



NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child

A global voice for child rights

Five-Year Strategic Plan

2010 – 2014

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Vision

The NGO Group envisions a world in which children's rights, as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, are universally recognised and realised.

Mission

The NGO Group's Mission is to facilitate the promotion, implementation and monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Introduction

The NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (the NGO Group) has, since its establishment in 1983¹, developed a significant record of achievements with respect to the drafting, monitoring and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Having successfully influenced the drafting of the CRC and been credited with having a significant impact on the final text, the NGO Group set up a secretariat in Geneva to support national and international NGOs and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee) to monitor and implement the CRC.

The NGO Group, as its name suggests, consists primarily of international and national NGOs involved in child rights, including national child rights coalitions. It encourages, supports and facilitates the involvement of child rights NGOs, children and child-led organisations in the promotion, implementation and monitoring of the CRC and its Optional Protocols, as well as in related child rights advocacy. The NGO Group also supports, where appropriate, the effective involvement of the UN and national human rights institutions (children's ombudspersons among others) in child rights advocacy.

The NGO Group holds a unique position in relation to the rights of the child. It is the only organisation that provides a link between the Committee and NGOs from around the world. No other organisation plays such an active role in supporting NGOs throughout the CRC reporting process in Geneva, especially in presenting information directly to the Committee. The NGO Group has, over the years, developed extensive knowledge and expertise, and is highly respected by the Committee and others involved in the reporting process. In addition, the NGO Group constitutes a unique platform and rallying point for joint NGO action, particularly when it comes to international advocacy on child rights. The focus of this plan is on how to build further on this unique position, and on the respect and knowledge that the NGO Group has established.

Developing the 2010-2014 strategic plan

In 2007, the NGO Group reviewed its statutes and governance structure, which resulted in the establishment of an Executive Committee. This is the first Strategic Plan developed under the guidance of the Executive Committee. Its purpose is to set the direction of the NGO Group for the next five years (2010-2014) and to provide a framework within which annual work plans can be developed, setting out the specific activities and responsibilities of the various bodies within the structure of the NGO Group: the Executive Committee, the Secretariat, the Working Groups and the membership. The Strategic Plan has been developed in consultation with the members through a

¹ It was originally called the Ad Hoc Group for the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

questionnaire, an invitation for comments on the first draft as well as a discussion during the General Assembly. The strategic plan was adopted during the June 2009 General Assembly.

The Context: challenges and opportunities

Global financial crisis and child rights

The plan is being developed amidst challenging times as well as new opportunities. Negative trends in the world's economy risk compromising not only the financial stability of civil society organisations, such as the NGO Group, but also impacting significantly on the realisation of children's rights. One likely impact is that much of the focus on child rights will return to a few 'big issues' such as child survival and education, with sectoral approaches and a decreasing emphasis on a comprehensive child rights approach. It is therefore more important than ever for civil society to ensure the full implementation of children's rights as defined in the CRC.

Strengthening CRC impact

Another key challenge is the tendency of many actors to focus on reporting to the Committee, rather than ensuring real impact of the Concluding Observations at national level. Despite near universal ratification of the CRC and many States parties submitting their 3rd or 4th periodic reports, much remains to be done to achieve effective impact of the reporting process at national level. The NGO Group can, together with its members and relevant local actors (e.g. national coalitions), play a significant role in ensuring effective follow-up.

The Committee is tasked with overseeing reporting on three international instruments with separate reporting requirements (the CRC and its two Optional Protocols) with a combined total of 453² ratifications and faces a considerable backlog of reports. The delay between submission and examination has implications for the validity of the information being examined by the Committee as well as the alternative reporting process. In addition, with a growing number of states having submitted reports on the Optional Protocols, a new challenge emerges as states are expected to prepare periodic reports on all three treaties. The NGO Group will therefore have to ensure that adequate procedures are in place to maintain the quality of alternative reports.

A unique position to mobilise NGOs

Since its creation, the NGO Group has responded to the needs and demands of international and national NGOs and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Thanks to its broad network of members and partners, the NGO Group is in a unique position to draw on the diverse experiences and knowledge of these partners to further the realisation of children's rights. Through working effectively with its existing partners and reaching out to potential new partners in countries where there is weak NGO engagement around the CRC, the NGO Group can ultimately strengthen its role as a global voice for children's rights.

² In September 2009, there were: 193 States parties to the CRC, 128 States parties to the OPAC and 132 States parties to the OPSC.

Engaging with emerging human rights procedures

Thanks to its experience and knowledge of the wider UN human rights system, the NGO Group is well placed to take advantage of emerging opportunities that present themselves through new and developing human rights procedures, including at the Human Rights Council and Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, the Special Procedures and other Treaty Bodies to mainstream child rights. The NGO Group can strengthen its advocacy on child rights by contributing to relevant activities of these human rights mechanisms.

Strategic priorities for 2010 – 2014

The NGO Group has identified four strategic priorities that build on its accomplishments and aim to strengthen its role as a collective global voice for child rights. These priorities focus on strengthening the core function of supporting NGOs and the Committee in effectively monitoring the CRC. To ensure that the reporting process serves as a tool for change at the national level, support for national coalitions will extend to strengthening the implementation of the Committee's Concluding Observations.

The NGO Group will work with relevant partners to promote further mainstreaming of child rights in relevant human rights mechanisms to encourage a greater focus on child rights within their specialised mandates. In addition, the NGO Group will continue to serve as a platform for its members to jointly advocate for priority child rights issues.

Child participation will be a guiding principle in the work of the NGO, whether it is to maximise child participation in the reporting process, their engagement in advocating for child rights at national level or becoming more actively involved in the network of the NGO Group.

The strategic priorities of the NGO Group

1. Enhance the effective engagement of NGOs and other relevant partners in the CRC reporting process and other activities of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.
2. Mainstream child rights in relevant activities of other United Nations human rights mechanisms and procedures.
3. Promote the realisation of child rights at national level through the effective implementation of the recommendations and other outputs of the Committee and other relevant international human rights mechanisms.
4. Pursue and support international advocacy on priority child rights issues through coordinated action with members and partners.

Strategic Priority 1

Enhance the effective engagement of NGOs and other relevant partners in the CRC reporting process and other activities of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

This strategic priority aims to ensure that the key role of the NGO Group in providing a link between national civil society organisations and the Committee is further strengthened. One of the main areas of focus is to improve the quality of reports (especially for the two Optional Protocols) prepared by national child rights coalitions and NGOs as well as to ensure the submission of alternative reports from countries with weak civil society organisations.

Key activities

1. Expand outreach to civil society actors working on child rights at national level

- Develop and maintain a global map of NGOs and relevant actors involved in the CRC reporting process and/or child rights advocacy.
- Identify countries with limited or no civil society engagement in child rights with a view to strengthen their capacity.

2. Support NGO engagement in the CRC reporting process

- Provide advice, information and training to national coalitions, NGOs and other relevant partners during the preparation of alternative reports, the pre-sessional working groups and the sessions of the Committee.
- Develop guidance for national NGOs/coalitions to respond to evolving practices in reporting to the CRC and/or the two Optional Protocols.
- Strengthen NGO engagement in countries with limited or no child rights coalitions, either directly or through member organisations.
- Identify and facilitate the involvement of child-led organisations/children in the preparation of reports and in meeting with the Committee.
- Facilitate representation of national NGOs/coalitions and others at the pre-sessions and sessions, including providing financial support for NGOs from the Global South and from Central and Eastern Europe.

3. Strengthen civil society's capacity to work with the Committee

- Provide training to NGOs from countries with limited civil society involvement in the reporting process.
- Co-organise/participate in national and regional workshops on reporting and working as a coalition.
- Develop practical tools to guide national NGOs in reporting to the Committee and engaging in its other areas of work.

4. Support the Committee in further strengthening its working methods and outputs

- Document and analyse ‘lessons learnt’ to advocate for improvements in the Committee’s working methods.
- Assist the Committee in developing working procedures to facilitate child participation in reporting to, and interacting with, the Committee.
- Contribute to the development and organisation of Days of General Discussion and General Comments to maximise NGO engagement in the work of the Committee.
- Review the Concluding Observations and advocate for improvements in their formulation to make them more targeted and relevant at national level.
- Enhance the positive influence of NGOs in the nomination of suitable candidates for election as Committee members.

Expected outcomes

- A continuously updated database of NGOs and others engaged in the CRC reporting process and child rights advocacy.
- Improved quality and quantity of alternative reports, especially for the Optional Protocols and periodic reports on the three treaties.
- Increased and more influential engagement of NGOs and others in the reporting process, at national level and through representation at the pre-sessions and sessions.
- More alternative reports from NGOs in countries with limited reporting capacity and/or little previous experience of reporting.
- More systematic and influential child participation in the reporting process and follow-up to concluding observations.
- Improved working methods and outputs of the Committee.
- A range of tools, such as guidelines and fact sheets, to strengthen NGO engagement in CRC reporting.

Strategic Priority 2

Mainstream child rights in relevant activities of other United Nations human rights mechanisms and procedures

The NGO Group has been engaging with the broader UN human rights system for over ten years. Much focus was initially on the Commission on Human Rights, now replaced by the Human Rights Council (HRC). The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism offers a new opportunity for the implementation of key recommendations made by the Committee. To ensure that child rights NGOs engage with other relevant human rights mechanisms and procedures, the NGO Group has begun to explore areas of work with the Special Procedures Mandate Holders and other Treaty Bodies.

Key activities

- Inform and encourage child rights NGOs to engage with other UN Treaty Bodies.
- Support and facilitate effective engagement of child rights NGOs in the HRC's UPR mechanism.
- Facilitate the involvement of child rights NGOs and other partners in relevant HRC activities, including the annual Day on the Rights of the Child, lobbying for the annual Resolution on the Rights of the Child and other relevant resolutions.
- Maintain an active and influential role in the harmonisation of Treaty Bodies' working methods to safeguard the best practices of the CRC and learn from other Treaty Bodies.
- Lobby for the establishment of a child rights unit in OHCHR.
- Develop tools for child rights NGOs to engage with other Treaty Bodies, Special Procedures and the HRC.
- Initiate a NGO Group presence in New York³, aiming to promote and mainstream child rights in relevant New York-based human rights activities.

Expected outcomes

- More comprehensive coverage of the rights of the child in the work of the HRC, Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies.
- Increased and more focused advocacy to strengthen the focus on children's rights in the full range of relevant Treaty Bodies.
- Increased number of, and more specific, recommendations on child rights issues in the UPR process to reinforce the Committee's recommendations.
- Increased engagement of child rights NGOs and relevant partners in the work of the HRC.
- A child rights unit in OHCHR to coordinate child rights related-work.
- Best practices of the CRC reporting process reflected in the harmonisation of Treaty Bodies working methods.
- Increased child rights advocacy by NGOs and other bodies in relevant New York-based activities.

Strategic Priority 3

Promote the realisation of child rights at national level through the effective implementation of the recommendations and other outputs of the Committee and other relevant international human rights mechanisms

Since the Committee began examining reports, many States parties and NGOs have reported more than twice on the CRC. In many countries, the NGOs have formed national

³ If resources become available, the NGO Group will extend its mainstreaming activities to include the New York-based human rights system.

coalitions and have gained considerable expertise in reporting on the CRC and influencing the Committee's Concluding Observations.

Given civil society's growing capacity to monitor the CRC, NGOs are increasingly looking to strengthen the implementation of the Convention and the Concluding Observations. Given its key role and network of national NGOs/coalitions from around the world, the NGO Group is well placed to play an important role in documenting experiences in the follow-up to Concluding Observations, and developing tools for coalitions to share best practices. This work is a logical progression of the NGO Group's activities in relation to the reporting process.

Key activities

- Disseminate the Committee's Concluding Observations, General Comments and outcomes of Days of General Discussion to relevant NGOs and relevant partners.
- Develop tools for NGOs to effectively advocate and implement the recommendations of the Committee.
- Promote effective dissemination, analysis and review of progress in implementing the recommendations.
- Collate information and share best practices on the implementation of Concluding Observations at national level.
- Participate in national and regional workshops on following-up Concluding Observations and other relevant human rights mechanisms.
- Advocate for the Committee to develop a strategy to follow-up the implementation of Concluding Observations drawing on the experiences of other Treaty Bodies.
- Promote the dissemination of relevant outputs of other Treaty Bodies, the Human Rights Council and its special procedures, and their effective use in child rights advocacy at national level.

Expected outcomes

- Enhanced NGO involvement in advocating and following up the Committee's outputs (Concluding Observations, General Comments, Days of General Discussion, etc).
- Increased impact of the Concluding Observations and other outputs on standards and policies at the national level.
- Tools to guide child rights NGOs on how to follow-up the outputs of the Committee and other human rights mechanisms.
- Increased government collaboration with civil society in the follow-up to the Committee's Concluding Observations and other relevant recommendations of other Treaty Bodies, and the Human Rights Council at national level.
- Systematic engagement of the Committee in following-up its Concluding Observations and other output at national level.

Strategic Priority 4

Pursue and support international advocacy on priority child rights issues through coordinated action with members and partners

Since its establishment, the NGO Group has gained in strength and credibility from its coordinated action. Due to its broad representation of child rights NGOs, it continues to advocate for key child rights issues in various forums. Over the years, this has included, the drafting of the Optional Protocol on Children Involved in Armed Conflict, the UN Study on Violence against Children and joint action for the three World Congresses against sexual exploitation, to name but a few. It continues to advocate for the general inclusion of child rights in the broader human rights system as well as for specific areas of concern. The activities below are a few areas identified by the NGO Group as priorities, aiming to build on previous achievements and to respond to ongoing issues of urgent need. One of the main priorities is the establishment of a communications procedure under the CRC to provide children with a mechanism to make individual complaints about violations of their rights to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The NGO Group will continue to identify ongoing initiatives which are relevant to its work.

Key activities

Advocacy for child rights

- Identify child rights issues for which international advocacy can bring about changes to standards or policy at the national level.
- Ensure the effective and meaningful participation of the NGO Group and its members in relevant international events on child rights, including where appropriate in the follow-up of such events.
- Establish Working Groups in response to emerging issues or priorities of the NGO Group, and monitor the effectiveness of their activities.

Specific issues on child rights⁴

- Coordinate the campaign for an Optional Protocol (OP) for a communications procedure under the CRC.
- Following the establishment by the HRC of an open-ended working group to consider the elaboration of the OP, the NGO Group aims to coordinate NGO activity to ensure an effective communications procedure for children.
- Play a full role in the drafting process and subsequent adoption and ratification of the OP. Once in place, the NGO Group will promote effective use of the procedure to pursue child rights.
- Coordinate broad-based NGO involvement in the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children in collaboration with the UN Advisory Council.

⁴ This is not an exhaustive list of issues and initiative for the period 2010-2014. It will vary depending on emerging child rights issues over the five-year period.

- Develop initiatives to promote the implementation of guidelines on children without parental care.

Expected outcomes

- The NGO Group's profile and influence is raised by being present and active at key international and regional events.
- Working Groups are active and effectively reach their objectives.
- Drafting, adoption and pursuing states' ratification of a new OP to the CRC to provide a communications procedure.
- Effective NGO engagement in the follow-up to the UN Study on Violence against Children.
- Collaboration with international and national NGOs to promote the Guidelines as a tool to influence policy and practice.

Strengthening the NGO Group as an organisation and as a network to achieve its Strategic Priorities

In order to successfully implement the strategic priorities set out for the next five years, the NGO Group needs to strengthen its Secretariat, Working Groups and the network of member organisations. The following section provides information on key areas of development (preferably within the first two years covered by the Strategic Plan) as well as ongoing activities.

1. Increased visibility and profile

Since 2008, the NGO Group has increased its visibility and profile by co-organising key events such as World Congress III and the 20th anniversary event with the Committee on the Rights of the Child; providing a platform for child rights NGOs to coordinate their actions at the HRC, including a leading role in the campaign for a communications procedure under the CRC; as well as launching a website, developing a logo and producing new practical tools. This has helped raise awareness about the work of the NGO Group and its unique role in the area of child rights among human rights NGOs in Geneva and other UN human rights mechanisms. However, to become a stronger global voice for child rights, the NGO Group needs to further develop its communications strategy to increase the visibility of its activities and the issues it is addressing.

Given its broad representation, the NGO Group is frequently requested to speak at events and represents its membership in various forms. To improve its access, its visibility and to have a stronger voice, the NGO Group will apply for consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Assuming ECOSOC status is obtained, the NGO Group will develop guidelines on representation, as it is a membership network.

2. Strengthen the NGO Group's main bodies

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee will continue to find ways of ensuring engagement and recognition of the needs and the potential contribution of child rights NGOs from all regions in the work of the Executive Committee. It will also use new technology to

involve non-Geneva-based members of the Executive Committee in meetings and other discussions.

Secretariat

To achieve its strategic priorities, the NGO Group will need further funding to increase the core capacity of its Secretariat. With the capacity of the Secretariat (2.5 people) in 2009, the core tasks can be maintained, but there are insufficient human resources to develop fundamental areas such as the follow-up to Concluding Observations and the mainstreaming of child rights. To adequately support the fulfilment of this strategic plan, the Secretariat would need to increase the number of staff to broaden the variety of competencies and to effectively reach out to members and other relevant actors.

Working Groups

The Working Groups are central to the work of the NGO Group. They generate knowledge as well as initiatives, thus contributing to the achievement of the NGO Group's priorities. To achieve the priorities set in this strategic plan, the potential of the Working Groups will be further developed and their effectiveness improved.

3. Increase and secure the NGO Group's financial base

While the NGO Group has received considerable support from key donors over the years, it has not been possible to secure sufficient funding to grow and develop. In order to realise its potential for effecting greater positive change through delivering its strategic priorities, the NGO Group is looking for additional resources to increase its work and impact. To ensure sustainable funds, the NGO Group will seek to have a strong fundraising function in the Secretariat to broaden and diversify the funding base.

4. Effective internal and external communication

To facilitate and support the delivery of key strategic tasks, the NGO Group will strengthen its communication capacity. The NGO Group's website, which was recently redesigned to better reflect its identity and activities, will continue to be developed during the 5-year period. Through consultation with its members, the NGO Group will develop new tools to improve communication with the members to facilitate knowledge sharing and the coordination of joint activities.

5. Develop strategic partnerships

Over the years, the NGO Group has worked in partnership with a number of organisations, networks and UN agencies which share the same aims and values. The NGO Group's relationship with the Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) has developed over the years, initially through information sharing, but increasingly in joint advocacy campaigns. This cooperation has been of mutual benefit to both organisations but also to the child rights community in general. The NGO Group will continue to build on this collaboration with CRIN. Based on this positive experience, the NGO Group will explore how it can effectively engage with other international and regional child rights networks, such as the NGO Committee on UNICEF and the Global Movement for Children. Targeted approaches will be made to important regional NGO networks to promote collaboration and involvement in the NGO Group's work such as REDLAMYC

(a regional child rights network in Latin America) and other regional networks of NGOs that work on child rights at national and regional level.

The NGO Group will continue effectively collaborating with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, OHCHR and UNICEF in its work on the reporting process and the follow-up to the Concluding Observations. In order to effectively influence the HRC's agenda and relevant outcomes, the NGO Group will seek to engage with states from different regional groups. It will also work closely with human rights organisations, such as the International Service for Human Rights, to ensure that its child rights mainstreaming efforts complement the work of these organisations.

6. Membership

As of 2009, the NGO Group had 71 member organisations. These were mostly international NGOs, Geneva-based NGOs as well as some national NGOs, primarily based in the North. To involve more active members from different regions, the NGO Group will reach out to national NGOs/coalitions as well as child-led organisations. During the strategic period, the NGO Group aims to further build and maintain an active membership. Through its leadership, the NGO Group will provide a more effective platform for collaborating on child rights issues and conducting joint advocacy.

Conclusion

The NGO Group will spend the next five years capitalising on its unique position and best practices in reporting under the CRC to support national and international actors in better monitoring and implementing child rights. Through realising the planned strategic priorities, the NGO Group will effectively fulfil this role, enabling children to more fully enjoy their rights. By strengthening and expanding the activities of its membership and secretariat, the NGO Group will be a more powerful voice for child rights. Furthermore, national actors such as child rights coalitions and children will have new tools to effectively advocate for child rights in their countries and hold their governments more accountable. In these ways, the NGO Group will deliver on its mission to better promote, implement and monitor the CRC.