



Partnerships between child led and adult organizations – experiences from Bangladesh



Save the Children



The following document summarizes experiences related to partnerships between child led and “adult” led organizations. It builds on experiences from implementing the project: “ICT and innovative partnerships – responding to well-known challenges for children in new ways” in Bangladesh. The experiences are extracted from reports and documents produced during the project. (See list at the end of the document). There are many interesting learnings from the project including impressive advocacy results based on children’s monitoring and advocating for better WASH facilities in secondary schools. However, the focus of this document is solely on the learnings from the partnership aspects of the project.



Introduction:

The “ICT and innovative partnerships – responding to well-known challenges for children in new ways” was a 2-year project implemented from 2014 to 2016. It was funded by Danida, through a special facility for innovation, through Save the Children Denmark.

The program was designed around a **partnership model** between a child led organization, the National Children’s Task Force (NCTF) and four “adult” organizations with different but complementary roles. The project aimed to empower the child led organization to improve the WASH facilities in secondary schools in selected schools in Bangladesh through monitoring supported by ICT and through local and national advocacy based on the ICT monitoring.

A central part of the project was **developing a model of partnership with children’s organizations**. Whereas Save the Children has vast experience with supporting empowerment and participation of children in projects and advocacy, there is less documented experience in relation to developing partnerships with children’s organizations. In many programme countries, children’s organizations cannot be legally registered, since the members are considered minors. While this has implications for contractual and financial matters, this does not in itself prevent a quality partnership with a child led organization in line with SCI partnership principles.

It is hoped that this document which will be shared through the SCI global partnership working group can be of use to partnership practitioners across the organization.

According to an evaluation report, the project’s innovative use of ICT to empower rights holders, and hold duty bearers accountable, **combined** with organizing children, has shown to be an effective way of promoting children’s rights.

Summary:

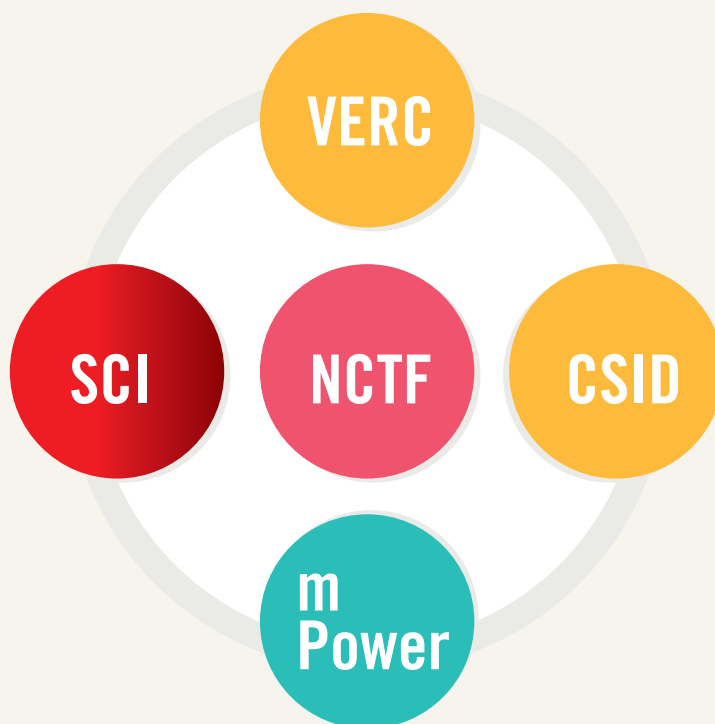
Overall, the project has shown that child led organizations can be very effective in improving services for children through social accountability. This makes such organizations valuable partners for adult CSOs. It has shown that strategic partnerships based on mutual benefit and respect, which are core SCI partnership principles, can be built between child led and adult led organizations.

The project has according to both NCTF and the adult partners been both innovative and effective by forming a partnership based on the various competencies and reach of the partners with the child-led organization in the driver’s seat and with the adult organizations playing a more facilitative role. This has been supported by a project management structure where the representatives of the child led and adult organizations have come together regularly to learn from each other. The adult partners have applied an ‘arms-length’ approach i.e. gradually handing over increased responsibilities in the project based on the increased capacity of the organization and the trust built among the partners. The adult partners have taken on a facilitation role and operated more as a type of support secretariat than patron organizations.

The project has shown that it is possible to develop a partnership of strategic value. This has been expressed by all partners incl. through a verbal commitment to continue the working relationships beyond the project. One explanation could well be that the partners involved see the partnerships as strategic and mutually beneficial and therefore interested in investing in it. This mutual interest, on the side of the ‘adult’ organizations, derives from NCTF’s strong position with nation-wide presence and capacity to influence at national level. The adult partners thus have an inherent interest in strengthening the capacity of NCTF. However partnership with a child-led organization must have a long-term perspective due to need for capacity building of BOTH children and adults.

The partners in the project:

The partnership set-up, as illustrated by the model below, has NCTF at the centre with the other partners supporting NCTF. Each of the adult organizations have played a different role based on their specific competencies, positions and reach.



The following is a short description of the partners:



National Children's Task Force (NCTF)

is a nationwide child-led organization, established in 2003, with 43,000 members. NCTF focuses on monitoring, reporting and advocating for children's rights both locally and nationally. NCTF is the largest child rights organization in Bangladesh with representation in all 64 districts and with a strong voice at national level. Children between 12 and 18 years can be members of NCTF. Through NCTF, children practice their citizen's rights and they learn to take leadership. NCTF has District Committees in all 64 districts in Bangladesh and from these district committees, 11 members are elected to the Central Committee. To ensure sustainability, members elected for the Central Committee must be between 14 and 16 years old. If they are above 16 they cannot sit the period of 2 years, as they will have to leave NCTF when they turn 18. Such former members can become mentors and support training for new members. NCTF is recognized by the government of Bangladesh and has a formalized cooperation with the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs through the Bangladesh Shishu Academy, which has offices in all districts. Save the Children has supported NCTF for several years.

Village Education Resource Centre

(VERC) has experience from implementing child rights based WASH projects, education programmes, social accountability projects and from working with local government. VERC has its head office in Savar district where the local project implementation took place. VERC facilitators have supported activities of NCTF members in the project area.



mPower is a social enterprise that develops technology based solutions to help development organizations do better program delivery, training, monitoring, and knowledge management. mPower developed the ICT based monitoring application used during the project implementation.



Center for Services and Information on Disability (CSID) is a national NGO focused on child disability and child rights. The organization has good experience in national advocacy for child rights including work with the Parliamentary Caucus for Children's Rights. CSID has supported NCTF in national level advocacy



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designed the project based on consultations with NCTF and the other partners. SCIB has been overall responsible for and coordinating the project, supported by SCD. The partnership has been guided by a Project Steering Committee representing all partners. The Project Steering Committee has been meet

ing every second month to update each other on the project. The meeting has been conducted in a flexible and informal manner with members taking turns to chair the meeting.

All "adult" partners have emphasized the importance of not seeing the children as beneficiaries but as a partner, with the adult organization taking on the role as facilitator. This, however, requires capacity building of the adult organization.

This could point to a role and an added value of SC in the partnership, as the facilitator of organizational capacity development of both the child-led organization and the adult organizations.

Experiences:

SCIB staff members have stressed the importance of seeing NCTF as a partner. However, they have raised questions and concerns about the capacity support to NCTF as well as how SCI and the other adult organisations have acted in the relationship with NCTF.

One concern has been whether the capacity support to NCTF has been adequate and addressing the organizational needs of NCTF. It has been mentioned that the relationship between the adult organisations and NCTF to a big degree has been on adult premises. This has meant a focus on the project monitoring and the log frame and less on issues that the children could relate to such as the day-to-day management of NCTF.

In other words, the adult organization's support was more focused on the implementation of project activities and less on NCTF's own challenges such as internal communications and strengthening its networks to develop a stronger organization.

NCTF was also not fully engaged in the planning, budgeting and decision-making process from the start, which led to the later development of a MoU to reduce gaps in coordination and communication.

As NCTF is a children's organization and members have to leave when they turn 18, it is a challenging situation to continue to build capacity of the new members year after year. By building partnership with adult organization, this capacity support can be more sustainable.

VERC staff have explained that it has been a journey from working for children to now working with children. The Field facilitators of VERC have been the main contact to the NCTF School Committees while VERC management has represented VERC in the Project Steering Committee. VERC stressed that it had been important to view NCTF as an independent partner organization. VERC sees itself as a facilitator. They gave an example of how VERC had facilitated children to visit a news media to learn how an advocacy message

goes through a media. VERC mentioned that it **is important to build the capacity of the adult organization for it to be empowered for the partnership with a child-led organization.** They also suggested that it is important for the adult organization to get to know the child-led organization from the inside. E.g. one of the VERC members had attended one of the NCTF committee elections and had learnt a lot about how seriously NCTF handled this. VERC underlined that they have gained a lot from working with NCTF.



Building a strategic partnership:



Information from all partners indicate that the partnership approach was atypical and emphasized an arm-lengths principle. This provided sufficient space for NCTF to be in the driver's seat, although this was sometimes a difficult model to follow.

The partners involved have seen the partnership as strategic and mutually beneficial and have therefore been interested in investing in it. This mutual interest, on the side of the 'adult' organizations, derives from NCTF's strong position with nation-wide presence and capacity to influence at national level. The adult partners thus have an inherent interest in strengthening the capacity of NCTF. The adult organizations in many ways operated more as a type of support secretariat than patron organizations. This testifies to the implementing partner's perception of the importance of the relationships with NCTF, one of strategic importance.

VERC, SCI and NCTF all emphasized the importance of viewing NCTF as a partner, with the adult organization taking on the role as facilitator. This again testifies to the implementing partner's perception of the importance of the relationships with NCTF. NCTF is the largest child rights organization in Bangladesh. It has a strong voice at national level and is recognized by the government. This is also reflected in verbal commitments to continue working relationships between VERC, CSID, Mpower and NCTF despite funding coming to an end.

The partnership approach of placing NCTF in the driver's seat has helped strengthen the organization and in turn reinforced the strategic interests to further collaboration based on mutually benefits between NCTF and the other project partners.

Outcome mapping for developing Meaningful partnerships with children's organizations

A very useful process undertaken during the project was an outcome mapping workshop with all partners to clarify the desired outcomes for NCTF of the program. This included NCTF members from local, district and national level.¹

The workshop established outcomes, progress markers and strategies and identified a number of activities and organizational practices for the partnership. To ensure meaningful participation of children, the workshop was conducted using theatre, which allowed a broad participation of all the children present in defining the desired outcomes.

The workshop developed a description of where NCTF would like to be at the end of project in 2015 ("the outcome challenge") including:

- The program intended to see NCTF using ICT and social media to empower children within the organization and in relation to duty bearers. NCTF will be able to collect real-time data through apps and use this for advocacy with local and national duty bearers, including in the Child Parliament.
- Local members of NCTF are capable of dialogue with national and local duty bearers, including teachers and School Management Committees.
- NCTF will be able to raise awareness and conduct campaigns on children's issues using ICT, such as social media. The central and district committees in NCTF have strengthened communication channels and practices to support local committees and activities through for example their facebook pages as well regular meetings and interaction.
- NCTF has a strategy and a partnership to sustain and scale-up ICT based monitoring (on WASH, Child Rights).

¹ The workshop was conducted on the 22 June, 2015 in Savar. The workshop and the tools provided here are based on the Outcome Mapping method (with the addition of statue theatre, to make it more child friendly). To learn more about outcome mapping, please see the Outcome Mapping manual here: http://www.outcomemapping.ca/download.php?file=/resource/files/OM_English_final.pdf



These outcomes were accompanied by a number of progress markers organized under these headlines: need to see, like to see, love to see. These elements then formed the basis for the monitoring plan. All project partners have monitored the progress of the outcome mapping and found significant progress.

Best organizational practices

Additionally the workshop identified the best organizational practices for the “adult” NGOs working with children.

1. Ensuring age-appropriate information – ensuring that internal and external communication is such that children can understand and engage with it
2. Seeking active participation and feedback from children – taking opportunities at every stage in the process to engage with children, including checking back with children to improve further
3. Experimenting with handing over the responsibility – challenging ourselves regularly to assess whether more responsibility can be handed over to the child led organization
4. Working with environment around children – engaging with other stakeholders around the childrens’ organization to support their work and empowerment
5. Engaging in critical self-reflection – checking in regularly to ensure that working style, process are program is actively engaging children.

Lessons Learned through the project:

The project had a strong focus on empowering children through the use of ICT. Although this document focuses on the partnership between the child led and the adult organisations, it is evident that the use of ICT also empowered NCTF to reach more children and advocate more effectively, thereby becoming a very valuable strategic partner. Other lessons learned were:

- ▶ Child led organizations can be very effective in improving services for children through social accountability. This makes such organizations valuable partners for adult CSOs
- ▶ Partnership with a child-led organization must have a long-term perspective due to need for capacity building of BOTH children and adults.
- ▶ It is important not to see the child led organization as a beneficiary – but as a partner and with the ‘adult’ organizations playing a more facilitative role.
- ▶ There is need to reflect on what types of capacity building is needed for a child led organization based on children’s own identified needs.
- ▶ It is important to build the capacity of the adult organization for it to be empowered for the partnership with a child-led organization and it is important for the adult organization to get to know the structure and workings of the child-led organization.
- ▶ It is important to develop a project management structure where the representatives of the child led and adult organizations can come together regularly to learn from each other
- ▶ ICT can work as an attractive tool for reaching children and young people and an effective way of creating empowerment and accountability. It can also work as a cost-effective way of reaching many children and youth at low costs.
- ▶ Capacity building of NCTF members have supported them in developing a platform to address the problems they are facing.
- ▶ NCTF has an inherent strength in empowering other children through child-to-child mentorships
- ▶ The combination of using ICT, organizing children and training them in CR is an effective approach for empowering children and enhancing accountability, not exclusively on WASH, and not only in the school setting. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this approach has had considerable ripple effects testifying to the potential for this approach to serve as a means to empower rights-holders and hold duty-bearers accountable in schools and communities.
- ▶ Although important partnerships have been forged throughout this project, a second phase needs a more cost-effective and less complex partnership setup. NCTF still needs some financial and technical support from partners, but this could easily be provided by few partners and on a more needs based approach.

Sustainability:

The strong collaborative and in many cases strategic partnerships forged between NCTF, CSID, VERC, MPower and SCIB for this project is likely to continue beyond the project closure. A workshop conducted during the evaluation highlighted some of the opportunities for future strategic collaboration between the organizations.

Opportunities for continuing the strategic relationship on advocacy between CSID and NCTF at the national level were highlighted during the workshop, particularly with the Parliamentary Caucus on Children's Rights, but also opportunities for furthering information sharing and research were areas mentioned during the workshop.

Similar interest of continuing and furthering a strategic partnership between VERC and NCTF beyond the project period was expressed. Both VERC and NCTF clearly views the collaboration as a strategic partnership with VERC emphasizing the added value to its brand by partnering with the main child led organization in Bangladesh and NCFT emphasizing the value added of the support provided by VERC, especially at the field level. Mutual interest in collaborating on such areas as organizing child protection related mobilization, arranging national days and events, supporting the national NCTF conferences and linking NCTF to key players were highlighted during the workshop.

Interests of furthering the partnership between MPower and NCTF were also clearly expressed during the workshop. For Mpower the partnership with NCTF with its country wide representation holds vast potential in reaching out to children in all parts of the country. For NCTF the opportunity to use ICT for communication, monitoring and advocacy purposes (just to mention some) as tested with the WASH App, is clearly essential to strengthening the organization and reaching out to more children and young people in Bangladesh.

SCIB already has a longstanding cooperation with NCTF in terms of child rights monitoring and reporting which is expected to continue. Although this bodes well for the future, the financial constraints with project funds ending may inhibit the ability of some of the partnerships to continue growing even in the short to medium term. They will however form a strong fundament for attracting future donor funding.

Sources for this report:

Outcome mapping Workshop report, 2015.

Reflection and Learning workshop report done midway in the project, 2015.

Learning about...a partnership with a child led organization, June 2016

Evaluation of the "ICT and innovative partnerships – responding to well-known challenges for children in new ways" project in Bangladesh, September 2016

PP presentation, Regional partnership meeting, Cambodia, September, ICT innovative project completion report, December, 2016



INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS



From a small ICT application collecting information on WASH facilities in 30 schools, NCTF Voice has emerged as a platform for constructive activism and collective organization for students in Bangladesh's schools. Not only can ICT provide a safe medium through which to communicate difficult information, it can also provide a platform from which children and adults can positively engage to resolve issues together. It is an effective social accountability tool and an efficient way of maintaining a database of information on school based issues. However, NCTF Voice is only as effective as the social accountability system that it builds. This project has demonstrated that ICT can be useful for resolving issues, but only with the full support of civil society organizations. Improvement in WASH in schools has showcased how effective child-led organisations, such as the NCTF, can be in mobilising and building the confidence and sense of security of adolescent children to tackle difficult issues with adults in authority. The project has illustrated how through the creation of NCTF school committees, students in 30 Savar schools have been able to influence policy makers to commit to changes that will directly impact their lives in their best interests. In this context, the NCTF Voice application can also be seen as an effective civic education tool for teaching children and adolescents about democratic processes in their country, and how they can participate meaningfully in these as young people.

Save the Children and its partner organisations have implemented the "ICT and innovative partnership school project" in 30 government schools in Savar. The project tested whether the use of ICT by children as a social accountability tool would enhance improvement of service delivery and accountability of school decision making process. The project has achieved significant changes in school WASH as a direct result of the child-centered development and roll out of an android application called 'NCTF Voice'. This process was fully backstopped by the National Children Task Force (NCTF) and has resulted in students perceiving themselves to be in a better position to reflect their voice in school decisions affecting them.



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