

Regional Programs



Save the Children
Sweden

“There is little doubt that these interventions have been highly relevant and basically efficient. Given the impact, the costs are relatively modest.”

Evaluation of Save the Children Sweden's Regional Approach by Roger Hällhag, 2011

Save the Children Sweden is convinced that working for social change and policy reforms are the most effective ways to address children's rights. This is cost effective and has a huge impact on large numbers of children. Regional programs serve as a cornerstone for this work.

Over the last two decades several SC members - including SC Canada, Norway, Finland, and Sweden - have adopted regional program approaches in their development work. A broad range of regional programs with a focus on health, education, child protection and Child Rights Governance have been implemented in Latin America, The Middle East, Africa, Asia and Europe.

Our experience shows that a regional approach in many situations has several clear advantages, leading to greater cost effectiveness, improved impact and outcomes, and provides an effective platform for partnership, learning and scaling up.

Regional programs create opportunities for networking and learning between different parties and can be an important complement to country programs, making it possible to ensure thematic development within a specific area. This gives us a platform to address issues on a regional and sometimes global level and enables us to address cross-border issues. Regional programs can be an effective way to support partners technically and financially in several countries that work on a common issue and enable us to reach and work for children also in countries where there are no SC country offices, due to, for example, the political situation or lack of funding opportunities.

We firmly believe that regional programs should play an important role in Save the Children's future work for children.

What is a Regional Program?

Regional programs can take various shapes and forms. Common for all regional programmes, however, is that they are managed from either a country or regional office and are implemented in either several countries in a region and/or are addressing problems at a regional level. Implementing partners are normally civil society organisations, but can at times also be an SC country office and its partners.

The specific context and issue at hand is decisive for which program design is most appropriate. Normally, however, regional programs have shown to be most effective when operating simultaneously at both country and regional levels. Ideally, regional programs promote capacity building, analysis and research and contain advocacy work at a regional level that is strengthened and complemented by country level efforts and activities.

Added Values of Regional Programs

The regional approach is generally appreciated as an important complement to and sometimes a substitute for national programs and projects. In many situations there are strong reasons for us to consider a regional approach since it allows us:

- More effective use of available resources
- Improved impact of our advocacy work
- An appropriate platform for addressing regional and cross-border problems
- Improved opportunities for learning, adaptation of new ideas and strategic partnerships

Effective Use of Available Resources

Through regional programs we can often make optimal use of our resources to maximise impact for children worldwide. Working with a multitude of partners throughout a region rather than supporting individual projects in one country allows us to use our capacity and resources in a much more cost effective way.

It's fundamental for the work of Save the Children that almost all states in the world have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which provides a basic framework and global standards on children's rights common to all countries. Apart from other potential synergies that this creates for a regional approach it also contributes to making regional programs a potentially very cost effective alternative, through:

- Minimizing program transaction costs
- More effective utilization of technical resources and expertise
- Utilizing financial resources where they make the best use
- Establishing and expanding successful work to new geographical areas when opportunity arises

Since the early 2000s SCS has implemented a regional Child Rights Governance Program in West Africa. The program started off basically as a multi-country program, where program activities were replicated in several countries under a joint programmatic framework. Initially the program included a limited number of countries and partners, but when possible it was expanded geographically and progressively developed to also include regional level and cross-country activities.

What enabled the approach was a similar child rights situation in the region, with serious child rights violations and a common need to improve the child rights monitoring systems, which at the time were underdeveloped and under-prioritized by all national governments in the region. The rationale for the regional program was primarily to reach and impact as many countries as possible with available resources. Through a common regional programmatic framework SCS has with relatively modest financial and human/technical resources been successful in supporting the formation and capacity building of sustainable national child rights networks in nine countries in the region.

The networks are effectively monitoring the implementation of the UNCRC as well as other child rights treaties and child rights aspects of other human rights instruments, for example the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council. The program has proven effective in advocating policy reforms; monitoring violations of children's rights and awareness raising of children's rights and promoting child participation.

At a country level the regional child rights program in West Africa has been able to contribute to:

- Adaptation of national legislation, i.e. Children's Acts, in The Gambia, Guinea, Niger and Togo
- Ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) in Guinea-Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire and of the CRC Optional protocols in Côte d'Ivoire
- Improved governmental systems and institutions to protect children's rights, for example, the establishment of Child Panels for child protection in Ghana; a Permanent Secretary for Children in The Gambia; and an ombudsman function in Senegal
- Changes in policies and practices of government agencies. In several countries, such as Togo, Guinea and Senegal, children's priorities have been incorporated in national and/or local development policies and budgets; Senegal has changed its policies to allow pregnant girls to come back to school after delivery; and in The Gambia sexual abuse is increasingly being acted upon by the police
- Improved CRC monitoring. In ten countries complementary reports on CRC and/or ACRWC have been submitted by the child rights networks and the majority of the countries' governments have as a result of program activities improved their compliance with the monitoring requirements of the CRC and ACRWC



Enhanced Impact through Regional Coordination and Advocacy

A regional approach is needed to enhance cooperation for policy change at a regional as well as at national level. There is a need for linking advocacy efforts between different countries to put pressure on national as well as regional bodies, which in turn may provide guiding principles and recommendations that exert pressure on national governments.

The influence of regional and sub-regional intergovernmental institutions on national policies has increased dramatically in the last decades. Global child rights and other human rights conventions have been adapted and further developed by regional organizations (such as by the European Union, ASEAN, the Africa Union, the Organization of American States and the Arab League) which monitor their member countries' compliance to set standards.

'Regionalization' of political decisions means that advocacy can no longer be limited to a national level if it is to remain effective. National civil society organizations' access to regional political bodies is often restricted. However, through the coordination and support that a Regional Program can offer it is often possible to overcome this barrier and help our partners gain access to regional institutions and their agendas, structures and resources. For example, in South East Asia our main regional program partner is formally represented in ASEAN's Commission on Women's and Children's Rights; in Africa several partners are represented as members of the African Committee of Experts to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and in ECOWAS; and in Latin America Save the Children and partners have successfully driven advocacy work in relation to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

Advocacy work on regional and national levels are interlinked and mutually reinforcing; in many cases the results of the advocacy efforts in one country tends to strengthen outcomes in other countries as well. This can be illustrated by some of the achievements of the regional Child Rights Program in Latin America:

- Save the Children together with partners in the region (from among other countries Costa Rica, Venezuela, Brazil and Peru) were successful in influencing the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to take an advisory opinion on the elimination of corporal punishment. This was later incorporated in the interpretation of article 19 'Rights of the Child' of the American Convention on Human Rights, thus directly affecting all signatory countries.
- Building on national level advocacy activities Save the Children and partners were able to influence the UN's Violence against Children study to include a specific focus and recommendation on corporal punishment. Violence against Children was a global effort by the UN to paint a detailed picture of the nature, extent and causes of violence against children, and to propose clear recommendations for action to prevent and respond to it. Through advocacy efforts at national and regional level the program was consequently able to address corporal punishment also at a global level.
- The situation for imprisoned children in Latin America was jointly addressed by the regional program through strategic litigation. By bringing a specific case from Uruguay to the Inter-American Court on Human Rights the program was able to not only improve the situation for imprisoned children in Uruguay, but also to strengthen the impact of advocacy efforts in other countries, such as Argentina and Paraguay.

Effectively Address Regional and Trans-border Problems

A regional approach allows us to effectively address issues that are of a regional, multi-country or trans-border character.

Regional programs become increasingly relevant in an ever more interdependent world where neither the problems nor the solutions to children's safety, rights and welfare are limited by country borders. Issues such as migration, discrimination against ethnic minorities and the environment are examples of issues that often require a regional rather than national approach.

In 2012, the UNHCR Global Trends Report recorded the highest ever number of unaccompanied migrant children worldwide, with a significant proportion of them engaging in South-South migration. The protection of migrant children and the promotion of their well-being are closely linked to the development and well-being of their societies – both in countries of origin and destination. An appropriate response to the needs of children who move across international borders often relies not only on national laws and procedures but also on effective transnational cooperation between public and private actors, based on the best interests of the child.

In 2013, Save the Children received funding from the European Union to embark on a three- year, multi-country collaboration across borders in Southern Africa, to improve the protection of unaccompanied migrant children in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique. In Zimbabwe and Mozambique, Save the Children works closely with government partners to attempt to prevent unsafe migration by addressing critical factors and linking families and young people to community-based projects that increase access to adequate resources, and improving knowledge of risks and rights related to irregular migration. In South Africa, Save the Children will support ongoing initiatives by the South African Government and the inter-agency community to strengthen the provision of child protection services to unaccompanied migrant children in line with their best interests as required by existing national laws and procedures, and to reduce the number of unaccompanied or separated children who end up in harmful, unregistered institutions.

The project supports the current cross-border coordination working group initiative, which include key government and civil society stakeholders from both sides of the border that meet on a regular basis to join forces in promoting the protection of children's rights, regardless of nationality or asylum status. Evidence from interventions will be collected, shared and used to inform learning and advocacy at national and regional levels.

Improved Learning, Adaptation of New Ideas and Coordination

A regional approach meets a need within Save the Children as well as among local partners for exchange, learning and generating new knowledge

There is growing recognition within the development community of the importance of learning, capacity building and coordination for development effectiveness. This is also something that is in constant demand by our partners and central to Save the Children's view on partnership. Regional programs can provide an outlook and overview in a way few country-based NGOs and country offices have the resources or the capacity to achieve on their own. Regional programs are able to provide an effective learning platform for SCI and partners through sharing experiences, common learning activities and co-operation that complement and strengthen local research, programme quality and advocacy for policy change.

In an external evaluation from 2011 of Save the Children Sweden's regional approach in Latin America, the consultant concluded that a key success factor for reaching impact has been that SCS more than any other organisation in Latin America and the Caribbean, including government and academic institutions, has pooled and provided thematic expertise. This technical assistance has helped build the capacity of civil society partners and in some relevant cases also that of public institutions. The program has organised, advised and supported research at a regional level; and promoted coordination of advocacy activities and public awareness campaigns.

Save the Children is the world's leading independent organisation for children. We work in around 120 countries. We save children's lives. We fight for their rights. We help them fulfil their potential.



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