set of recommendations, first of all to Norad in respect of its future cooperation with SCN and secondly, recommendations to SCN, based on the strengths and weaknesses documented on these pages.

### 6.1. Conclusions

The assessment framework from Chapter 1 implies that SCN needs four key abilities to provide effective aid – capacities which to a large extent determine organisational performance. The argument is that a high score on only one or two of the abilities is not sufficient. It is the successful combination of all four which provides the basis for high performance.

The discussion in chapters 2 through 5 cover all the four abilities and is based on document review, interviews and two country visits. The figure below sums up our aggregate assessment. If all abilities had been equally strong, the figure would have been a perfect quadrature, with one corner at the end of each scale. The figure below indicates that main SCN's strength lies in its strong and clear identity – as an organisation fulfilling children's rights. It is also an organisation with well established managerial systems and procedures, ample human and financial resources. It can also document the ability to produce results for children – though to a lesser extent in the area of advocacy, capacity building of partner organisations and civil society. SCN has the weakest score in its ability to engage in external partnerships and achieve results through partners.



The following table provides a brief summary of key strengths and weaknesses for each of the four abilities based on discussion in previous chapters.

**Box 10. Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses for Abilities**

<p><b>ABILITY TO BE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong organisational identity</li> <li>• Suitable governance structure</li> <li>• Inclusive and well coordinated strategy process</li> <li>• Concise and comprehensive SCN strategy document</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Selection of strategic direction and thematic priorities more problematic</li> <li>- Country strategies less clear and their processes cumbersome</li> <li>- Complex emerging global strategy</li> <li>- Paradoxes related to Children's Participation formulated as both a mean and an end.</li> </ul>	<p><b>ABILITY TO ORGANISE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant and solid thematic competence</li> <li>• Adequate managerial and financial management skills</li> <li>• Financial control and zero-tolerance policies on abuse</li> <li>• Systems and procedures well established</li> <li>• Human resources, gender well balanced, low turnover, high motivation, successful recruitment</li> <li>• Solid and diversified financial base, predictable sources of incomes</li> <li>• Leadership, stable and solid</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uncertainties in unification process (end result)</li> <li>- Constrained technical capacities</li> <li>- Training and skills development, few opportunities and limited time – risk of eroding capacities in the long run</li> <li>- Programme theory/theory of change not clearly developed</li> </ul>
<p><b>ABILITY TO RELATE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy document good, clear goals and distinguish different types of partners</li> <li>• Changes from self-implementation to working through partners over past 20 years</li> <li>• Extensive collaboration with government partners at national and local level,</li> <li>• Seen as a serious and good partner by other civil society organisations, reliable and trustworthy</li> <li>• Able to work both with government and civil society</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Often traditional donor-recipient relationship, instrumental use of partners to achieve SC objectives</li> <li>- Problems finding and working with like-minded and strategic partner</li> <li>- Unification process bring in other approaches, and less of partnerships</li> <li>- Constraints in relating to local stakeholders</li> </ul>	<p><b>ABILITY TO DO</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Necessary skills and capacities in M&amp;E</li> <li>• Adequate resources devoted to M&amp;E</li> <li>• Clear and well formulated objectives and targets</li> <li>• Most significant results in the fields of service delivery – less in capacity building and advocacy</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quantitative orientation of planning, M&amp;E efforts</li> <li>- Performance indicators not reflecting activities</li> <li>- Little information on results in respect of institutional development, advocacy work and children's participation</li> <li>- Norad reports too long and lacking strategic information, many figures, but little analysis</li> </ul>

**6.2 Conclusions on Effective Aid and Unification**

Terms of reference state that the purpose of this review is to examine SCN's ability to provide effective aid, meaning cost efficient use of funds, results in accordance with approved plans, relevance to final recipients and ability to achieve its own goals. The text box above presents key findings in respect of each ability. While we have pointed out a number of strengths and weaknesses, that does not mean that the overall

assessment contains equally much of positive and negative findings. An external assessment such as this will always come up with many suggestions for improvement, but that does not mean that the organisation is not basically efficient and effective. Let us now turn to the questions that define the purpose of the review.

**Question 1: Does SCN have the ability to achieve its own goals?**

In the course of the review, we have identified goals at the level of projects and programmes, at the level of country strategies and at the level of the global strategy. In each case, some goals and objectives are quantified, others qualitative. In terms of pure numbers of children reached in different thematic areas, in education, protection, concerning HIV/AIDS and with other social services, SCN reaches the goals it has set. In some important dimensions, the targets for 2009 were reached already in 2006, in other dimensions there is a more a steady progress towards the targets.

SCN also has goals that express qualities, for example increased qualities in education through teachers training and development of child friendly schools. Other goals are expressed in terms of advocacy work and changes in basic conditions affecting children's rights, for example in legislation. There are many results in these areas too and they are described in reports. However, the documentation of results in these areas is weaker, the monitoring and evaluation systems have not been developed to capture progress in respect of such goals.

The conclusion is that SCN does have the ability to reach its goals, but it knows more and has better evidence of results concerning basic service provision and numbers of children reached through its projects than it has concerning results of a qualitative nature.

**Question 2: Are the activities of relevance to final recipients?**

The operations of the SCN International Programme Department are solidly anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have not come across activities, projects or programmes that do not logically follow from a rights-based approach to the international Conventions that define the rights of children.

First of all, SCN operates in geographical areas where children's rights are most at risk. There is a geographical focus in the selection of countries. As far as we have seen, there is a geographical focus within countries, where SCN again operates in the areas where children's rights are most at risk. Projects and programmes have a strong poverty focus, again visible in the choice of where to be and operate and within which themes to develop projects.

Second, SCN has a focus on some particular aspects of rights, namely those relating to education and protection. Within the Alliance, other members work with other themes, but the specialisation of SCN can be defended in terms of relevance to the final recipients and it leads to more effective aid through the mechanism of economies of scale and specialisation.

Third, SCN operates with working principles that – fully implemented – increase the relevance of its work. Those working principles are the notions of children's participation and partnerships. While each of these entails problems and dilemmas for the organisation, they are nevertheless good principles and they will, in the long run,

increase the relevance of the work done. However, a real risk is that children's participation is considered so closely linked with SC identity, that there is less room for critical reflection on the subject.

**Question 3: Are results in accordance with Norwegian political priorities?**

Norwegian development cooperation is governed by a complex set of political priorities and objectives. First and foremost is the concern for poverty alleviation. SCN reaches out to children in poor families, and the choice of countries, regions and thematic areas ascertain that it is these target groups that are reached. The approaches of SCN are firmly anchored in objectives and values that are supposed to characterise Norwegian cooperation, namely education for children, partnerships, participation and gender equity. The work of SCN is in line with MFA's plan for poverty reduction, the MDGs and the strategic framework for peace building. The document "Three billion reasons : Norway's development strategy for children and young people in the south" (2005) has also been an important guiding document.

Performance management and mutual accountability for results are other priorities of Norway. SCN has built systems and organisational structures for monitoring and evaluation. So far, there is a focus on quantitative results in terms of children reached, directly and indirectly, but more qualitative dimensions can be added. Political priorities are stated in terms of purposes and thematic areas and qualities, not, as far as we have seen, in numbers.

**Question 4: Is there a cost-efficient use of funds?**

Cost-efficiency can be discussed in three ways. First, efficiency concerns the ratio between expenditures and the values achieved through projects and programmes. While there is no way that the different results can be compared on a similar scale, added up and related to the expenditures, there is hardly any doubt that the such an imagined ratio would be much above the figure 1. Hence, the funds are used cost-efficiently.

In the course of the review, we have also seen many examples of how SCN has had a major impact with a rather limited use of funds. Through innovative projects in basic education it has been possible to generate models that are applied on a much wider scale and that affect large numbers of children outside the initial target area. There have been impressive achievements in institutional development with a limited use of funds. Advocacy activities have had an impact far beyond the rather low costs of such projects.

At the same time, it is also possible for a review to show how things could be done at even lower costs and thus how cost-efficiency could be even higher. At the organisational level, huge costs have been devoted to monitoring and evaluation systems that do not provide the type of evaluation that the organisation is most of all in need of, nor what major donors would be interested in. The systems of strategic planning at times appear cumbersome and much working time is spent on producing voluminous reports that are not of much use. Save the Children has also opted for strong country presence with an expensive infrastructure and a relatively high level of expatriate staff. While the overall answer to the question is that "yes, funds are used cost efficiently", the follow up to that is that SCN could be even more cost-efficient and that there is a constant need to review and change operations to become better.

### **The Unification Process**

Much of our review has concerned the unification process and we were specifically asked to assess that process. First of all, there is no doubt that a unified presence is a step for the better and it increases the efficiency and effectiveness of Alliance members jointly, though at times some more than others. The unification is necessary and must continue.

That being said, it is a process that has been ongoing for many years and that has seen some spectacular failures. The programme in Uganda saw a failed<sup>21</sup> attempt at unification between 2005 and 2007, at a very high cost to the programme and to the organisation. The lessons of that failure have not really been taken to heart, and though the practice at present is better, the lessons learned of both the failed attempts and the present success (and successes in other countries) need to be made explicit for organisational learning to take place. Also, the costs of unification and the entailing organisational change at country level are quite high in terms of management time, and there is no doubt that projects suffer. Therefore the process of change should be speeded up, and there is much too little knowledge in the organisation about the costs of change.

The unification process is open-ended and as we have shown above, there are many ways that strategic issues around governance, delegation of responsibilities, accountability for results, division of labour, etc. could be designed. While it was useful to start the unification as an open process in 2003 and 2004, it is now high time to close the process and to establish a vision for what the Alliance should look like when the change process is through. Change creates uncertainty and that can be healthy for a while, but if it continues for a decade it becomes detrimental. There is a need to speed up change management at the Alliance level and to close the process. Not that the organisation will cease to change, new reasons to change will emerge, but the Alliance will be in a better position to identify such needs and cope with them if the present change process has come to an end.

### **6.3. Recommendations**

We have been asked to examine SCN's ability to provide effective aid. The report with its recommendation is meant to assist Norad in taking decisions about future support to SCN. The review process has given many insights into the organisation with its many qualities. There are also several aspects of governance, organisation, partnerships and results that can be strengthened. Recommendations to Norad regarding future support, conditions for continued funding and important issues to be discussed in the dialog between SCN and Norad is first presented followed by follows key recommendations to SCN.

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<sup>21</sup> In comments to the draft review report SCN contested that the process in Uganda was called "failed". In the eyes of the review team the period up to 2007 failed for the following reasons; (1) not all Alliance members joined, (2) no real steps towards reorganisation of the country presence and (3) development of a consolidated program were taken, and (4) the partners noticed much turmoil while no significant improvement in relations occurred, while at the same time (5) a lot of time was spent internally in trying to move forwards in respect of a unified presence. The review's interview notes show that the appointment of a new Country Director in 2007 was motivated by a wish to manage the unification process professionally.

**Recommendations to Norad**

- SCN has policies, organisational systems, resources and partners to deliver effective aid and Norad should enter into negotiations with SCN about a new frame agreement from 2010.
- The new frame agreement should provide core strategic support to country programmes.

However, there are certain conditions for entering such an agreement and also scope for improvements in how SCN currently operates. There are also issues to be monitored by Norad and discussed regularly with SCN of which the most important is the ongoing global unification process and its so far unknown consequences for SCN. Hence, Norad should:

- Request SCN to provide a short critical and strategic annual report on the unification process - in particular its progress at country level and implications for SCN.
- Request that an external evaluation of the unification process is carried out early 2010.
- Emphasise the need for an improvement in SCN's reporting of qualitative aspects of results in particular in the area of advocacy, capacity building and Children's Participation. The analytical and evaluative aspects of reporting should also be strengthened.
- Request a plan with approaches and methods for improved qualitative and quantitative monitoring and reporting to be submitted in 2009.
- Review its new guidelines for support to Norwegian NGOs in light of the extensive collaboration between SCN and governments at national and local level.
- Review to what extent SCN country programmes supported, but not managed by SCN classify as Norwegian organisation – eligible for support from and strategic partnerships with Norwegian Embassies.

**Recommendations to SCN:**

- Prepare a proposal to Norad for a new frame agreement for 2010 to 2014 based on its new strategic plan providing core support to selected country programmes.
- Support the preparation of an overall plan for the unification process clarifying the scope and long term goals for the process within the Alliance with a particular focus on:
  - Strategic selection of thematic priorities and modes of operation in the global strategy.
  - Partnership dimensions and capacity building approaches.
  - Global governance structure including models for country programme management.
  - Unified and agreed country programmes articulated in strategy documents (with similar comparable outlines).



- Introduction and evaluation of alternative models for SC country presence.
- Joint financing of country programmes.
- Clearly operationalise its role as a partner organisation making the role and contributions of partners more visible in plans and reports and take their efforts into account when measuring and documenting results.
- Review its human resource needs in view of the ongoing unification process and:
  - Agree on a more systematic division of labour and specialization with other Alliance members.
  - Increase its technical capacity and competence in a few selected areas to support innovation and provide technical support to countries.
  - Reduce level of country programme management capacity in Oslo.
- Prepare a plan with approaches and methods for improved qualitative and quantitative monitoring and reporting in order to:
  - Capture qualitative aspects of results.
  - Combine and balance qualitative and quantitative indicators.
  - Strengthen children's participation as an integral part of M&E by utilizing qualitative measures, and enhance communication on evidence-based attempts on CP from field level to programme, policy- and strategic level.
  - Cover the analysis of quantitative reporting – explain and assess what numbers mean, etc.
  - Introduce more results indicators at intermediate level reflecting SC performance better than national impact indicators.
  - Collect more quantitative data about change in knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour as a result of SC interventions (for selected priority programmes).
- Support the development of an independent and unified evaluation function:
  - Initiate joint reviews in all country programmes where SCN is Managing member.
  - Establish a global SCA evaluation task force and network for all members and country programme M&E staff for improved coordination, sharing of information, professional development, etc. integrating also country capacity.
  - Strengthen the independence of evaluation within the organisation.

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**Annex 2: People Met**

Anders Bade, Chief Operating Officer  
 Anne Ma Grøslund, Special Advisor (Policy and Development)  
 Anne Pedersen, Regional Director Africa  
 Annette Giertsen, Senior Advisor (Policy and Development)  
 Bente Løvseth, HR Advisor  
 Elisabeth Kjær, Director Communication and Advocacy  
 Ellen Kongsted, Legal Advisor  
 Gro Brækken, Secretary General/CEO  
 Ingunn T. Nakkim, Advisor (evaluation)  
 Ivar Otterlei, Finance Director  
 Markus Aksland, Regional Director, Asia and Latin America  
 Peter Wood, Regional Coordinator Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan  
 Petter Myhren, Senior Advisor to the Secretary General  
 Petter Stigset, International Programme Director  
 Rikke Iversen, Regional Coordinator, Programme Department  
 Sigurd Johns, Head of Policy and Development Section  
 Svein Erik Lynne, Director Human Resources  
 Tove Hauge, Marketing Director  
 Tove R. Wang, Assistant Secretary General/Chair Rewrite the Future

**Sri Lanka**

Branko Golubovic, Manager Operations  
 Pinith Weerasekara, Security Focal Point  
 Judy Lister, Interim Country Director  
 Nishanthi Joseph, Grants and Operations Admin Officer  
 Menaca Calyanaratne, Head of Media and Communication  
 Senait Gebregziabher, Director Advocacy and Strategy  
 Krishnakumar Palanisamy, Programme Advisor, ECE/ECCD  
 Geoffrey Oyat, Child Protection Team Leader  
 Wondwossen Delelegne, Team Leader HES  
 Aye Aye Tun, Team Leader Team Leader Realizing Child Rights  
 Tahirih Qurratul Ayn, Advisor - DRR  
 Dharshini Seneviratne, Team Leader- Learning & Impact  
 Harendra De Silva, Head of Finance  
 Ravindra Palipane, Manager - Finance/Grants  
 Gamini Samarasinghe, Grants Compliance Manager  
 Dillon Gomez, Head of Human Resources and Administration  
 Julian Chellapah, District Manager Batticaloa and Ampara  
 Senior management Team of SC Batticaloa  
 Parents and CPC members in a village  
 Senior staff PPDRO  
 Meetings Vellavelli Resettlement Area

Vigdis Wathne, 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary, Norwegian Embassy  
 Edle Hamre, Counsellor Development, Norwegian Embassy

**Uganda**

Helene Andersson Novela, Country Director

Richard Odong, Finance Director

Rose Obita, Programme Specialist Partnerships

Edmund Kertho, Programme Specialist HIV/Aids – Northern Uganda

Moses Cik, Regional Manager Northern Uganda

Anne K. Hoseth, District Manager - Gulu

Joan Kipioda, Programme Specialist CP - Gulu

Akello Alino Latoga Kamodleet, Project Coordinator child protection - Gulu

SCiUG Nakasongolo office and visit to CHANCE Centre in Wakakooli community

Luc F.E. Vanhoorickx, Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager

Charles Abola, Consultant

Kato Nkimba, Consultant (lead evaluator of children's participation in armed conflicts, post conflict and Peace Building in Uganda)

Orach Godfred Otobi, National Coordinator Civil Society Organisation for Peace in Northern Uganda

H. Willie Otim, Commissioner Youth & Children Affairs, Min. of Gender, Labour and Social Development

Hon. Yiga Anthony, MP Kalungu County West Masaka District

Hon. Tuma Ruth, MP Jinja District

Hon. Muwuma Milton, MP Kigulu South Iganga

Gulu LCV Chairman

District Education Office

Health Alert Uganda

James Gibson, Plan Uganda

Charles Wacha Angulo, Uganda Peoples Defence Forces

Kerwegi Anthony, Concerned Parents Association

Uganda Child Rights NGO Network

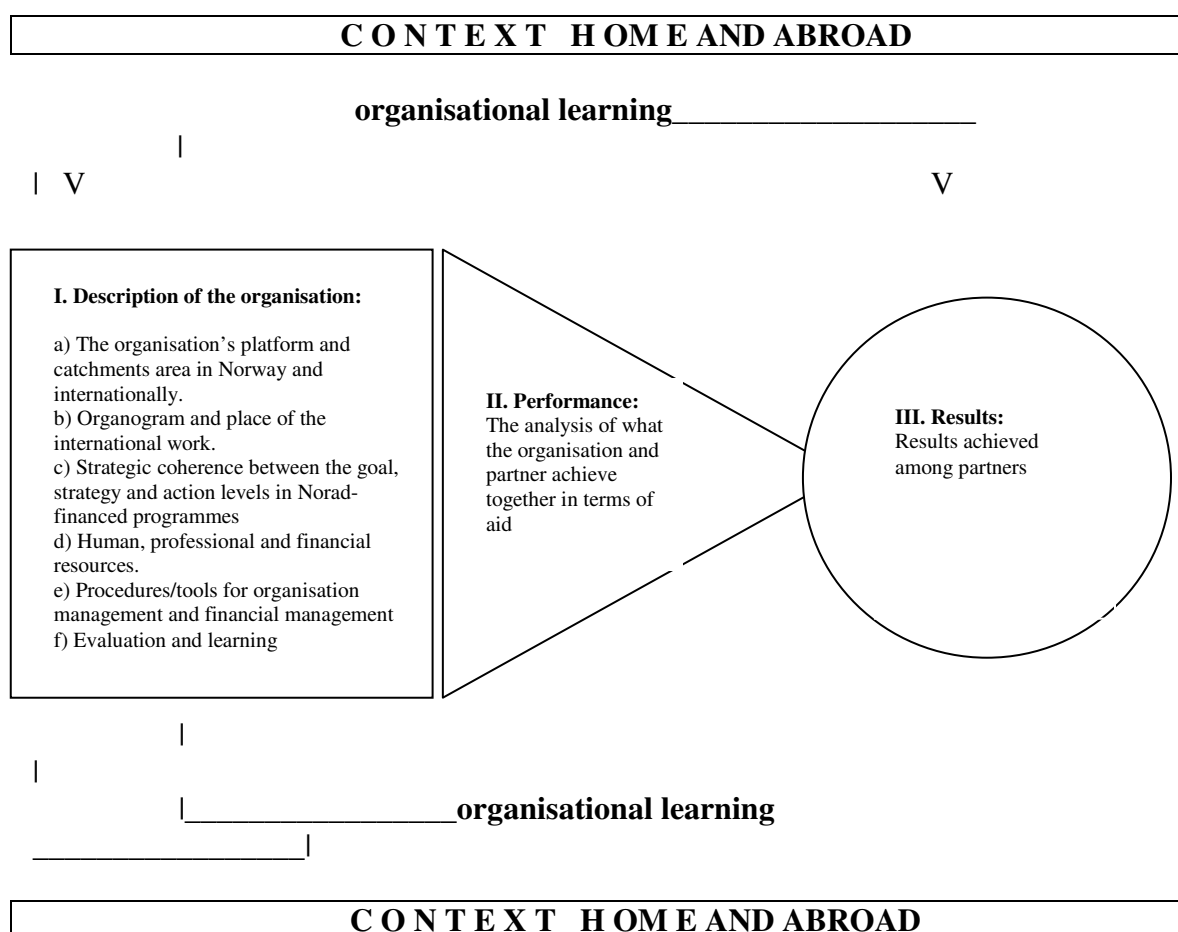
CHANCE Centre, Wakakooli community, Nakasongola

Adriana Van Ommering, Senior Programme Officer Norwegian Embassy

## Annex 3: Terms of Reference

## 1. Model for work on the organisational review

In the figure below, the main components of the review are illustrated by an open organisational system in which the different parts are dependent both on each other and on the surroundings. The organisational review will comprise a capacity analysis of the system's performance and find out where its strengths and weaknesses lie. Its performance, which is illustrated in **triangle (II)**, is specified in more detail in section 4 (pp. 8-10). The analysis also requires knowledge about *organisational matters* that must be taken from the **square (I)**, and *the results* achieved in the form of capacity development with the partners, illustrated by the contents of the **circle (III)**. The contents of these sub-figures are also described in more detail in section 4.



An organisational review concentrates on the services the Norwegian organisation delivers. This means services delivered to partners abroad as well as the extent to which the organisation is capable of meeting the terms and conditions set out in the agreement with Norad. The review will also assess the partner organisations' ability to deliver towards its target groups

and its ability to meet with its commitments towards the Norwegian organisation. It is the “*performance of the system for delivery services*” that is to be analysed, not the services themselves. An assessment of the partners’ capacity may, however, be illustrated by results with end-user of the partners’ services.

**The context** at home influences the Norwegian organisation in Norway; the context abroad influences the organisation and partners in their joint work. By context is meant framework conditions which the organisation cannot influence itself, factors it can influence as a result of prolonged purposeful efforts, and factors in its surroundings which it can readily influence.

The organisational review will normally start with a description of the services delivered at different levels in the organisational chain. The description shall be related to the context in question. It shall also provide an overview of the distribution of resources in the organisational chain. As the analysis of the organisation’s and partners’ services progresses, the causes of the conditions that are uncovered will be examined in more depth, both factors of an organisational nature (**the square box I**), the partners’ roles and resources, and factors that can be attributed to the context in which the work is done.

It is important not just to examine the results (**Circle III**) among partners. Also possible consequences of the organisation’s and partners’ work for other groups in the immediate environs and the local community may be examined. As illustrated by the arrows in the figure, there is continuous interaction between the organisational chain and the surroundings. In this interaction a great deal of communication and learning takes place at different organisational levels between the Norwegian organisation, partners and recipients, which is important for performance.

The capacity analysis of this organisational system shall assess both the services delivered and the quality of the ongoing interaction processes, which will require the use of different kinds of indicators.

The **square (I)** contains the actual description of the organisation, including the organisation’s platform, organogram, strategic coherence, human and financial resources and procedures/tools, evaluation and learning.

The analysis of the organisation’s ability, together with its local partner, to make use of its resources in order to achieve results takes place in the **triangle (II)**. **The analysis of performance is the most important part of the organisational review.**

**The circle (III)** contains the results which the organisation achieves together with its partners with respect to the development of the partners’ capacity and aid to final recipients. The results are divided into two parts in order to illustrate that most organisations have the twofold goal of

strengthening local partners and thereby strengthening special target groups and/or civil society. The review shall focus on capacity development with the partner. Results with the end-user may serve to illustrate the partners' capacity, but is not subject to separate analysis. In addition to observations, interviews and the material available in the organisation's reports to Norad, the country visits will show whether the results among partners are actually in accordance with the picture painted by the organisation in its reports.

An organisational review shall thus assess an organisation's ability to achieve effective aid given its available financial, human and professional resources and work methods. The main question is whether the organisation – together with its partners – has the capacity and professional expertise required to achieve its goals and implement the measures and programmes supported by Norad or which Norad will support. This presupposes that the organisation is familiar with the socio-cultural context in which it operates and that it has a realistic ambition level for its work. Other important aspects include examining to what extent and how the organisation coordinates its work with other organisations, locally and in relation to the national authorities. And whether it is familiar with and utilises the same guidelines and standards in its work as other players do.

The team's assessment shall take account of Norad's experience of dialogue with the organisation, the annual meeting, country visits, the organisation's follow-up of previous grant letters, participation in various national and international forums etc.

After an overall assessment, Norad should be able to:

- Determine whether the organisation has the required system for management and control of its own activities, including expertise with respect to developing and applying methods and systems for the documentation of results and long-term effects.
- Determine whether the organisation's reports to Norad give a true picture of partners and provide Norad with an adequate basis on which to assess further support.
- Determine whether the organisation is capable of adapting goals and means to each other, and adapting means and goals to the situation and the context.

After the review the organisation should be able to:

- Decide the direction of the organisation's further work on development of its capacity.



## 2. Background

### *Save the Children Norway*

Save the Children Norway (SCN) was founded in 1946 and is a party-politically and religiously neutral membership organisation. It works on the basis of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and has from 1989 defined itself as a Child rights organisation. Its expertise in the area of child rights and child participation is recognised. SCN is a member of the international Save the Children (SC) Alliance.

SCN's vision is 'a world which respects and values every child; a world which listens to children and learns; a world where all children have hope and opportunity' (SCN Strategy 2006-2009).

SCN's working principles as stated in the strategy 2006-2009 are

- *Child participation* to ensure their impact on issues that concern them, though adults are responsible for fulfilling children's rights.
- *Strengthening local capacity* to fulfil children's rights, including parents, communities, child rights organisations, and governments. It states that local actors shall be responsible for activities, in terms of planning, implementation and follow-up.
- *Influencing causes*. Assess causes locally, and together with other actors, influence these causes to prevent violation of child rights and achieve lasting results for children.

SCN started working through local partners by the end of the 1980s. Guidelines and a policy for this kind of cooperation were introduced in 1995 and 1997 respectively. SCNs partners include both local government, civil society- and community based organisations.

SCN works on the basis of the following strategic objectives (Strategy 2006-2009):

- Fulfil children's right to education
- Fulfil the rights of children affected by armed conflict and disaster
- Fulfil the rights of children to protection against physical and psychological violence and sexual abuse
- Fulfil the rights of children to protection against the impact of hiv/aids
- Achieve better results for children through a stronger Save the Children
- Strengthening implementation and monitoring of children's rights
- Combat economic and political structures and systems that violate children's rights

SCN has received grants from Norad since the late 1960ies and is one of the organisations that receive the highest level of financial support from Norad. The current cooperation agreement between Norad and SCN runs from 2006-2009, which corresponds with the current time-frame for SCN's own strategy period. All of the above strategic objectives are included as thematic priorities in the cooperation agreement with Norad. In 2007, Norad's grant was at NOK 103 million, which was approximately 1/4<sup>th</sup> of

the total budget for SCN's international programmes. SCN also receives grants from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (including embassies). Other main donors to SCN include individuals ('committed donors') and companies in Norway, as well as other SC-organisations.

SCN works in 36 countries, out of which 14 are included in the cooperation agreement with Norad. The agreement includes the following countries:

- Africa: Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe
- Asia: Afghanistan, Cambodia, India, Laos, Nepal, Sri Lanka
- Latin America: Guatemala, Nicaragua.

The international Save the Children Alliance is currently in a process of coordinating the operations of its members at country level through so-called 'unified presence', with the establishment of one common country office, and one country programme for all the SC-agencies working in the country. Both the countries selected for field work (Uganda and Sri Lanka) have such 'unified presence', or have started working towards it. SCN is so-called 'participating member' in Sri Lanka, under SC UK lead, and 'managing member' in Uganda. The unification in Uganda is still in process, while the Sri Lanka office is more consolidated.

#### *Why an SCN-review now?*

Capacity analyses have become more important for Norad when considering the level of support to Norwegian NGOs. Thus, systematic organisational reviews will be carried out regularly to feed into the strategic dialogue between Norad and the NGOs. This review will provide input into the dialogue towards a new cooperation agreement between Norad and SCN from 2010. Norad is considering core support as the modality for the next agreement period, as opposed to the programme support provided under the current agreement. The review will also provide input into SCN's planning for the next strategy period from 2010.

#### *Composition of the team:*

The review team shall consist of two international consultants with documented evaluation experience in the field of development cooperation. The team should have experience in carrying out organisational assessments and should combined have the competence to analyse and assess the organisational, administrative and financial management of the organisation. The team should also have good knowledge of civil society as a development arena and actor, the partner relation, child rights, child participation, rights based approach to development. One of the consultants shall be the team leader, and will be responsible for the delivery of the final report. For the field work, the team shall be supplemented by one local consultant in each country selected for field work (to be contracted by the team).

### 3. Purpose

The purpose of the organisational review is to examine the organisation's ability to provide effective aid. By effective aid in this context is meant:

- The cost-efficient use of funds
- Results that are in accordance with Norwegian political priorities
- Relevance to final recipients
- The ability to achieve its own goals.

The review shall assess the organisation's professional, financial and administrative capacity to – together with its partners – carry out programmes that implement the organisation's Norad-financed measures and programmes.

### 4. The scope of the assignment

**The review shall be based on the following reference material:**

- SCN's cooperation agreement and contract with Norad
- SCN's policy and strategy for aid work, website, programme tools
- Relevant reviews and evaluations<sup>22</sup> (including SCN's own)
- SCN's plans and annual reports to Norad
- Research-based literature aimed in particular at the areas within which the organisation works, and documents with reference to 'best practices'
- Applicable guidelines for grants to civil society (2001)
- White paper no 35 (2003-2004)
- The MFA allocation letter No. 1 ("Tildelingsbrev") 2008
- Three Billion Reasons. Norway's Development Strategy for Children and Young People in the South (May 2005)
- Norad's strategy towards 2010

The organisational review shall form the basis for a general assessment of both SCN's reporting to Norad and the quality of the organisation's internal communication. The analysis shall also include an assessment of the head office's organisational structure and dimension in relation to its own functions and tasks. The review shall cover the whole organisational chain from head office to local partner<sup>23</sup>. The work will consist of

<sup>22</sup> Norad's Evaluation Department will carry out an evaluation of development cooperation through Norwegian NGOs in Uganda in September-November 2008. To the extent possible, this review shall use the findings of this evaluation to strengthen the foundation of its conclusions.

<sup>23</sup> The local partner can consist of a network of individuals, informal local community groups (CBOs), individual NGOs, NGO networks, government or semi-government organisations. The context in which such players operate is also highly variable, which strongly influences the critical variables for capacity building it will be most relevant to examine in the review.

studying, analysing, concluding and presenting recommendations and proposals for follow-up.

An overview of the factors to be examined in more detail follows below. It is not intended to be exhaustive, rather a checklist that will have to be adapted in each individual case.

Most of the following points involve questions that cannot be answered in chronological order once and for all, but are more recurring questions that will follow the team in its assessments throughout all the phases of the work up until the final report.

### **Description and analysis of the organisation (The square I)**

- The organisation's catchments area, platform and structure:
  - ✓ In Norway and abroad
  - ✓ Remit, policy and strategy(ies)
  - ✓ Governing bodies, organisational structure and work methods
  - ✓ An organogram indicating the place of the international work
  - ✓ Strategic coherence between the goal, strategy and action levels
  - ✓ The organisation's partners/whether it operates on the basis of partnership (or is self-implementing)
  - ✓ The organisation's procedures for (a) monitoring and (b) formalised dialogue/collaboration with partners in the South
  - ✓ SCN's links to and participation in the global Save the Children Alliance at head office level (What are the benefits and the costs of the participation?)
- Capacity and professional competence
  - ✓ Procedures/tools for organisation management, financial management and the measurement of results
  - ✓ Risk analysis of human, professional and financial resources
  - ✓ Evaluation and learning

### **Performance analysis (The triangle II)**

#### Of the Norwegian organisation

- Policy, strategy and action programme for building partners' capacity:
  - ✓ How and on the basis of what principles does the organisation choose its partners?
  - ✓ How does the organisation measure and monitor the attainment of goals with regard to capacity building of partners (incl. use of baseline and indicators)?
  - ✓ How is the partner's capacity relating to the work to be done checked?
  - ✓ What is the timeframe for partnerships? To what extent is a phase out strategy prepared with a view to the partner standing on its own feet in the end?
  - ✓ To what extent are partners included in decision-making and strategy processes?
  - ✓ To what extent and how does the organisation contribute to strengthening partners? Does the organisation help strengthen

- partners' existing systems and procedures (if applicable) or are new systems introduced?
- ✓ How does it contribute to the development of partners' knowledge, e.g. it has good ideas but is poor at making arrangements that help the ideas to be realised?
- ✓ How does communication function between the head office, the organisation in the field and partners?
- Coordination and cooperation with other actors (other international NGOs, UN-system) at country level
- SCN's participation in the Save the Children Alliance at country level
  - ✓ What is SCN's added value in Unified Presence as 'participating member' under a country programme headed by another SC-agency (Sri Lanka) and as 'managing member' (Uganda) respectively?
  - ✓ What is the added value of the Unified Presence to SCN's work at country level?

#### Of local partners

- The quality of the partner's planning and implementation process:
  - ✓ To what extent are partners and target groups included in the planning and implementation phase?
  - ✓ How much local expertise and resources is mobilised in programmes?
  - ✓ How realistic are the goals and the planned results during the planning phase?
  - ✓ How are indicators used in the planning phase?
  - ✓ How are risk analyses carried out in the planning phase?

#### Of both the Norwegian organisation and local partners

- Reporting and evaluation of capacity-building results:
  - ✓ What indicators and other instruments are used to report goal attainment at different levels?
  - ✓ What are the reporting requirements and how are they followed up?
  - ✓ What feedback is given on reports from partners? How is learning ensured?
  - ✓ What guidance is triggered by feedback on reports?
- Conflict sensitivity of SCN and partners
  - ✓ To what extent are programmes planned and implemented based on an adequate analysis of the conflict and the context?
- The quality of communication when:
  - ✓ A failure takes place in terms of quality and delivery date in relation to contractual obligations
  - ✓ Conflicts and corruption occur.

#### **Results achieved among partners (The circle III)**

- What has been achieved in terms of building partners' capacity that can be attributed to SCN? This *may be* illustrated by results with the final recipients.
- How are results with final recipients documented?

- ✓ What is the level of the documented results (input, output, outcome)?
- ✓ To what extent are indicators used in reporting?
- ✓ How is the risk situation handled during implementation of the programmes?
- ✓ To what extent is the target group involved in the reporting of agreed goals?

## 5. Work process and method <sup>24</sup>

The main part of the review will be carried out in Norway, where SCN has its head office. Two country visits (Uganda<sup>25</sup> and Sri Lanka) will also be carried out as part of the review.

### **General information about the collection of data/information**

The review shall be based on document studies, but also on the use of a self-evaluation form and interviews in order to ensure necessary participation in the process.

The self-evaluation form will preferably be used by board members and employees at head office and country level and possibly others. Interviews, which should be based on an interview guide, can be conducted with a sample of persons at all levels in the organisation, including partners (and possibly target groups or other stakeholders).

### **The study and documentation phase**

The first part of the review will consist of an in-depth study of the documents concerning the organisation and its cooperation with and reporting to Norad and its local partner.

The provisional results from this phase shall be presented to Norad and SCN. The inception report shall propose focal point for the country visit.

### **Country visits**

During country visits, focus will be on the quality assessment of the partnership and its capacity to deliver. In addition to conversations with project employees, it will also be necessary to speak to people who are not dependent on the organisation in any way. Examples of such persons are (a) peers, i.e. other actors who work within the same field in the same country (e.g. UNICEF/other UN-agencies, national and international NGOs), and (b) actors at the local level, for example residents in areas in the vicinity of where the organisation's activities take place, but who do not benefit directly from the organisation's work.

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2) Two good reference documents as regards organisational analysis are Stein-Erik Kruse's "How to Assess NGO Capacity: A Resource Book on Organisational Assessment", 1999, Bistandsnemnda and "Institutional Assessment and Capacity Development: Why, What and How", produced by EuropeAid for the European Commission, September 2005.

<sup>25</sup> The field work in Uganda shall as far as possible build on and be coordinated with the Evaluation of development cooperation through Norwegian NGOs - cf. above.

The team holds a debriefing with the organisation and its partners before travelling home from country visits.

**Interpretation of the data and observations**

The consultant's subjective standpoint shall be explicitly stated in the report, and the methodological approach shall be systematic and analytical. As far as possible, conclusions shall be based on triangulation, i.e. elucidation of the same question from several angles using data from composite source material. The document studies and interviews shall be organised in a manner that ensures they are representative and that the analysis provides a basis for drawing tenable conclusions.

**Analysis and conclusion**

All assessment of the reliability and relevance of the management of the undertaking and its finances shall be based on documentation.

**Recommendation and follow-up**

The review shall provide Norad with new knowledge about the direction further cooperation with SCN should take. The recommendations shall be structured with this in mind and contain proposals for improvements on which Norad should focus in its follow-up work.

The recommendations shall also contain proposals for measures to improve SCN's organisational structure in order to optimise the organisation's aid activities. Otherwise, the team is free to include other recommendations that are deemed to be relevant to furthering the objective of the review.

The team leader is responsible for the final report, but any internal disagreement about its conclusions and recommendations should be stated in the report.

## **6. Reporting**

In order to allow an opportunity for comment and for correction of any factual errors and misunderstandings, the team will send a draft of the final report to SCN, local partners and Norad no later than 1. December 2008, with a deadline for responding to the team two weeks later.

**Final report**

The final report will be structured in accordance with the Terms of Reference. It shall be written in English, contain a summary of approx. 3-4 pages and be maximum 40 pages long. Appendices can be added. The final report shall be sent to Norad in electronic format.

SCN may on its own or partners' behalf request that information that is considered particularly sensitive with respect to the life and safety of staff be included in separate appendices with restricted access.

**Information, presentation and publication**

In order to ensure that the report constitutes a good basis for follow-up, the team shall keep Norad's case administrator informed about the progress of the work and include them in discussions about important findings, topics and issues before the country visits start, as well as during the concluding phase of the work.

At the request of the organisation or Norad, the team leader shall be available for discussions about recommendations and follow-up points.

As part of the assignment, the team leader and/or consultant shall make two presentations of the final result within two months after the report is completed. One of the presentations will be made at SCN's head office or other expedient venue, while the other will be made at a half-day seminar for SCN and Norad personnel.

The report will normally be published on the internet. In special cases, and subject to relevant legal provisions, parts of the report may be exempted from general publication.

Terje Vigtel  
Director  
Civil society Department  
Norad





**Norad**

Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

Postal address:

P.O. Box 8034 Dep, NO-0030 OSLO

Office address:

Ruseløkkveien 26, Oslo, Norway

Tel: +47 22 24 20 30

Fax: +47 22 24 20 31

[postmottak@norad.no](mailto:postmottak@norad.no)

[www.norad.no](http://www.norad.no)