



Save the Children



**The Open
University**

Advocacy and Campaigning

13 Working with regional and international bodies (such as the United Nations)

Keywords: Accountability, inter-governmental, United Nations, international and regional bodies, inter-agency platforms

Duration: 2 hours



Introduction

Save the Children engages with and seeks to influence the United Nations (UN) and other international and regional bodies to hold states to account on their commitments to children. These bodies also provide civil society organisations (CSOs) and children themselves with a platform to bring the voices of children to the attention of states. The pressure exercised by the international community through these bodies can push states to prioritise children in their national policies, laws, budgets and practice (you can learn more about how to conduct advocacy for law and budget reform in Sessions 14 and 12 respectively). Other bodies can be used to fill gaps in the protection of children's rights by creating new treaties, norms, standards and other agreements in favour of children. In this session you will explore why these bodies are useful platforms for advocacy for children, which of these bodies Save the Children engages with, and how we have used and influenced these bodies to achieve change for children.

Learning Outcomes for this session

Knowledge and understanding

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

1. Understand how the UN and other international and regional bodies can hold states to account on their commitments to children.
2. Explain the ways in which civil society can engage the UN and other international and regional bodies to advocate for children.
3. Understand how Save the Children uses and influences the UN and other international and regional bodies to achieve change for children.

Practical and professional skills

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

4. Access key entry points for advocacy in UN and other international and regional bodies.
5. Identify opportunities to integrate national, regional and international advocacy.

Duration 2 hours

1 Why are UN and other international and regional bodies useful platforms for advocacy and campaigning?

The UN and other inter-governmental bodies bring states together to discuss, negotiate and monitor implementation of agreements at the international and regional level. They also provide important platforms for stakeholders, including civil society and children, to engage their governments, donors and other actors on key issues of concern to children. Advocacy towards these bodies is useful to: (a) hold Governments to account; (b) push child rights concerns up the political agenda; (c) achieve new norms and commitments in favour of children. The outcomes of these bodies, including recommendations, resolutions and agreements, can also be used to support national level-advocacy across different programmes.

Accountability

Treaty bodies

Some UN and regional bodies have the mandate to monitor the implementation of international treaties and can be used to hold governments to account on their obligations to children. Save the Children engages primarily with the ‘treaty bodies’ that are child-specific, notably the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its Optional Protocols (OHCHR, 2013), and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), which monitors the African Union’s African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC, 2013).

Save the Children supports civil society and child-led groups in engaging with these bodies, including by submitting supplementary reports, meeting with committee experts prior to sessions to advocate for key children’s issues to be included in their recommendations to governments, and supports follow-up activities at the national level. For example, in Bangladesh, Save the Children supported children in drafting a child-led supplementary report for the government’s review by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2009, including research in 64 districts with input from 12,225 children. A child representative was also nominated and supported to present the report to committee experts in Geneva. A report launch also took place at national level. As a result of child-led reporting and advocacy at national and international level, children were given the chance to comment on the government’s child policy (Save the Children, 2011, p. 52).

Save the Children also bases its advocacy on programme experience and is informed by consultations with children. For example, to influence the outcome of the Committee on the Rights of the Child's thematic discussion on children and migration in 2012, Save the Children collected evidence from country programmes and consulted over 100 migrant children across Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Kosovo, Lao PDR, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Senegal, Somalia, Swaziland and Thailand. Save the Children produced a report and a video with children's testimonies projected during the discussion. We also supported the participation of two children from Mali and Thailand to take part in the discussions. As a result, Save the Children's key asks and the children's demands were reflected in the outcome document (Save the Children, 2012a).

Advocacy towards treaty bodies is the most effective when civil society groups collaborate together and form a child rights coalition. Our experience is that these coalitions can also be used for other advocacy activities. For example, in Addis Ababa, Save the Children supports the holding of a Civil Society Forum in advance of the meetings of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC). The third ACERWC CSO Forum that took place in 2010 was used as a platform for joint advocacy towards governmental delegations attending the African Union Summit to raise concerns regarding maternal and child health (Save the Children, 2010).

Political bodies

There exist a number of political bodies whose mandate includes reviewing state commitments to children. For example, the UN Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body created by the UN General Assembly to strengthen human rights, address violations and make recommendations. One of its key mechanisms is the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), where the human rights record of all UN Member States is individually peer-reviewed. This includes commitments under international human rights treaties, including the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols, and international humanitarian law. States have also reported on political commitments, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Save the Children has engaged in the UPR since its first cycle of review (2008–2011), supporting submissions and advocacy on 31 countries, and is now actively engaged in the second cycle (2012–2016). During the first cycle, an average of 50% of child rights priorities raised by Save the Children and our partners were reflected in UPR recommendations accepted by states for the countries that we covered. (Save the Children, 2012b). To achieve these results, Save the Children's UPR advocacy aims to be strategic, planned and coordinated at the national and international levels (Save the Children, 2012c).

The UPR process can also be a good tool to strengthen national accountability systems and the quality interaction between the government, civil society and other stakeholders. For example, in Nepal, Save the Children trained 138 civil society organisations on the UPR process. We then engaged in coordinated advocacy at the national and international levels, including meetings with embassies in Kathmandu and missions in Geneva. As an outcome of the UPR sessions in 2011, 34 UPR recommendations focused on child rights, including 31 accepted by the government of Nepal. In order to achieve impact, Save the Children built its UPR follow-up strategy around the mobilisation of various national stakeholders, including civil society networks, the National Human Rights Commission, embassies and the media. Moreover, Save the Children was instrumental in ensuring that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) included monitoring and follow-up of UPR recommendations in its mandate. As a result, the UPR process sped up the adoption of the National Child Policy and comprehensive standards for child care homes in 2012 (Save the Children, 2013a).

In developing your advocacy strategy towards these bodies, it is important to bear in mind that these bodies are complementary and that your advocacy should be linked and mutually reinforcing. You can build your UPR submissions and advocacy on your supplementary report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child or ACERWC, picking out the priority issues and tailoring your message to an international community. In order to achieve this, it is important to be strategic and to understand the key similarities and differences between different organs, as illustrated by the activity below.

Activity 1 Understanding how to use and influence different accountability bodies in a strategic manner

Look at Figure 1. How do you think these similarities and differences affect advocacy towards either body?

Committee on the Rights of the Child	Universal Periodic Review
Only State parties are reviewed	All UN Member States are reviewed (193 currently)
Review done by 18 experts	Review done by all Government representatives (peer-review)
Covers the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols only	All human rights and humanitarian commitments considered, including voluntary pledges

Figure 1 Key similarities and differences between the Committee on the Rights of the Child and Universal Periodic Review

Comment

A key similarity is that you can refer to the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols in your advocacy towards the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UPR. However, as the UPR is broader, covering all human rights, humanitarian and political commitments, you can also mention issues that are not raised in the UNCRC.

A key difference is that the committee is composed of experts and the UPR is a peer review done by governments. This means that in the UPR you cannot be exhaustive. You need to identify a limited number of priority issues where political pressure can lead to policy change at the national level. The most successful advocacy is when you link your advocacy towards the committee with the UPR, using the UPR to prioritise child rights on the national political agenda.

Agenda setting

The United Nations and other inter-governmental bodies are used by states to set the political agenda. Within these bodies, individual states or political groupings can have a lot of influence on whether an issue is considered a priority or not. For example, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC) and the European Union (EU) alternate in setting the agenda for the annual full-day discussion on child rights and leading the negotiations for the resolutions on children's issues at the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council. This has an influence on who your target audience is, which opportunities you should seize and which advocacy activities you should plan to convince these targets. Civil society organisations and child-led groups can try to influence the agenda by advocating for states to champion key issues. This can be achieved through approaching states to co-sponsor a high-level discussion or side event in parallel to an official meeting. Also, states can be called on to make public statements; lead or support resolutions and make public commitments prioritising children.

Case study: Putting the reduction of child mortality on the Human Rights Council agenda



Human Rights Council annual full-day discussion on the child's right to health, March 2013 (Save the Children, 2013b)

Save the Children's Geneva Office, in collaboration with WHO, UNICEF and World Vision, worked closely with the Representative of the Mission of Uruguay that was leading GRULAC in 2011, in order to convince them to propose an annual full-day discussion on child health at the Human Rights Council in 2013. We succeeded in getting our proposal into the resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council in March 2012. We continued working with them to influence the day and succeeded in getting a seat on the high-level panel in March 2013 for the CEO of Save the Children India and influenced outcomes. As a result, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on children's right to health, which invited WHO and others to prepare a study on under-five mortality as a human rights concern. The report was presented during the September 2013 session and has led to further action by the Human Rights Council, including a thematic resolution on child mortality calling for technical guidance on the application of a human rights-based approach to reducing child mortality.

Norm setting and political commitments in favour of children

UN and other international and regional bodies can be used to address gaps in protection of children and develop new norms and standards in favour of children. Save the Children has been actively engaged, through coalitions and partners, in identifying gaps in protection and addressing these gaps through advocacy. Indeed, Eglantyne Jebb, the founder of Save the Children, was the driving force behind the Declaration on the Rights of the Child adopted by the League of Nations in 1929 that led to the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by the UN General Assembly in 1989.

One of the key recent treaties that Save the Children has been actively involved in at all stages – from inception, through to the negotiations, signature and ratification – is the third Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on a communications procedure (OP3CRC). This new treaty establishes a new international mechanism for children to make complaints and obtain remedies if their national courts fail them. In Activity 2 you'll investigate a table that gives you a chronology of the key moments in the development of this new treaty:

Activity 2 Identifying key advocacy moments for a new treaty

Look through the chronology in Figure 2 (overleaf). What do you think are the key advocacy moments in a campaign to achieve a new international treaty and its ratification?

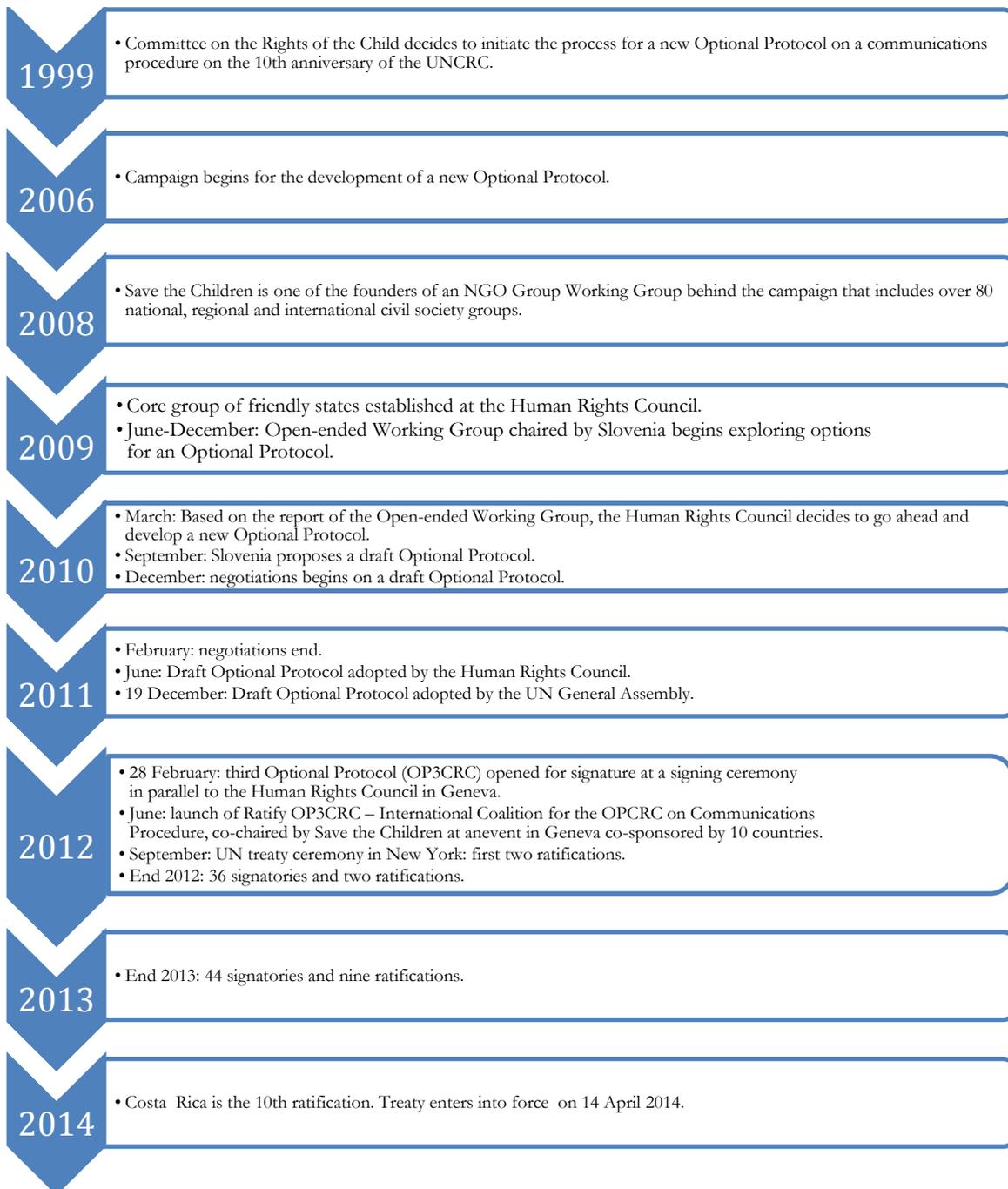


Figure 2 Key stages in the development of the Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on a communications procedure (OP3CRC) (NGO Group for the CRC, 2012, p. 3)

Comment

There is no single answer to this question, but there are a number of crucial moments where advocacy is essential to obtain political commitments. For example, it is important to begin with a go-ahead from states to begin drafting a new treaty. In the case above, that key moment was in 2009 when a ‘Core group of friendly states’ came together at the Human Rights Council. Civil society worked closely with this group to advocate for UN Member States to establish an Open-ended Working Group chaired by Slovenia. Another key moment was when Slovenia proposed a draft in September 2010. Save the Children’s Advocacy Office in Geneva and Save the Children members were very active in advocating for key issues to be included in the draft treaty in advance of the negotiations that took place in December 2010 and February 2011. The Advocacy Office was also involved in advocating for the adoption of the draft Optional Protocol by the Human Rights Council in June 2011.

Once the Optional Protocol was adopted by the General Assembly in December 2011, Save the Children, through the Global Initiative on Child Rights Governance, Advocacy Offices, members and Country Offices, was involved in advocating for signature and ratification at the official signing ceremony in February 2012.



Members of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child attending the launch of ‘Ratify OP3CRC – International Coalition for the OPCRC on a Communications Procedure’, Geneva, June 2012 (NGO Group for the CRC, 2012)

A new international coalition, ‘Ratify OP3CRC – International Coalition for the OPCRC on Communications Procedure’, was launched in June 2013 with Save the Children as co-chair of the Steering Committee (www.ratifyop3crc.org).

Since then, the key advocacy moments have been in advance of the UN treaty events in New York in parallel to the UN General Assembly in September and at national level. Nine ratifications were achieved by December 2013 and Costa Rica was the tenth country to ratify in early 2014. The treaty will enter into force on 14 April 2014. The campaign will now focus on increasing cross-regional ratifications and implementation.

You can see through this example that this type of advocacy takes time and requires long-term plans, flexibility and the mobilisation of civil society actors at the national and international levels.

2 Which key UN and other international and regional bodies does Save the Children engage with?

Save the Children's four Advocacy Offices in New York, Geneva, Addis Ababa and Brussels seek to influence political agendas in favour of children.

At the international level, Save the Children Advocacy Offices in New York and Geneva engage primarily with the UN bodies, including humanitarian bodies. In order to facilitate engagement, Save the Children has consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This allows Save the Children access and official entry into all UN institutions and processes globally, most importantly the UN General Assembly in New York, ECOSOC and the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. The Advocacy Offices also engage bilaterally with missions in order to influence political processes or decision-making bodies that are not open to civil society engagement, such as the Security Council in New York.

The Advocacy Offices, in collaboration with Save the Children members that have been identified as 'account holders', also engage actively with the UN Secretariat, specialised agencies and funds. For example, the New York Office engages with UNICEF headquarters and the Geneva Office engages with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in close collaboration with Save the Children members.

Moreover, Save the Children also advocates towards inter-agency platforms, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in Geneva that is the main forum for coordination, policy development and decision making on humanitarian issues (you can learn more about humanitarian advocacy in Session 16). This engagement is both at a high-level – Save the Children's CEO is Chair of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response for the IASC – and at a working level through co-leadership of the Education Cluster with UNICEF. Save the Children is also an active member of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), a network of NGOs working on humanitarian issues.

At the regional level, Save the Children also has Advocacy Offices in Addis Ababa and Brussels. The Advocacy Office in Addis Ababa engages mainly with the institutions of the African Union (AU), including the African Union Commission and the African Union's statutory bodies such as the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC). It also works closely with the regional groupings that are represented in the African Union, such as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The EU Office in Brussels engages primarily with the institutions of the European Union (EU) to ensure that the EU's strategies, policies, laws and budgets include children's rights. These include: the European Commission's Directorate Generals (DGs) focusing on international cooperation (EuropeAid); humanitarian issues (ECHO); justice (DG Justice) and home affairs (HOME); the European External Action Service (EEAS) that supports the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; and the European Parliament. For example, the EU Office has significantly influenced EU legislative proposals on child protection, such as the adoption of the EU Returns Directive, the EU Trafficking Directive and the EU Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors. The EU Office has also successfully advocated for earmarking 20% of the future EU Development Co-operation Instrument (DCI) from 2014 onwards for basic health and education, as outlined in the case study below:

Case study: Influencing the EU Multi-Annual Framework (MFF)

The Multi-Annual Framework (MFF) is a spending plan that translates the EU priorities into financial terms for the period 2014–2020. It is not a seven-year budget. Every year a new EU annual budget must be agreed upon, and the MFF acts as the ceiling limit for expenditure over this period and defines the maximum amounts available for each major category of spending called ‘headings’.

The discussions and preparations of the MFF took more than two years so it was important for Save the Children to be strategic regarding its engagement. Save the Children advocated for more and better investment in children in different categories of spending (Heading 1 Sustainable Growth, Heading 3 Citizenship, freedom, security and justice and Heading 4 EU as a global player). Taking into account the multitude of different actors trying to influence the MFF, it was more strategic to work mainly within the existing coalitions. Save the Children worked on the domestic issues with the Child Rights Action Group (CRAG) and through CONCORD (the European platform for development NGOs) for the external action. The actions of these coalitions included briefings, high-level meetings and roundtables.

For some specific topics, ad hoc coalitions were made in order to have a stronger voice. A good example is the work which has been done to secure 20% of the Development Cooperation Instrument for Health and Basic Education. On this occasion CONCORD and Action for Global Health (both of which Save the Children is part of) partnered together. The European Parliament accepted the proposition partly by broadening it to ‘20% of the DCI for basic social services’. The final outcome of this is not yet known as the final discussions on Heading 4 are still ongoing at the time of writing (early 2014).

Alongside the work with the coalitions, Save the Children also produced a specific policy brief to highlight the importance of Investment in Children in the MFF (Save the Children, 2012e).

In addition, Save the Children, through its regional offices and partners, seeks to influence regional inter-governmental bodies in Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean. For example, Save the Children engages and supports child rights coalitions, through CRC Asia, to engage with the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN), including its Commission on the Protection and Promotion of Women and Children’s Rights (ACWC). Save the Children also seeks to influence the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and has successfully conducted this work through the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children. Save the Children also engages with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on the post-2015 development agenda. This has included influencing the Asia inter-ministerial dialogue on post-2015.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, Save the Children engages with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, including through support to the office of the Commissioner on Child Rights. Through our advocacy, we succeeded in obtaining recommendations on abolishing corporal punishment in the region. We have also worked closely with our partners in the region, the Latin American and Caribbean Network for the Defence of the Rights of Children (REDLAMYC), to engage with MERCOSUR's working group on the UNCRC.

Activity 3 Case study: Save the Children's advocacy at the UN General Assembly in 2013

Read through the case study below, in which the UNGA was identified as a 'global moment'. What different types of advocacy activities can you identify at the New York level? What complementary advocacy might take place at the national level?

Save the Children developed a Global Advocacy Strategy for the 68th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York from 22 September to 4 October 2013. The strategy responded to a steer from Save the Children's CEO Steering Group and was identified as a priority 'global moment' for the EVERY ONE campaign. It is a key milestone for the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and is an opportunity to engage governments on Save the Children's priorities for the post-2015 Development Agenda (Save the Children, 2013c).

Save the Children globally, in collaboration with the New York Advocacy Office, was involved in planning and implementing the UNGA advocacy strategy. Over a five-week period the New York Office hosted 50 staff from across the organisation, including seven CEOs.

In advance of the UNGA, Save the Children sent lobby letters to 44 UN Missions in New York and at the national level highlighting our key asks on child survival and the post-2015 Development Agenda. Save the Children also conducted 22 face-to-face meetings with missions in New York, hosted 11 events during the UNGA and the UN Global Compact Leader's Summit on our priority issues and secured high-level speaking roles for Save the Children at official UNGA events, including the MDG Special Event and the World Humanitarian Summit. As a result, Save the Children secured high-level statements and commitments from governments on our priority issues (Jones, 2013).

Comment

Save the Children engaged in a number of advocacy activities across the world. The case study only captures the activities at the New York level. These include lobby letters and bilateral meetings with missions in advance of the UNGA, side events organised by Save the Children and high-level speaking roles at official UNGA events.

Other types of advocacy activities at the international level, not captured in the case study, can include oral statements, written submissions for high-level events and inputs to resolutions and political agreements.

These activities at the international level were supported by national-level advocacy towards Ministries of Foreign Affairs and other relevant ministries involved in developing state policies and positions in advance of the UNGA.

3 How does Save the Children use and influence these bodies?

Save the Children's CEO's have adopted guidance on 'Great Advocacy' that includes the requirement that advocacy should be 'joined up between the global, regional and national levels and influential in the capitals that count, and synchronized with reinforcing media strategies' (Save the Children, 2012d). As a result, Save the Children's advocacy towards the UN and other international and regional bodies aims to be linked and reinforce each other. An example is the 'local to global' project on maternal and child health that seeks to improve child survival and contribute to the EVERY ONE campaign goals by linking community level approaches and field impact to national, regional and international advocacy, covering Afghanistan, India, Zambia and Yemen. The following case study provides you with an example of joined-up advocacy:

Activity 4 Case study: Achieving a global stunting reduction target

Read through the case study below. Can you identify what the advocacy objective was, who was involved in the advocacy and whether it was achieved?

Save the Children, as part of its EVERY ONE campaign advocacy strategy, decided to influence the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 2012 in order to achieve a Global Nutrition Plan with global nutrition targets, including one on reducing stunting. Save the Children's Advocacy Office in Geneva, through its 'local to global' project, worked closely with the campaign team, Save the Children members and country offices in order to hold a series of advocacy activities at both national and international levels to achieve this goal. This included the launch of Save the Children's nutrition report 'A Life Free from Hunger' in Geneva, and a series of side events on nutrition at the Human Rights Council and the World Health Assembly. Nutrition champions were identified at the national level, including an Indian parliamentarian and an Afghan representative of the Ministry of Health, to participate in advocacy towards decision makers in Geneva and at the national level. As a result of this coordinated advocacy at both levels, WHO's Member States endorsed and adopted a Nutrition Plan with six global targets for improving nutrition, including a target calling for a 40% reduction by 2025 in the number of children under 5 who are stunted.



Afghan representative addressing the Save the Children side event held at the World Health Assembly five days before the adoption of the Global Nutrition Plan, May 2012 (Save the Children, 2013d)

Comment

The advocacy objective was a Global Nutrition Plan with a global target on stunting. Save the Children conducted coordinated advocacy at the national and international levels, through the involvement of the Advocacy Office in Geneva, Save the Children members and country offices. Nutrition champions including a parliamentarian from India and a representative of the Ministry of Health from Afghanistan took part in advocacy activities at the national and international levels. Save the Children achieved its objective: a global target on reducing stunting was included in the WHA nutrition plan agreed by governments. This is, however, only one step in the process; what was successfully adopted at global level, needs to be followed up on, reinforced and implemented at national level through national costed implementation plans to scale up nutrition.

Summary

This session has looked at how to use and influence UN and other international and regional bodies to further children's rights. By now you should understand:

- why the UN and other bodies are useful platforms for advocacy and campaigning
- which of these bodies Save the Children engages with at the international and regional level
- how Save the Children has used and influenced the UN and other bodies to achieve change for children.

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