

Advocacy and Campaigning

11 Partnerships and coalitions

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Duration: 1 hour



Introduction

Partnerships and coalitions with other organisations are often a vital part of a successful campaign. These relationships can demonstrate broad support for an issue or call to action, which can be more persuasive to political leaders than the calls of just one organisation, no matter how large or well established. In this session you will see how and why partnerships and coalitions can help our advocacy. You will look at both the opportunities and the challenges involved when working with partners and through coalitions, and work through examples, activities and tips to help you choose the right partner and work most efficiently and effectively with them.

Learning Outcomes for this session

Knowledge and understanding

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

1. Define how working in a partnership or coalition can help you achieve your advocacy or campaign goal.
2. Determine whether Save the Children will be a leader, member or supporter in the coalition or partnership.
3. Determine the strengths of each partner and from that the natural roles and responsibilities of all actors involved.

Practical and professional skills

Develop and implement an advocacy strategy in a humanitarian situation.

4. Assess and develop appropriate coalition or partnership models to support your advocacy or campaign goals.
5. Know how to demonstrate to decision makers that Save the Children is an effective advocate for children that can mobilise and leverage community forces for change.

Duration: 1 hour

1 Analysing the situation

Would working in a partnership or coalition help you reach your advocacy or campaign goals? In order to decide this, you first need to analyse the benefits and limitations of working in coalition or partnership. The activity below will help you undertake this analysis.

Activity 1 Benefits and challenges

(a) Using a specific advocacy goal you have identified (e.g. increased access to health care for children under five, increasing the education budget by X%), think about how working in partnership or coalition could help you achieve your goal. Write down five key reasons why you think working with partners or in coalition would be effective in achieving your advocacy goal.

(b) List three challenges to or limitations of working in partnerships or coalitions, and think of solutions to or mitigation of these factors.

Challenges/limitations	Solutions/mitigations
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Comment

(a) You may have come up with the following points.

Coalition/partnership working can:

- amplify your message
- offer protection in a difficult advocacy context
- enable sharing of resources
- enable sharing of intelligence
- demonstrate leadership.

(b) Below are some ideas you may have considered.

Challenges/limitations	Solutions/mitigations
1. The need for consensus could make the campaign less focused	1. Be explicit from the outset and discuss this as part of the planning and strategy (e.g. the need for hard-hitting messages and focused policy asks)
2. It could increase the use of staff resources	2. Be clear with partners that they need to contribute time and resources too
3. Save the Children's advocacy messages might not all be reflected in the coalition's joint advocacy products	3. Identify jointly what the key messages are to ensure that Save the Children's priorities are included. Be willing to have Save the Children's messages alongside others

As Activity 1 has suggested, working in partnership or coalition may mean that you will have less visibility as an organisation and may have to make compromises in terms of advocacy messages or advocacy strategy. However, the advantage of working in a partnership or coalition is that by showing unity on a particular issue, you demonstrate that it is an issue of grave concern that has to be addressed.

Moreover, by joining forces with national organisations or coalitions the message is amplified and there is also less risk that decision makers will perceive the advocacy or campaign message as simply the opinion of an international organisation such as Save the Children. Joining with others can also provide protection – there is safety in numbers.

Gulalai Ismail, an enthusiastic campaigner in Pakistan, explains the rewards of coalition work:

We're stronger and more visible as a result. We bring our different strengths and combine them to make ourselves a real movement for change. In effect, we claim our rights.

Gulalai noted something that could be a benefit in certain country contexts or a limitation to be managed:

By working in this way, your own particular organisation is highlighted less – but you can achieve on wider aims.

2 What type of partnership or coalition?

Campaigning with partner organisations or coalitions has real value when: the goals of the partnership are clear; the working relationship is built on a set of shared values; there is agreement on strategies and tactics; and the organisations in the partnership or coalition bring added value.

While broad coalitions have reach, they also require a good deal of diplomacy, care and maintenance. Diversity brings creativity, energy and numbers, but in some cases it can bring division, confusion and bureaucracy, which can divert you from your goal.

Partnering with one strong partner organisation might offer many of the same benefits as a larger coalition, with fewer complicating factors. For instance, by partnering with a national midwives association Save the Children is likely to have a complimentary partner on a policy. The added value that Save the Children would bring is its international assets, whereas the midwives association would bring communities, practitioners and clients.

Ensuring a successful coalition

An advantage of bringing people together in a partnership or coalition is the possibility of pooling resources and playing to each other's strengths.

A broad coalition can have a real legitimacy and, while you may not agree with everyone on everything, you know that you're acting as part of a wider movement. It is vital to respect other people's experiences and perspectives throughout.

Raphael Ahenu, who helps coordinate a coalition of 20 community organisations in Ghana, notes that the time required to convince so many people that clean water and sanitation is a right is important because:

When campaigning alone, you need to work very hard to get those in authority to listen to you. Now, in coalition, they are always in a hurry to meet us!

Don't underestimate the value of surprise. By combining a diverse range of groups who don't usually work together – not the usual suspects – there is additional value in expanded reach and credibility with decision makers.

Activity 2 Contributions to partnership

Taking this assessment into account, can you think of three or more partners (e.g. National Child Rights Coalition, Midwives Association or a Parliamentary Association) that you think would help you achieve your advocacy objective?

To further assess the possible value of a partnership or coalition, ask yourself the following questions:

- Who brings policy expertise?
- Who brings service delivery expertise?
- Who can elevate the voice of the community/children?
- What does Save the Children bring to the partnership/coalition?
- What does the other partner(s) bring?

Comment

Possible partners: national and international NGOs (e.g. Plan International, World Vision International); national or regional child rights coalitions (e.g. Child Rights Coalition Asia, Eurochild, Latin American and Caribbean Network for the Defence of the Rights of Children); professional organisations (e.g. Midwives Association); networks (e.g. Network White Ribbon Campaign); UN agencies (e.g. UNICEF), media, corporates, research bodies and academia.

What does Save the Children bring? International organisation, depth of programme and advocacy experience, SCI support for advocacy (messaging, communications).

What does the partner bring? The White Ribbon Campaign, for instance, would bring access to a volunteer network, and expertise on maternal health.

3 What style of coalition?

There are many styles of coalition and you may choose to change your approach midway through an advocacy strategy or campaign because priorities have shifted.

- **Loose** coalitions are organisationally light, with limited mechanisms for oversight, but can still be very successful.
- **Ad hoc** coalitions may work together on a campaign long enough to require more internal systems, including written rules of engagement, working groups and a steering committee.
- **Formal** coalitions have elected steering committees or a board, by-laws and membership structures, and may even have dedicated staff.

Francis Njuakom, a campaigner focused on the rights of older people in Cameroon, says they maintain an informal coalition to engage with traditional rulers and policy makers ‘because they change and the mandate to them changes and we don’t want to tie ourselves in’.

By contrast, the Stop AIDS Campaign in the UK was born as a formal coalition. All the big NGOs joined and a steering group and membership structure were immediately established – there was no organic growth. In ‘Ready for Action: Campaigning at the Grassroots and in Coalition’ (2011), Simon Wright (Save the Children UK) explains: ‘The issue was already on the table. We had celebrity involvement and initially our role was awareness-raising. Then in the run-up to the G8 in 2005, we found a purpose and focus to the campaign – universal access to treatment.’

Activity 3

(a) What style of coalition works best in a particular context?

Tick the style of coalition best suited to the advocacy activity or goal. There may be more than one type of coalition that works in each situation.

	Formal coalition	Ad hoc coalition	Loose coalition
Rally for change			
Policy brief/letter			
Annual lobby day at legislature			
Advocacy for policy development/implementation			
Petition campaign			
Issue campaign during election period			
G8/G20 campaign			

(b) Reflection time: learning from experience

Think of a previous experience working with a partner(s). What advocacy/policy work did you do together? How would you characterise the partnership – formal, ad hoc, loose? What was successful? What wasn't? What activities could you have done that would have better suited the partnership? How could you have improved your efforts?

Comment

In my 25 years of working with partners and in coalitions my experience is that more and better advocacy is achieved together than apart. In 2010, Canada held the Presidency of the G8. Save the Children was a key member of a loose coalition of organisations (MNCH Coalition) which advocated that the Canadian government choose maternal, newborn and child health as the signature development initiative of the G8. The coalition included UNICEF, World Vision, CARE, Plan and Results. When we began speaking with the government late in 2008 and early 2009, the global recession was beginning to have an impact and the MNCH Coalition was not sure the conservative Canadian government would even consider a major development announcement. There were a number of key factors that worked in favour of the coalition:

1. The coalition realised who the right decision makers were for this discussion – policy people in the Prime Minister’s office and not those in the Development Department.
2. The group decided a modest initial ask that focused on an approach to reducing maternal and child deaths that was known to the government and that had demonstrated strong outcomes. We did this because we knew this approach would appeal to a conservative government that was naturally doubtful of big government solutions.
3. Knowing that the Canadian government was seeking one of the rotating seats on the UN Security Council, we highlighted the need of high-burden countries that might play a role in the decision-making process.
4. As it became apparent that the government would choose MNCH as its development focus, we expanded the financial ask in a holistic way, building on the foundation of the earlier communications.
5. We developed a communication strategy that reinforced the need and the approach, pointing to examples of similar commitments previously made by the Canadian government. We called this the ‘continuing leadership’ message.

4 Leader, member or supporter?

What should Save the Children's role be?

Leadership comes with additional responsibility, which sometimes includes direct and indirect financial commitments. Beware of assuming that leadership necessarily equates with control; depending on the decision-making process or governance structure, a coalition leader may have no greater influence or visibility than a member.

Membership of a coalition can require greater flexibility and compromise. The benefit of membership is that you have greater freedom to advocate within the coalition for your policy priorities. A role that is a few steps away from leadership also means increased capacity to focus on the elements or tactics that best suit your organisational capacities.

There are times when it is not appropriate for Save the Children to be either a leader or a member of a coalition, but there may be important advocacy and policy reasons to **support** the coalition. An obvious example would be a child-led coalition or coalitions in countries that have advocacy limitations on international NGOs. Supporting these kinds of coalitions or coalitions in these kinds of country contexts can mean supporting directly through funding and indirectly through training, administrative support (e.g. office space, travel costs) and communications support. For example, Save the Children, through its Child Rights Governance Global Initiative, provides technical and advocacy support to national and regional child rights coalitions to strengthen their capacity to hold their governments to account on their commitments to children, including through the submission of supplementary reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child or the Universal Periodic Review mechanism.

Activity 4 Give us some tips!

For a successful campaign working in coalition we need to seize the opportunities and overcome the challenges. Based on the example in Activity 3, write down five examples of possible opportunities for your own coalition work that you can take advantage of, and say whether they relate to an opportunity or a challenge.

Comment

Here are our practical tips. Compare them with your own. Now that you see the combined list of tips, can you think of any other tips you can add?

- Be clear in your ways of working within the coalition, understand the levels of resources of all the partners and recognise the different strengths that each brings.
- Be explicit within the coalition about the added value the work brings to delivering on the objectives of the campaign.
- Communicate – it is vital and ensures that everyone is clear and comfortable about the ‘red lines’, i.e. issues, tactics and messaging that are non-negotiable.
- Build trust – tensions will be inevitable; what is important is to have trust and patience and a willingness to work through those tensions to find common ground.
- Set up a Facebook page for the coalition: it is a great way of sharing information and resources.
- Supporting and managing a coalition can be time consuming. Establishing a Secretariat for the coalition is extremely useful when working in advocacy and campaigning.
- Some donors may be willing to fund coalitions (the SUN Civil Society Alliances are all supported by donor funding); look around for resources.

Campaign coalitions versus long-term advocacy coalitions

Coalitions that come together for a campaign are time-bound coalitions. Their format can be formal, ad hoc or loose, but whatever their format they are primarily characterised by being focused on a relatively short-term goal. Examples of coalition campaigns include campaigns to ask G8 countries for ODA investments, such as the campaigns in advance of the Gleneagles and Muskoka G8s. Campaign coalitions are often characterised by a significant public engagement and mobilisation component which complements a strategy that engages policy makers and decision makers in private advocacy.

There can also be coalitions that are permanent or semi-permanent initiatives. Often these coalitions have a formal structure and they most often focus on technical advocacy/influence and a private 'insider' advocacy strategy. Below is an example of a coalition from Yemen that is engaged in technical advocacy.

Activity 5 Yemen case study

The case study below is an example of a coalition that the Save the Children office in Yemen engaged with on technical policy work related to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.

As you read the case study, identify and list three key differences in approach or style from the example of working in coalition in Activity 3.

Reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Save the Children Sweden – Yemen

The following case study is taken from the report of the Global Capacity Building Workshop on Community and Child Centred Advocacy held by the International Save the Children Alliance in March 2006 in Kathmandu.

Yemen ratified the UNCRC in 1991 and its third periodic reporting process took place during 2004/2005. A major shortcoming of the two previous reports, however, had been that issues of violence against children were not sufficiently addressed by either the government or NGOs and no serious follow-up plans for implementation of the Concluding Observations had been made.

Some of the benefits of this work included:

The Yemen Coalition for Child Rights Care, the Child Protection Network and The Violence against Children Network carrying out programmes to follow up on the UN Committee's Concluding Observations. They now follow a child rights approach.

Other partners in civil society, including the Yemen Coalition, being mobilised to make use of the Concluding Observations in their advocacy and awareness raising efforts.

Save the Children Sweden, along with its partners, convincing the media to report about the Concluding Observations, including issues of violence against children.

The Children's Parliament discussing the Concluding Observations and preparing a plan of action for follow-up in its session in August 2005.

The Committee's Concluding Observations from the third reporting process included:

Revision of existing legislation and explicit prohibition of all forms of physical and humiliating punishments.

Training of teachers and parents on alternative practices.

Undertaking awareness-raising campaigns on the negative impact of physical and humiliating punishments.

Save the Children Sweden worked with the Yemen Coalition for Child Rights Care to submit an alternative report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and included the issue of violence against children. In addition, a social worker's report emphasised children's voices. Workshops and training on child rights as well as awareness-raising activities also took place during this time. In

February 2005, the Coalition discussed the issue with the Committee at the pre-session meeting in Geneva.

Although Concluding Observations are not legally binding, they are recommendations from the international body mandated to monitor state obligations and therefore carry significant political and moral weight. The more knowledge of them and mobilisation behind them, the greater that weight. Save the Children Sweden suggested that a follow-up plan to the Concluding Observations would be a strong platform for future advocacy.

Because of NGO involvement in the reporting process, the Yemeni government was more aware and willing to listen on child rights issues, including violence against children. In March 2005, for example, the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood and the Arab Resource Collective, supported by Save the Children Sweden, organised a training workshop on advocacy for the rights of the child; and in September 2005, the Yemeni government developed a plan of action emphasising that Yemen should address violence against children in schools and other settings.

Now that you have reviewed two actual examples of coalition work, one in the context of a G8 campaign in a developed country and one a national-level policy campaign, how do you think the support of an organisation such as Save the Children can be instrumental?

Activity 5 Check your knowledge

Your Country Director believes that coalition work is too resource intensive and has a limited return on investment. You have to persuade her otherwise.

Write a short statement presenting three key arguments to counter her position. Your argument should be concise and to the point and not longer than three paragraphs.

Comment

Your arguments in Activity 5 should use your answers from Activity 1(a) and, if necessary, the solution/mitigations from Activity 1(b) to make a persuasive argument and address the concerns of your Country Director.

Summary

In this session, you have learnt about different kinds of partners or coalitions, how to assess what type of partner or coalition would best support your advocacy and campaign goals, and how to position Save the Children for greatest impact. Finally, you should understand how Save the Children has been involved in or supported partners and coalitions.

Now that you have completed the session, you should be able to recognise:

- what the benefits of partnerships or coalitions are
- what some of the limitations are but also how to mitigate them
- how to assess potential partners and Save the Children's strengths as a potential partner
- how to assess which kind of coalition (loose, ad hoc, formal) works best with which kinds of advocacy and campaign objectives
- different ways Save the Children can engage/be positioned in a coalition
- the difference between a campaigning coalition and one focused on longer-term policy engagement.

Additional resources

Scaling Up Nutrition, (2013) Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Civil Society Network (CSN): Guidance note towards establishing and strengthening Civil Society Alliances in SUN countries, http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Guidance-note_Establishing-a-SUN-CSA_EN_18sep2013_FINAL.pdf (Accessed 6 March 2014).

Acknowledgements

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