



# Protecting Children's Rights Using Community Based Approaches

Southern Sudan



**Save the Children**

Sweden

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*Our vision is a world in which all children's rights are fulfilled. Save the Children works for a world:*

- which respects and values each child*
- which listens to children and learns*
- where all children have hope and opportunity*

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Art no 10024  
Project manager Anne Musomba  
Author Okumba Miruka  
Photo David Neveling

**Save the Children Sweden**  
Eastern and Central Africa Region  
PO Box 19423, 202 KNH  
Nairobi, Kenya  
Phone +254 20 386 5888/90  
Fax +254 20 386 5889

Email [info@ecaf.savethechildren.se](mailto:info@ecaf.savethechildren.se)  
<http://ecaf.savethechildren.se>

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## The situation in southern Sudan

Southern Sudan comprises approximately 1,000,000 square kilometres divided into 10 states, each consisting of 5 – 30 counties, which in turn comprise 5 – 7 payams with each payam having a population of about 15,000 – 20,000. Each payam has bomas (villages) representing various gols (a unit of approximately 9 – 10 clan families).

According to recent estimates, southern Sudan is populated by an estimated 14,549,000 including refugees in neighbouring countries and those already re-settled in third countries.

Children under 14 years of age experience high morbidity and mortality due to hunger, low immunisation coverage and low birth weight. Diarrhoea, malaria, measles and polio are prevalent. Most children have no ready access to primary health care or clean drinking water; a majority suffers from one form of malnutrition or another; and many suffer from chronic illnesses. It is estimated that only 16 –18 per cent of the children of southern Sudan have access to schooling. Yet the enthusiasm and thirst for education remains one of the strongest among the youth who see it as the most important route to personal, familial and national development.

the need for community based approaches 4 |  
strategies 5 | implementation structures 9 | two  
examples of community based approaches 12 |  
lessons learned 19 | practical suggestions 22

# The Need for Community Based Approaches

Since the first influx of Sudanese refugees into Ethiopia in late 80's, Save the Children Sweden has played a great role in providing support, care and protection for the war-affected children. One of the negative impacts of war is the breakdown of the social fabric which protects children from threats on their fundamental rights. In these situations, the role of parents, communities, civil society, the state and non-state actors in protecting children was minimised. This booklet summarises experiences made prior to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005.

In southern Sudanese communities, a child is protected from danger, trauma (when a person dies in the family, children are evacuated to shield them) and starvation (priority given to children in feeding during times of shortages). Children are also viewed as belonging to the whole community and so those deprived and orphaned are catered for through the extended family system.

The war fragmented these values and practices in diverse ways. Because of the demand for foot soldiers, children were recruited into armed groups. They witnessed, perpetrated and internalised violence as the sole means of resolving conflict, leaving them with a thin sociological foundation for growth and development. One of the greatest effects is the increased individualism and competition for scarce resources, a scenario in which children are more disadvantaged because they may not be able to compete equally with adults. The demands of

survival essentially accelerate children into premature adulthood as they seek to fend for themselves. For those who fled the country, the spectre of cultural alienation became real as they adjusted to refugee life. For all categories of children, the instability effectively reduced or even eliminated opportunities for going to school.

There are also a number of harmful traditional practices targeting children, such as face marking to initiate boys into adulthood; removal of lower teeth for both males and females; sending children to cattle camps where they can remain for several years, cutting them off from schooling; and early marriage for girls. These factors influenced Save the Children Sweden to use Community Based Approaches – the protection of children is primarily the responsibility of the communities.

When the organisation started its work in southern Sudan, it was very impressed by the voluntary spirit displayed by the Akot community where it set up its first base in Lakes Region. The community offered to support the establishment of a teacher training centre by donating food for the trainees, and supplying grass and timber for construction.

As expressed by the Youth Education Coordinator in Malualkon, Michael Njogu, "an organisation cannot develop a community, but can only facilitate the community towards self-development by being a change agent through advocacy, and by building capacity in the community to solve its own problems."

# Strategies

The development of community-based approaches is based on Save the Children Sweden's initial base in Akot, where the intervention started with demobilising of child soldiers after which the communities requested education for the children who were reunified with families. Since most teachers in pre-war southern Sudan had been sucked into the army, the organisation hit on starting a teacher training institute. To realise this, it created the model of phased training where volunteers were taken for training during school holidays and released back to the schools for the term.

In Lakes state, Youth Education was pioneered to cater for children who were way beyond primary school age and had been in difficult situations, such as former child soldiers. This consists of vocational training combined with life skills to make the training more holistic and facilitate reintegration into the community.

## Sensitising Communities

The concentration of all community efforts on military pursuits meant that the proper protection and development of children was neglected. The first priority was, therefore, to re-focus community attention on children as a most vulnerable group through sensitisation of parents, teachers, children, elders, military personnel etc in meetings, training workshops and discussions.

The process looks at how communities protected children in the traditional set-up, how the war changed this and how communities can improve on their responsibilities towards children.



One of the negative impacts of war, is the breakdown of the social fabric which protects children from threats on their fundamental rights.

## **Traditional values as entry point**

In its work with communities, Save the Children Sweden builds on the traditional values and practices that protect children while discouraging the harmful ones. Children are themselves involved in campaigning against harmful practices. For instance, children who have gone through initiation rites give personal testimonies to appeal to communities to stop such practices and sensitise other children not to seek or go through the same.

## **Support of local leadership and formal authorities**

In the community projects, the support of chiefs (traditional leadership system) and the civil authorities (appointed administrators and, earlier, civilian wings of the liberation movement) has been invaluable. While the chief is critical in mobilising his community, the civil authorities provide assurance of security, coordinate the project efforts in the area and contribute land for project buildings. Without this support, there could be no meaningful work in southern Sudan.

## **Mobilising resources through cost-sharing**

To map out resources required for projects to support children, an assessment of what is locally available and the capacity of the community to provide such resources is conducted. The commitment of communities to contribute is spelt out in a Memorandum of Understanding describing the partnership between the agency and the community. The approach has worked successfully in support to education where communities

provide land, timber, mud, water, labour, volunteer teachers and food for teachers while the organisation contributes iron sheets, nails and teacher training.

## **Collaboration with other development partners**

In places where Save the Children Sweden works, it develops rapport with the other agencies to coordinate activities, reduce duplication and strengthen synergies. In education, for example, the organisation contributes to school construction and teacher training, UNICEF provides school materials and World Food Programme (WFP) contributes food-for-work during construction and emergency school feeding during times of shortage.

## **Capacity building of community based structures**

The involvement of the community in implementing project activities is enabled through recognised structures, and members of these structures are then trained on children's rights and how to support various categories of vulnerable children.

## **Income generating projects (IGP)**

Financial outlay almost always determines whether a project will survive or collapse. It is in this regard that an income generating component was introduced into the CBO pilot in Akot and in the youth education component. The aim was that the income generated would support programmes, maintain structures, pay staff and finance operations.



In Maluakon, southern Sudan, Save the Children Sweden supports youth education for children beyond primary school age.



The Community Mobilisers use bicycles moving around among the communities.

# Implementation Structures

The southern Sudan Programme is headed by a Country Director based in Nairobi, Kenya. The programme focuses on protection and development, mainly education, of children. Children's participation, good governance and non-discrimination are mainstreamed into all programmes.

In each state, a Field Manager coordinates programme work and oversees administration. There is a Project Coordinator under whom comes a Field Officer who supervises the community mobilisers responsible for coordinating the activities of the community and providing a link between the community and civil authorities. The mobilisers are in charge of each payam, the smallest geo-administrative unit in the political set-up.

## Community mobilisers, the link to communities

Most of the ground work is done by community mobilisers who are recruited from communities, employed and trained on community mobilisation, training skills and child rights issues. Apart from the training, the mobilisers are also provided with reference materials such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, guidelines on community based rehabilitation of children with disabilities, guidelines for formation of community groups and clubs and report writing steps.

The community mobilisers create child rights awareness in communities and among the civil authorities and specifically

advocate against harmful traditional practices while promoting protective practices such as child vaccination. They identify vulnerable children in schools and communities and encourage communities to send all children to school with special emphasis on girls and children with disabilities. They also link up with schools to monitor enrolment, train teachers on creative and recreational activities and form youth clubs and associations to promote children's rights. A part of their job is to reunify and follow up demobilised child soldiers, formerly abducted children and other separated children to monitor reintegration.

## Community Support Groups for ownership and sustainability

At village level are Community Support Groups each consisting of 9–11 members, with three mandatory places for women. To form the groups, community mobilisers liaise with chiefs to identify luminary community members such as teachers, women's group leaders and opinion shapers. Although the groups are initiated by community mobilisers, their formation and membership is left to the communities. The group is the most basic structure and is mainly formed by communities around schools.

The Community Support Groups carry out needs assessment in their villages and suggest relevant solutions. They motivate and organise communities to pool resources to children's needs as well as network with agencies in their locations to provide vital social services. Their advocacy on child rights revolves around awareness creation on psycho-social needs of children, harmful



In the communities, children look after themselves and each other. Youth associations promote children's rights and discuss children's issues.

traditional practices, non-discrimination of vulnerable children and non-recruitment of children into armed groups. In liaison with parent-teacher associations and school authorities, they ensure that children with disabilities are exempted from school levies and promote enrolment of girls. Overall, the groups monitor the situation of children and take action where they can or report cases beyond their capacity to Save the Children Sweden through the community mobilisers.

### Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA)

PTAs are school-based structures separate from Community Support Groups, although the membership overlaps because it is derived from the same pool of community members. They are formed according to educational regulations and are very important entry points into schools. Other roles of the PTAs include mobilising teachers to contribute food for pupils, collecting school levies, donating land and labour for construction and maintenance of schools, participation in management of schools, encouraging enrolment of pupils and lobbying local authorities to provide water in schools.

### Child and Youth Participation

Children are encouraged to participate in discussions on issues that affects them and to form their own clubs. Save the Children Sweden also provides sports materials, trains teachers on starting and running clubs and organises public forums for children to express their opinions e.g. during the Day of the African Child.



The Community Support Groups carry out needs assessment in their villages and suggest relevant solutions.

*A demobilized child soldier remembers what happened prior to demobilization: "We were told by the commander that there was an improvement in the security situation and there was no need for us in the army. Now the army is not taking children to go and fight".*

# Two Examples of Community Based Approaches

## *1. Demobilising, Reintegrating and Rehabilitating Child Soldiers*

Work on this successful intervention began through quiet lobbying with Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) leadership due to the sensitivity of the child soldier issue and denial of its existence. As soon as SPLM acknowledged the problem and made a press release to that effect in 1997, Save the Children Sweden mounted activities with the movement's humanitarian wings, the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA) in SPLM controlled areas and Relief Association of Southern Sudan (RASS) in areas controlled by the Southern Sudan Independence Movement/Army (SSIM/A).

The resulting project was called Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Child Soldiers (DRRCS), whose goal was to ensure that there were no children in the army at any time. It was specifically designed to; create awareness on the need to stop recruiting children into the army; demobilise and rehabilitate children who were already in the army; reunify rehabilitated children with their families; and prevent further recruitment.

The project commenced in January 1998 and has since been implemented in two-year phases according to donor funding cycles. An evaluation of the project, between March and September 2002, showed that 11,387 soldiers had been trained on children's rights, 9,187 child soldiers identified and registered,

6,150 child soldiers demobilised and 5,674 demobilised child soldiers officially re-unified. At that time, SPLM's Foundation for Rehabilitation, Education and Development of Children Affected by Conflict (FREDCAC) estimated that there were still some 12,218 child soldiers in the ranks of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), a small proportion of them, 6 per cent, being girls. In August 2004, recruitment of children into the army had stopped except in two payams where children were still visible with guns under the guise of being community defence forces. An additional 2,037 child soldiers were demobilised and reunified and over 50 per cent of all those demobilised found their way into school.

### **Awareness Creation**

The demobilisation chain began with Save the Children Sweden staff creating awareness in the community and the SPLM ranks about the need to remove children from the army in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international conventions. Children attached to the army were then identified by the military command and their release officially sought.

A demobilised child soldier remembers what happened prior to demobilisation: "We were told by the commander that there was an improvement in the security situation and there was no need for us in the army. We were to be taken out to come and get education. Now the army is not taking children to go and fight".



Youth Education aims to cater for children who are way beyond primary school age and have been in difficult situations, such as former child soldiers. The communities are also involved in constructing schools, and provide land, timber, mud, water, labour and volunteer teachers.

## Registration, Validation and Demobilisation

This was carried out by interviewers trained by Save the Children Sweden to screen, register and interview child soldiers in preparation for demobilisation. Personal data documented provided insight into the circumstances affecting the children and were used to prescribe psychosocial interventions. The data was used to trace families and kept in a database for further follow up.

Children who had been registered and their families traced were released and immediately reunified with their families at public ceremonies presided over by the military command and

witnessed by Save the Children Sweden. About 80 per cent of the child soldiers had almost daily contact with their families because they served in nearby military units. In fact, many of them knew exactly where their families were. The Community Support Groups assumed responsibility for those who could not go home immediately until they were reunified with families or relatives.

One former child soldier at Kongor Youth Education Centre in Jonglei State says: "Before we were removed from the army, some people from Save the Children Sweden talked to



Schools are a popular gathering space for children – even during non-school days.

the civic authorities to remove us. The authorities talked with the commanders and then we were informed that we should be in school not in the army. We were later collected at a nearby centre where we met our parents and were given clothes and other things to start our new life”.

## Rehabilitation and Reintegration

After reunification, the demobilised children were supported to rejoin civilian life and engage in normal childhood activities. Save the Children Sweden emphasized that they join formal schools, youth education centres or teacher training institutes depending on their ages and levels of education prior to joining the army.

Youth education was mooted to provide demobilised and formerly abducted children with vocational and life skills. When the project was evaluated in 2004, the trainees acknowledged that Youth Education had provided them with self reliance skills and a potential source of livelihood.

## Construction of ”model” schools to aid rehabilitation and reintegration

In order to contribute to the improvement of social services that promote the reintegration of demobilised child soldiers, as well as serve other children in the community, Save the Children Sweden contributed to the construction of a ”model” school in each payam. The community mobilisers and the Community Support Groups worked to bring their community together to erect the walls of the structures and Save the

## Impact

The following achievements can be attributed to the use of Community Based Approaches

### *Awareness creation leads to change of behaviour, attitude and practice*

The work of community based structures has resulted in wide awareness on the rights of children in general and those of vulnerable children in particular. The community now knows that children should not be in the army and SPLM itself has decreed against child recruitment. Children’s awareness of their own rights, obligations and duties has also led to refusal to be physically mutilated during initiation.

### *Child support structures promise sustainability*

The projects have led to the establishment of viable community child support structures. The residual impact of such structures is illustrated by the Nyal case where Save the Children decamped as a result of insecurity, but the Community Support Group members advocated for revival of schools and campaigned against child recruitment.

In another location, Leer, teachers trained by Save the Children Sweden remained in the profession, constituting 10 per cent of the county’s teaching force. Some became leaders in the sector and have influenced support to schools.

Children Sweden contributed corrugated iron sheets, timber and nails for roofing. For a start, five classrooms in each school were roofed and encouraged to enrol demobilised child soldiers. An example is Pageer Primary School in Bor, Upper Nile, which started operating under a tree in 2002. The next year, the organisation contributed timber and iron sheets to put up five classes there and sent three teachers from the school for training at the Teacher Training Centre in Makuac, South Bor. The school accommodates former child soldiers, both girls and boys, who were demobilised through the efforts of the project. The pupils in the school also wear uniforms produced by the tailoring unit of the Youth Education Centre in Kongor, a demonstration of the synergy of the projects.

All were happy to be outside the military and considered that they were leading the right life for children. "We can now go dancing and singing" one of them says. "Our parents and teachers tell us not to be involved in violence", says another. "The community support group members also come and tell our parents about the importance of education".

## Teacher Training

Bor South benefited from the construction of a Teacher Training Centre to enrol former child soldiers with primary 6–7 level of education and other eligible candidates. This contributed to improving the quality of teaching in schools, which benefited not only the demobilised child soldiers but all children in school.

## 2. Malualbab Community Support Group

Malualbab Community Support Group was formed in 2002. It consists of 11 members, and was trained by Save the Children Sweden, after which it started to encourage parents to enrol children in schools. But it soon realised that there was no school in the community. The Community Support Group sought the assistance of Save the Children Sweden which provided roofing sheets, nails and transportation while the community contributed earthen bricks, timber, thatching grass and labour. The results are a two-classroom pre-unit block, a four-classroom primary school and an adult education centre for girls who have dropped out of school.

In order to get children with disabilities to go to school, the group conducted door to door campaigns citing adults with disability who are holding important positions to show that disability is not inability. The campaigns yielded a 100 per cent response from the parents. The children with disabilities are placed in the front rows in the class so that they are visible to teachers and are protected from bullying by other children. Aware that those children are likely to face problems on the way back home, the Community Support Groups has appointed its members to oversee that children hailing from one village move together as a group from school and care for one another. The group has also successfully lobbied for one of the children with severe disability to receive paraplegic aids from Red Cross, a request forwarded by Save the Children Sweden.



A Community Support Group, with some Save the Children Sweden staff, in Maluakon. Each group consists of 9–11 members, with three mandatory places for women.



Save the Children Sweden provides sports materials, trains teachers on starting and running clubs and organises public forums for children to express their opinions.

# Lessons Learned

## **Rapport with communities is the foundation of Community Based Approaches**

- Long years of genuine service develops community confidence in the agency and makes entry into communities easy.
- Reliance on locally recruited staff provides opportunities for local talent, enhances motivation and ownership and enables quicker take-off of projects.
- Political support for agencies implementing community based approaches is imperative especially for successful mobilisation.

## **Projects in deprived communities should strive to meet practical needs**

- Delivering psycho-social services to war-affected children is costly, slow, tedious and often goes unrecognised due to its abstract nature. But it yields holistic rehabilitation and ensures a greater outreach to needy children at minimal costs if devolved to the community.
- Community based approaches in deprived communities should combine advocacy with material benefits. For instance, although majority of the demobilised child soldiers adjusted well to civilian life, lack of social services compromised the gains made on the psycho-social front.
- Involvement of the community from the beginning of a project and the community's contribution of ideas, decisions, resources and contacts enhance the success of the intervention.

## **The concept of a community should be derived from the community itself**

There is need for a very clear understanding of what the local people consider a community and agencies should avoid assuming that the understanding is shared and universal.

## **Coverage should conform with local concept of community and be realistic**

- The geographical coverage of a community based project should conform to the local concept of a community.
- People must also be made aware of the devolution of the programme to the community level.
- In order to maximise on the impact of scarce resources, there is need to limit activities to a manageable geographical scope.

## **Community based structures should cohere with the idea of a community**

The model has been a viable structure because people who stay in the same village regard themselves as inter-dependent neighbours circumstantially bound to work together. Basing the project structure on what is known ensures spontaneous take-off and greater momentum. It is also easier for members to identify their leaders and share responsibilities based on known individual capabilities.

## **Collaboration with sectoral partners reduces duplication and costs**

Collaboration with sectoral partners is important to utilise

comparative advantage for synergy and to reduce financial and logistical costs. However, uncoordinated entry of different players can counter-balance achievements already registered and interfere with the motivation of communities. For instance, where some agencies pay incentives and others do not, the credibility of those not paying is eroded. But the major problem is that ownership of the communities are undermined.

### **Insecurity limits access to project communities and deters implementation**

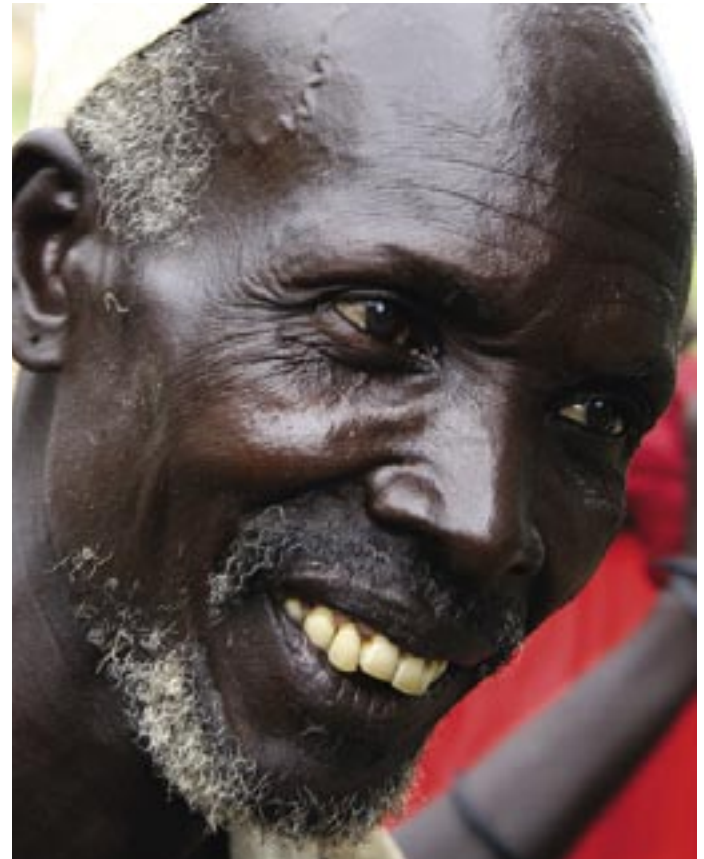
One major problem for community based projects in conflict areas is the limited access to communities due to insecurity, military operations and dilapidated infrastructure. This interferes with momentum of implementation, escalates the costs of operation and eventually skews the cost-benefit equilibrium negatively.

### **Feasibility of income generating projects should be established beforehand**

It is important to determine at the on-set which Income Generating Projects would be feasible based on availability of local raw materials, a market for products, sound and accountable management of funds and proper maintenance of capital equipment.

### **Sustainability of Community Based Approaches depends on various factors**

- Properly implemented Community Based Approaches minimise the risk of failure and rejection of projects.



In the community projects, the support of chiefs (leaders) has been invaluable in mobilising the community.

- Insistence on community responsibility to solve its own problems is the foundation for sustainable Community Based Approaches.
- Building the capacity of community members to undertake project work shifts the burden from the agency, enhances ownership and creates potential for continuity.
- Agencies using Community Based Approaches should rely on indigenous knowledge as the basis for their entry.
- Viable structures should be established as action points.
- A project with several components should be staggered into phases and the next phase be undertaken only once the previous one is successful and sustainable.
- The potential for sustainability is enhanced by interventions that communities have prioritised and that directly address their needs.
- The relatively thin resource base in communities does not augur well for projects should the external agency withdraw even if communities have the knowledge and inspiration to continue.

## Challenges

A community's socio-political orientation affects participation. Socio-political organisation determines the extent to which different cadres of the community can participate in projects. In southern Sudan, patriarchy denies women the space to participate alongside men and benefit proportionately. Yet the fact that most males were engaged in the armed forces meant that the civilian population consisted largely of women and

children. That the women also have a lower level of education due to historical marginalisation means that their level of participation is relatively lower. This is evident in the fact that virtually all community mobilisers are male. Other locally recruited programme staff are also dominantly male. Even in community support groups, women constitute just about 25 per cent of the membership. Save the Children Sweden is constantly trying to promote the participation of women in the Community Support Groups, as well as among the staff.

War-affected communities tend to focus more on immediate needs than long term development. Asking them to embark on long term agenda is met with reluctance and a suspicion of a ploy to abandon them mid-stream. This may lead to deliberate sabotage by contributing little or nothing towards projects even where the capacity to contribute exists.

*One major problem for community based projects in conflict areas is the limited access to communities due to insecurity, military operations and dilapidated infrastructure. This interferes with momentum of implementation, escalates the costs of operation and eventually skews the cost-benefit equilibrium negatively.*

# Practical Suggestions

For those who wish to use Community Based Approaches, the following suggestions should be considered.

- Adequate time should be allocated for preparation of community based actors to implement project activities, and there should be patience rather than quick results.
- The stability of the community support structures should be monitored constantly to deal with attrition and address sagging levels of motivation.
- Rapport should be established with the political establishment and the community for entry and acceptance of the organisation and its projects. At policy level, it helps if the government in place mandates Community Based Approaches as an official implementation strategy, promotes and sustains formation of Community Support Groups, creates an enabling environment for agencies and formally registers and recognises the community structures formed.
- Roles and responsibilities of the community and external agency should be agreed upon and clearly documented in a Memorandum of Understanding.
- It is indispensable to plan with communities and always consult with them for accountability.
- The agency should employ local staff in various positions, conduct on-the-job training, promote those performing well, expose them to different working environments and mentor them to take over management positions.
- Projects should be designed in such a way that their results are felt to be tangible and relevant to the practical needs of the community.
- The setting up of a Community Based Organisation needs very careful planning, constant reviews and rigorous adjustments to make it work. The outreach of the organisation should also be considered bearing in mind logistical factors, political sensitivities, human resource capacity, and community ability to contribute resources. Different components should be introduced only when their feasibility is established.
- The agency should be open to change in response to the evolving environment.
- Good ideas and intentions do not always translate into successful projects. There is therefore need for boldness in deciding at what point to conclude whether a project is working or not and to either fundamentally revise or terminate it.



## Save the Children Sweden in Eastern and Central Africa

Save the Children Sweden started working in Eastern and Central Africa in 1965. Today, the organisation has offices in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Nairobi, Kenya; and in Juba and Khartoum, Sudan. Save the Children Sweden has long-term child-rights based development programmes in Ethiopia and Sudan, and it supports local partners in Kenya, Eritrea, Somaliland and Uganda.

The organisation focuses on building the capacity of local people, community-based structures and organisations. In Eastern and Central Africa, it works with more than forty different non-governmental organisations and government bodies. In addition, it has adopted a direct implementation approach in southern Sudan and in the refugee camps of western Ethiopia and North Darfur.

All of the work in the region focuses on children's rights, and tackles issues that affect mar-

ginalised children. The core of the work focuses on education, and on children affected by conflict, discrimination, abuse, exploitation, and HIV/AIDS. Save the Children Sweden's focus also includes child participation and good governance in the best interest of the child.

The major task facing child rights advocates today is making the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child a reality for all children. The exchange of experience and know-how are proactive ways to work towards this goal, which is why Save the Children Sweden makes its books and reports available for the world. Welcome to visit our child rights bookshop on the internet, [www.rb.se/bookshop](http://www.rb.se/bookshop)

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Save the Children Sweden is a non-governmental organisation. It is an active member of the International Save the Children Alliance – a global movement for children's rights.

Through 18 offices around the world, the organisation contributes ideas, experience and funds to 500 projects in more than 60 countries. Welcome to visit the Save the Children website, [www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net)

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### Eastern and Central Africa Region

Ethiopia office  
Box 3457  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel +251 11 321 0960  
Fax +251 11 321 4234

Kenya/Regional office  
Box 19423  
202 KNH – Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel +254 20 386 5888/90  
Fax +254 20 386 5889

Northern Sudan office  
Box 3134  
Khartoum, Sudan  
Tel +249 183 256 415/16  
Fax +249 183 241 589

Southern Sudan office  
Box 19243  
202 KNH – Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel +254 20 386 5888/90  
Fax +254 20 386 5889

Email [info@ecaf.savethechildren.se](mailto:info@ecaf.savethechildren.se)  
<http://ecaf.savethechildren.se>



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