



# Review of Save the Children Norway's Support to programmes for child protection system strengthening

## Evaluation

May 2014



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### **AUTHORS:**

This review report was produced by Alexander Krueger and Padraig Quigley, Child Frontiers, for Save the Children Norway in May 2014. The opinions and statements presented here do not necessarily represent those of Save the Children.

### **Child Frontiers Ltd.**

Suite A 15/F% Hillier Commercial Building  
65-67 Bonham Strand East  
Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

Child Frontiers is a registered company (No. 1275515)



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## Executive summary

This report presents a review of the key results achieved through Save the Children Norway's programming to strengthen the national child protection system in eight countries.<sup>1</sup> The intention was to document and analyse the focus and impact of supported programmes for two purposes: to provide Save the Children Norway with the data and analysis needed for reporting requirements to the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and to draw out learning points and recommendations for internal and external planning and programme design for the new strategy period of 2014–2017 and new framework agreement with Norad for 2015–2018.

The review's line of inquiry looked at assessing to what degree Save the Children Norway has contributed to stronger systems for the protection of children and to what extent and how children have benefited from these systems. The review largely focused on the results achieved and the effectiveness of Save the Children's programme planning, with the reporting and monitoring processes additionally assessed.<sup>2</sup>

Specifically, the review attempted to shed light on the process for making judgements about the context and strategic planning while identifying areas where change is required as well as how to make that change happen and the process for transforming inputs into results. The review draws from specific country programmes but does not provide specific country-level analysis and/or recommendations.

While acknowledging the achievements of the programmes, the analysis presented in this report seeks to be constructive yet challenging. The intention is to provide the critical reflection required to support Save the Children Norway as it continues to deliver more effective protection outcomes.

## Findings

For the purpose of this review, the two most significant reference points for how child protection is approached are the global child protection strategy of the Child Protection Initiative and the Child Protection Strategic Plan of Save the Children Norway, 2010–2013. The Save the Children Norway child protection strategy is largely consistent with the approach outlined by the Child Protection Initiative. Fundamentally, both strategies look at system strengthening as an approach for delivering better outcomes or results for children. Both strategies outline key elements of the child protection system that need to be strengthened and a range of activities that might be undertaken to support this process. Both strategies also emphasise that systems will differ according to their context, yet neither strategy goes into much detail on how to approach a system-strengthening process.

The review finds that country programme staff clearly believe that system strengthening is more effective than issue-based approaches for child protection and that the adoption of this approach is improving the effectiveness of child protection activities. The country programme staff reported that system strengthening has helped to give their activities a clearer focus, reducing fragmentation and situating their work in a more detailed appreciation of the underlying factors that lead to child protection concerns. There is also a widely held belief that the systems approach will help to support the scaling up of good models and thereby

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<sup>1</sup> The countries included Cambodia, Ethiopia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

<sup>2</sup> Everitt, A. and Hardiker, P. (1996), *Evaluating for Good Practice*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, Macmillan, p. 88.

give Save the Children potentially greater influence and impact in terms of improving the quality of services available for children.

The most frequently reported differences or changes were that Save the Children is now adopting a more long-term vision and working with others, including government, civil society organisations, communities, other child protection agencies and children, in a more coordinated and coherent manner. Programme staff also believe that the systems approach promotes more effective use of resources. Other important changes cited include greater accountability among the different actors involved in child protection, the need to work at different levels (including national, subnational and with communities) and linking programmes and activities to root causes as a more effective means of bringing about social change.

The most frequently cited strengths include developing community-based child protection committees and networks, promoting sustainability through technical support to government and helping the involvement of a range of groups, including children. In fact, creating more opportunities for civil society groups and children to participate in child protection activities and the development of higher levels of community ownership were also mentioned as strengths. The systems approach is understood as creating a more effective platform for engaging in advocacy, especially in relation to policy development, and affording more opportunities for piloting and standardising procedures and approaches to service delivery.

One of the main challenges cited to system strengthening relates to contextualising the Child Protection Initiative and the Save the Children Norway strategies at the national level. The Save the Children Norway strategy is not overly explicit on this issue, but the Child Protection Initiative does explain the need to understand the political, social, cultural and governance situations and local power structures. Unfortunately, the country strategic plans generally do not appear to be based on or reflect sufficiently detailed contextual analysis that is needed to maximise the potential of the system-strengthening activities. It also appears that country programmes may be interpreting and applying both strategies in a prescriptive manner and, in the process, inadvertently adopting an overly simplistic or formulaic approach to their system-strengthening activities. For some programmes, the recent transition to the system-strengthening approach may be the main reason for this.

The strategic plans for 2010–2013 were developed during what could be considered a transitional period for both Save the Children and more general global approaches to child protection. The switch from thematic issue-based programmes to the systems approach is relatively new; and like any new approach, it creates a range of opportunities but also challenges. Also pointed out previously and important to recognise is the organisational restructuring that has taken place within Save the Children and the greater emphasis placed on education and child rights governance as high-level priorities, with less emphasis placed on child protection.

Given the way Save the Children has reorganised, it is important to establish consistency and clarity among international and members country programme strategies for child protection. If this is not achieved, then there is scope for confusion or even contradictions to emerge that are likely to have negative impacts on programme implementation. Even if international or member country strategies are broadly consistent with each other, the fact that multiple strategies exist is still likely to place burdens on country programmes as they try to situate their own strategies and workplans within multiple frameworks.

It is clear in the analysis of the country strategic plans that they are caught between the traditional issues-based approach to child protection and applying the systems approach. The strategic plans generally contain a long list of activities, some of which relate to the five key elements of system strengthening outlined in the Save the Child Norway strategy and others that are clearly more aligned to the issue-based approach. There is a tendency to

reduce the systems approach to working on specific (discrete) components, which is then equated with actual results in terms of the system being strengthened. Working on components of a system is part of the process; but a system is not just the sum of its parts. Targeting a component or even multiple components of a system does not automatically mean that the system as a whole will be strengthened.

## Challenges and lessons learned

Despite the many cited strengths associated with the systems approach, a range of challenges were encountered. The following are the main challenges encountered through efforts to strengthen the national child protection system across the eight countries reviewed:

- contextualisation of protection and system-strengthening strategies;
- inadequate of human and financial resources;
- inadequate political will;
- overambitious planning and failing to appreciate the time required to strengthen a system;
- many services are committed to within the legal and regulatory framework and promoted, even though they often do not exist or are generally inaccessible to the majority population; and
- the orientation or main motivation of services within the system is an issue that requires attention and can lead to complications for child protection actors.

### **Lessons learned from the perspective of country programme staff**

Areas of learning from programme implementation between 2010 and 2013 include:

- All child protection systems need to be grounded in reliable quantitative and qualitative data.
- System-strengthening activities involve a range of actors and take place at a number of different levels. These activities need to be supported by a multifaceted monitoring and evaluation strategy.
- Strengthening the national child protection system requires long-term, trusting relationships (characterised by mutual respect).
- It is important for there to be clarity of purpose from the programme design stage. All concepts and approaches should be fully understood, articulated well and grounded in the national context.
- Contextually relevant and tailor-made approaches to awareness raising and behaviour change are required.
- The question of human resources needs to be considered at an early stage in the system-strengthening process and supported by analysis of the resources required to implement the system (including the human resources) and development of a fundraising strategy.
- Community structures have influence and are both visible and accessible to children and families – much more so than is often the case with formal service providers.
- Implementation of a national child protection system is beyond the scope of any single ministry or child protection agency (national or international). Coordination across all agencies involved in child protection is therefore a fundamental requirement for the system.
- Community and traditional leaders are acknowledged as having a fundamental and vital role in addressing child protection issues at a local level. This highlights the importance of integrating ‘informal’ actors into the child protection system.
- Financial planning and costing for the implementation of the services provided by the system is essential in terms of delivering better outcomes for children.

## Enabling factors that contribute to the effectiveness of system strengthening

The following highlights the enabling factors for system strengthening that emerged through the review:

- shared vision for the child protection system;
- national work or strategic plan to implement the vision for the system;
- strategic plans of various child protection actors aligned to the national vision;
- partnerships and joint working practices;
- adequate human and financial resources;
- contextual relevance (an in-depth understanding of the national context, including socioeconomic, political, cultural, governance and resources issues, is essential);
- internal and external capacity, specifically on system strengthening; and
- long-term commitment.

## Conclusion and recommendations

The discourse of systems is filtering through more at the level of programmes. Although the transition is not yet complete, experience and learning are developing. The result is that the next strategic period offers the organisation the opportunity to embrace and further enhance the effectiveness of its system-strengthening activities. The system-strengthening process needs to be the fulcrum around which all protection activities are based. If the approach is not placed at the core of strategic planning, then there is always a risk that the system strengthening will end up being treated as just another thematic area.

As an organisation that prioritises system strengthening, Save the Children Norway has the opportunity to improve the way it works with country programmes and to influence the work of the Child Protection Initiative.

The following recommendations are based on the analysis at the heart of the review process. They are presented as suggestions for improving the effectiveness and impact of Save the Children Norway's efforts to strengthen child protection systems in the countries supported by funding from Norad and through participation in the Child Protection Initiative.

1. Update the approach to system strengthening and the strategy of Save the Children Norway.
2. Clarify and give guidance on the role or position of Save the Children in system strengthening.
3. Expand Save the Children staff capacity building.
4. Revise the country strategic planning process and centre this on the systems approach.
5. Align Save the Children Norway's reporting process with the approach for system strengthening.
6. Review and revise the monitoring and evaluation process to deliver solid evidence on outcomes for children.
7. Clarify and provide guidance on what constitutes a better outcome for children.
8. Improve the tracking of resources for system strengthening.
9. Strengthen internal and external learning and knowledge management practices.

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## Section I: Purpose and scope of the review

This report presents a review of the key results achieved through Save the Children Norway's programming to strengthen the national child protection system in eight countries that relies on funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad). Due to the limited time available, the exercise was a review of programmes rather than an in-depth evaluation and covered only the strategy period of 2010–2013.

The intention was to document and analyse the focus and impact of supported programmes for two purposes: to provide Save the Children Norway with the data and analysis needed for reporting requirements to Norad and to draw out learning points and recommendations for internal and external planning and programme design for the new strategy period of 2014–2017; and a new framework agreement with Norad for 2015–2018.

Based on information provided from each country programme and Save the Children Norway, the review endeavoured to analyse and extract, to the extent possible, important successes, insights and challenges. The review was expected to:

- assess Save the Children Norway's investments in terms of relevance and effectiveness;
- identify best practices and lessons learned;
- identify common challenges across countries;
- give an assessment of what components need to be in place to achieve success and ensure sustainability in the work to strengthen a child protection system;
- identify if and how children's participation has been a component in the efforts to strengthen child protection systems and assess the value of this component;
- if possible, make reference to outstanding work of other Save the Children members in the area of child protection system building or strengthening; and
- assess the way marginalised groups (such as children with disabilities) and a gender perspective have been included in the work to strengthen child protection systems.

The child protection system-strengthening programmes review involved eight country programmes (in three regions) that received Norad funds in 2010–2013.<sup>3</sup>

- Africa: Ethiopia, Mozambique, Uganda and Zimbabwe
- Asia: Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Nepal
- Latin America: Nicaragua

The findings of this review may be of interest to other stakeholders, including Norad, Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Save the Children International's Child Protection Initiative and other civil society partners in Norway and abroad.

### Review principles<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the principles outlined in the Save the Children Evaluation Guide (including for safeguarding children), the following four principles were applied during the review.

- The review was designed to be *useful* to Save the Children Norway and to contribute towards improving strategy, policy and practice in the area of child protection system strengthening.
- The review was conducted *independently*. Child Frontiers made independent

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<sup>3</sup> More than eight countries received funding for systems strengthening but this sample was deemed sufficient for the review.

<sup>4</sup> These principles are an adaptation of the evaluation criteria promoted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee.



judgement on the information collected and situations assessed. Although all effort was made to clearly explain and substantiate conclusions, a certain level of subjectivity was also applied.

- Qualitative data and individual *perspectives* were particularly relevant and were used to support the narrative outlined in this report.
- Specific comments or views expressed are not attributed to individuals and were dealt with *confidentially*. Individual respondents are not named or otherwise identified in this report. This principle was applied to encourage people to speak freely.

## Analytical framework and core questions

The overall line of inquiry for the review was to assess to what degree Save the Children Norway has contributed to stronger systems for the protection of children and to what extent and how children have benefited from these systems.

To address these two focus areas, the review was approached in two ways:

1. A review of the results achieved and documentation of key learning points that would be instructive for future system-strengthening programmes.
2. An evaluative analysis of the appropriateness, relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and inclusivity of the programmes.

The following core questions were developed to guide the review process:

- What are the results of each system-strengthening programme?
- What benefits or positive outcomes have each system-strengthening programme had for children?
- How sustainable are these results?
- Were programmes appropriately designed for strengthening a child protection system?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the programmes?
- What factors acted as either enablers or constraints to the strengthening of the system across the different contexts?

The review was informed and relied upon documentation made available by the organisation, including the evidence that Save the Children programmes have produced indicating their achievements and results. The resulting assessment is mostly descriptive in nature and should help to inform the reporting needs of the organisation.

The more analytical dimension of the review was based on the triangulation of the evidence produced by the programmes, individual perspectives and analysis of the programme documents. This part of the review was more complex and in-depth and aimed at assessing:

- programme **appropriateness** and **relevance**;
- programme **effectiveness** in strengthening the national child protection systems;
- programme **sustainability** related to results of the system-strengthening activities; and
- programme **inclusiveness** in terms of considering the needs of children with disabilities and fostering child participation.

This second part of the review had formative ambitions to influence Save the Children programming in child protection system strengthening. To fulfil these ambitions, the review included an analysis of programme design and application of the Save the Children Norway's strategic approach to system strengthening alongside that of its global Child Protection Initiative.

## Methodology

The review largely focused on the results achieved and the effectiveness of Save the Children's programme planning, with the reporting and monitoring processes additionally assessed.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the review attempted to shed light on the process for making judgements about the context and the strategic planning while identifying areas where change is required as well as how to make that change happen and the process for transforming inputs into results.

The methodology comprised the following elements.

- Desk review of Save the Children programme documentation from the eight targeted countries, including monitoring and evaluation data. Specific documentation analysed included:
  - project proposal documents and periodic reports submitted to Norad;
  - strategic plans for child protection, including the global initiative (from Save the Children Norway and other Save the Children offices);
  - project documents, including annual plans and reports, monitoring reports and log frames;
  - monitoring and evaluation data, including child protection indicator reports;
  - Save the Children Norway global indicators, mid-term status report and lessons learned;
  - mapping of the child protection portfolio;
  - country-specific reports published by international agencies;
  - indicator reports generated by Save the Children Norway's Questback system;
  - financial reports reflecting the level of investment and actual expenditure relating to the system-strengthening programmes;<sup>6</sup> and
  - learning and evaluation reports from other Save the Children offices.<sup>7</sup>
- Online survey of child protection programme staff in Save the Children offices in the eight countries. Of the 65 personnel invited, 35 responded to the survey (54 per cent), which is not a high rate. However, the respondents were proportionally representative of all country programmes. In fact, all country programmes had at least two respondents, which helped diminish the level of bias of the responses.
- Interviews to add depth to the analysis of the country situations that emerged as interesting in the desk review. This involved selected informants among Save the Children staff in Norway, regional and/or country levels (Child Protection Initiative focal points for Africa, East Asia and Latin America; Save the Children staff in Mozambique, Nicaragua and Zimbabwe; and data from previous interviews with staff in Cambodia and Lao PDR).<sup>8</sup>

The review process was organised as follows.

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<sup>5</sup> Everitt, A. and Hardiker, P. (1996), *Evaluating for Good Practice*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, Macmillan p. 88.

<sup>6</sup> This will be an overview or 'top line' analysis, based on Save the Children Norway accounts for 2010–2013. The financial information is broken down by themes and subthemes, according to the global child protection strategy while child protection system strengthening is cross-cutting.

<sup>7</sup> Subject to availability within the agreed time frame.

<sup>8</sup> Previous interviews conducted with protection staff as part of a review for Save the Children Australia were deemed relevant for this review also.

1. An **inception report on the methodological framework and research process** was developed on the basis of the terms of reference and a list of tentative questions. This report outlined the process for the review, including detailed steps, the selection of respondents and a matrix of the core questions. The report was shared for discussion and input before the process for the review was finalised.
2. **Desk review** of all relevant documents, including background documents from programmes, budgets and accounts; Save the Children programme and strategic documents for the eight countries; and relevant literature from the regional and global levels (but limited to strategic and programme guidance). A set of frameworks reflecting the questions outlined in the analytical framework and Save the Children Norway's five key elements of system strengthening were developed to process the data and facilitate comparison across the eight country programmes. The completion of these matrices also helped in forming insights and recommendations that might be more widely applicable.
3. After the initial review of the material, the draft **inception report** and tools were further adapted to both the terms of reference and the picture of the situation that emerged through the literature review.
4. Specific **tools** for data collection were then finalised to elicit further understanding of each national situation and/or to address gaps in the information collated through the literature review.
  - a. **Survey**: An online survey was conducted with Save the Children child protection staff to generate quantifiable data on staff understanding, perceptions and approaches regarding the programmes and their impact.
  - b. **Semi-structured interviews**: The desk review singled out countries and situations worth additional in-depth analysis. An interview schedule, including themes for discussion with selected informants, was then developed.
5. The emerging picture and **analysis** was shared and discussed with Save the Children Norway through a conference call and in the form of 'working notes' to ensure that the process was truly inclusive and participatory.

The final analysis, as presented in this report, provides a description of the results achieved, challenges encountered, lessons learned and the enabling factors to support child protection system-strengthening programmes in the future. The review draws from specific country programmes but does not provide specific country-level analysis and/or recommendations. The recommendations presented in the report were developed as 'global' recommendations, although they are also relevant for individual country programmes.

## Limitations

A number of challenges were encountered during the review process and, despite efforts to mitigate their impact on the overall process, they created limitations. The most significant was generating the level of data required to deliver detailed analysis for the three targeted areas. Additionally, there were challenges fulfilling certain aspects of the terms of reference:

- **Identifying best practices and lessons learned**: A number of lessons learned were collected and are discussed in more detail in section II. The task of identifying best practices proved more difficult and the review team decided not to include a specific section on this objective. There were a number of reasons for this, but the primary one stemmed from there being insufficient data available to state with a degree of certainty that activities undertaken by the country programmes could be considered as best practice for systems strengthening.

The literature review did include a number of examples on how activities supported by Save the Children Norway are being scaled up or contributing to the system-strengthening process. However, further analysis and independent verification of them are required before they might be considered as best practices (these are referenced later in the report). The semi-structured interviews were used as an opportunity to try and probe further; but even those ultimately reinforced the view that insufficient data was available to substantiate the promotion of best practices.

The foundations of what might become best practices may exist, but identifying them was beyond scope of this process, based on the evidence reviewed. Given both the relatively newness of the system-strengthening approach for the country programmes, identifying best practices may be premature. More time is needed for programmes to generate the evidence required to state with authority that specific activities or approaches genuinely constitute a model. Rather than nominating best practices, the report instead includes a section on the enabling factors that contribute to the effectiveness of system-strengthening programmes.

- **Assess the way marginalised groups (such as children with disabilities) and a gender perspective have been included in the work to strengthen child protection systems:** The review did not uncover sufficient explanation of how marginalised groups or how a gender perspective were being integrated into the system-strengthening approach.

There are a few references to marginalised groups, including children with disabilities, and gender perspectives in the literature, but these tended not to be substantive in terms of the benefits associated with systems strengthening. Gender issues were largely discussed specific child protection issues or programmes but not from a systems perspective.

The interviews were used, again, to probe these issues in more detail, but the responses did not lend themselves to the formation of any major points of analysis or conclusions. The time frame available for the review meant that there was no scope for developing alternative approaches for gathering data on these topics. As a result, it was not possible to develop a dedicated section on how the protection needs of these groups are being met through the child protection system-strengthening approach.

- **Tracking the level of Save the Children Norway financial contribution to systems strengthening:** The level of detail on funding dedicated to systems strengthening is less than was initially expected. The main reason is the way expenditure is 'tagged' or reported on, with support to systems strengthening obscured within general or theme-specific expenditure lines. Despite the challenges encountered, some general findings and analysis are included in section II.

In addition to these major limitations, further challenges were encountered in terms of:

- **Contacting respondents across three regions and eight countries:** Because the review spanned eight countries across three regions, finding suitable time for conducting interviews was difficult. Yet, the Save the Children staff demonstrated considerable flexibility to make themselves available. This was certainly appreciated by the review team and largely helped to mitigate any negative impact on the overall process.
- **Language issues:** Given the range of countries involved, translation was sometimes required when conducting semi-structured interviews. Working through translation,

especially via Skype or phone calls, can result in the loss of critical pieces of information.

- **Response rates to different methods:** Not all of the respondents contacted were able to complete the online survey or take part in a semi-structured interview. Given the large size of some of the country programme teams, this was understandable. It was also offset in the online survey to a certain degree by having at least two respondents from each country reviewed provide the data required.
- **Input of actors external to Save the Children:** The original intention was to speak to actors external to Save the Children who had first-hand knowledge of the system-strengthening work under review. Logistical and time constraints precluded this component.

## Section II: Findings

Due to their influence on the findings and analysis, three important contextual factors need to be taken into account when reading this report.

First, the strategic period under review, 2010–2013, coincided with a major organisational restructuring of Save the Children at the global level. The consolidation process led to the establishment of Save the Children International, and this required significant rearranging of the amalgamation of international members into a unified presence in each programme country.

Second, the period under review coincided with Save the Children Norway having a more limited engagement with child protection as an area of focus than had been the case in the past. In this period, emphasis shifted to education and child rights governance. In the 2014–2017 strategic plan, child protection is included as a separate thematic area; but it is not a main priority area, like education or child rights governance.

Finally, in the years prior to the period under review, Save the Children also changed its strategy for child protection by adopting the child protection systems-strengthening approach. For the majority of the countries reviewed, the 2010–2013 strategic period was likely the first time they had articulated and implemented a systems approach as part of their child protection strategies.

As a result, the strategic period of 2010–2013 should be considered as one of transition, in which country programmes were putting into action new global, regional and member country strategies while at the same time adapting to considerable organisational restructuring.

This findings section presents the combined responses and insights gathered through the various review methods and is divided into eight themes:

- strategic approaches to system strengthening
- role of Save the Children in strengthening national child protection systems
- reported results or achievements of system-strengthening activities
- benefits or positive outcomes of system strengthening for children
- changes associated with working through a systems approach
- strengths of the systems approach
- challenges and lessons learned
- enabling factors that contribute to the effectiveness of system strengthening.

### Strategic approaches to system strengthening

For the purpose of this review, the two most significant reference points for how child protection is approached are the global child protection strategy of the Child Protection Initiative and the Child Protection Strategic Plan of Save the Children Norway, 2010–2013.

#### **Child Protection Initiative**

Save the Children International launched the global Child Protection Initiative (CPI) in 2009 to “promote a more strategic approach to child protection. The vision of the Child Protection Initiative is that all children are protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence”.<sup>9</sup> This initiative is led by a steering committee that is chaired by Save the Children Sweden,

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<sup>9</sup> Save the Children Norway (2009), ‘International programme – Five-year plan and application to Norad for 2010–2014’, Oslo.



and Norway is one of the ten member countries represented. To support the achievement of its vision, the Child Protection Initiative chose four focus areas:

- children without appropriate care
- child protection in emergencies
- children and work
- physical and humiliating punishment.

According to the report *Mapping Save the Children Norway's Child Protection Portfolio*, Norway “has a unique focus on building child protection systems, compared with other CPI members, and has been important in advocating this approach as a working principle within the CPI and child protection in general”.<sup>10</sup> The report also notes that of the Child Protection Initiative members, only Norway and Sweden “have a particular focus on strengthening child protection systems. This has been an issue that Save the Children Norway has advocated within the CPI”.<sup>11</sup>

The Child Protection Initiative and other Save the Children members have also placed child protection system strengthening at the centre of their child protection strategies. It may be more accurate to say that, for Save the Children Norway, system strengthening is a stated objective, whereas for other members it is referred to as the ‘guiding approach’ to child protection.

### **Save the Children Norway's strategic approach to child protection**

Save the Children Norway has moved from isolated protection projects to a strong focus at the international, national and community levels on building and strengthening the child protection system in each country where it works. “The ultimate aim is better protection for children, both in terms of prevention and response.”<sup>12</sup> This strategic shift is consistent with the recommendations of the United Nations Study on Violence Against Children report, published in 2006. The UN report notes that “a good system ensures that more children are protected against harm and that more children who have experienced violence and abuse receive adequate support. A good system also makes sure that children's own opinion about what kind of support they need are heard and taken into account”.<sup>13</sup>

The Save the Children Norway Strategy for 2010–2013 includes child protection as one of five priority areas and specifies three priority outcomes:

- strengthened systems and structures to protect children
- more children are protected against and supported after violence and sexual abuse
- more children are heard and participate in the prevention of violence and abuse.

In terms of system strengthening, the strategy “aims to support and strengthen systems that bring together law reform, coordinated and adequately resourced services, public education and applied research into national efforts to safeguard children's right to protection”. Save the Children Norway defines the five key elements of a comprehensive child protection system as:

- **national jurisdiction** on children's right to protection from all forms of violence;
- **national plan of action** or policy on child protection, covering such elements as research, advocacy, programming and resourcing;

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<sup>10</sup> Save the Children Norway (2013), *Mapping of Save the Children Norway's (SCN) Child Protection Portfolio*, Oslo.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Save the Children Norway (2009), ‘International programme – 5-year plan and application to Norad for 2010–2014, Oslo.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*



- **key institutions**, including child-friendly protection services, child-friendly wards at hospitals and other health care facilities and child-friendly police stations and courts (such institutions need to be staffed with qualified people);<sup>14</sup>
- **community-based child protection initiatives**, such as committees or groups; and
- **referral systems** between the community, the regional and national child protection systems.

This strategy also states that what “constitutes a good and feasible child protection system will vary given the context. The aim is for each country programme to contribute to improvements on at least three out of the five key elements”.<sup>15</sup>

The Save the Children Norway child protection strategy is largely consistent with the approach outlined by the Child Protection Initiative. Fundamentally, both strategies look at system strengthening as an approach for delivering better outcomes or results for children. Both strategies outline key elements of a national child protection system that need to be strengthened and a range of activities that might be undertaken to support this process. Both strategies also emphasise that systems will differ according to their context, yet neither one goes into much detail on how to approach a systems-strengthening process.

A more detailed comparison of the global and the Save the Children Norway strategies revealed several differences in terms of emphasis and priorities (table 1). For Save the Children Norway, system strengthening is *the objective*, while it is treated as *the approach* in the global strategy of the Child Protection Initiative. It may seem like a subtle distinction, but it is possible to argue that the global strategy could be more explicit; the importance of national child protection system strengthening is diminished by not including it as a priority focus.

The Save the Children Norway strategy is explicit on the need to link child protection system strengthening to outcomes for children and thereby avoid the risk of working on the system ‘for the sake of it’. As noted, the Child Protection Initiative identifies four areas of focus (rather broad) whereas the Save the Children Norway strategy has only two (rather specific) – on sexual abuse and violence.

In theory, this difference in focus should not cause complications, but it does appear to create some confusion or challenges for country programmes.

**Table 1: Comparison of strategic approaches**

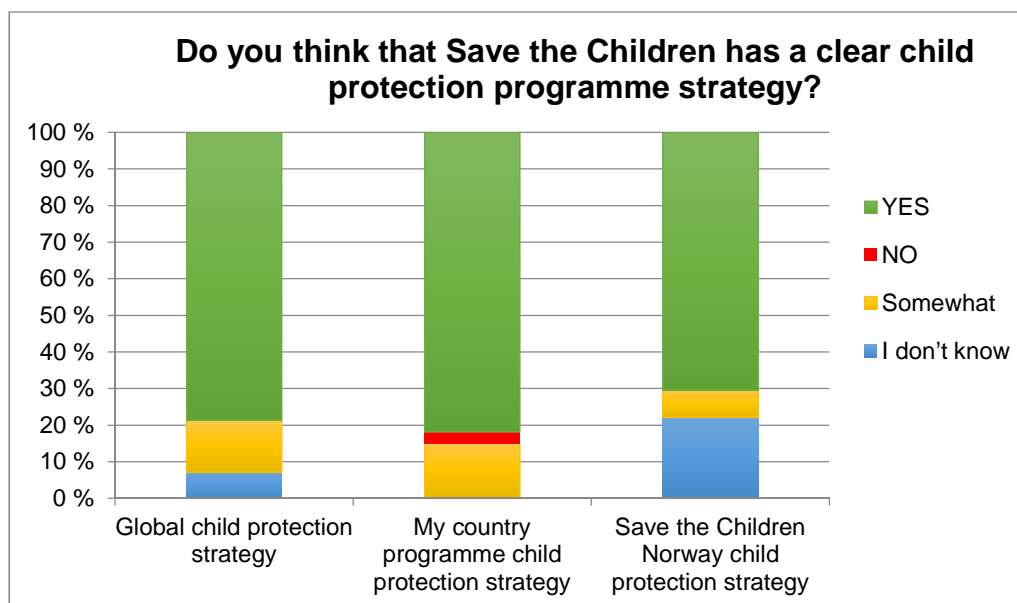
	<b>Child Protection Initiative</b>	<b>Save the Children Norway</b>
<b>Focus</b>	Children without appropriate care	Sexual abuse
	Child protection in emergencies	
	Physical and humiliating punishment	Violence (including physical and humiliating punishment)
	Children and work	
<b>System elements</b>	Laws and policies (laws, customary laws and national plan of action)	National jurisdiction
	Coordination (across government and civil society)	National plan of action
	Effective regulation and monitoring	Key institutions (services and institutions with qualified staff)
	Committed capable workforce (with mandate to intervene)	Community-based child protection initiatives
		Surveillance and referral systems

<sup>14</sup> Save the Children Norway (2009), ‘International programme – 5-year plan and application to Norad for 2010–2014, Oslo.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

The semi-structured interviews and online survey found that respondents were most familiar with their own country programme strategy; but the majority also seemed clear about the global and to a lesser extent the Save the Children Norway strategy as well (figure 1). Significantly, almost one third of staff who replied to the online survey thought that the Save the Children Norway strategy was either not clear or only somewhat clear. Given that Save the Children Norway has positioned itself as a leader on child protection system strengthening within the global organisation, it would seem important for there to be greater clarity about its strategy and its implications for how the funding it provides is used in country programmes.

**Figure 1: Views on the clarity of Save the Children’s child protection strategies**

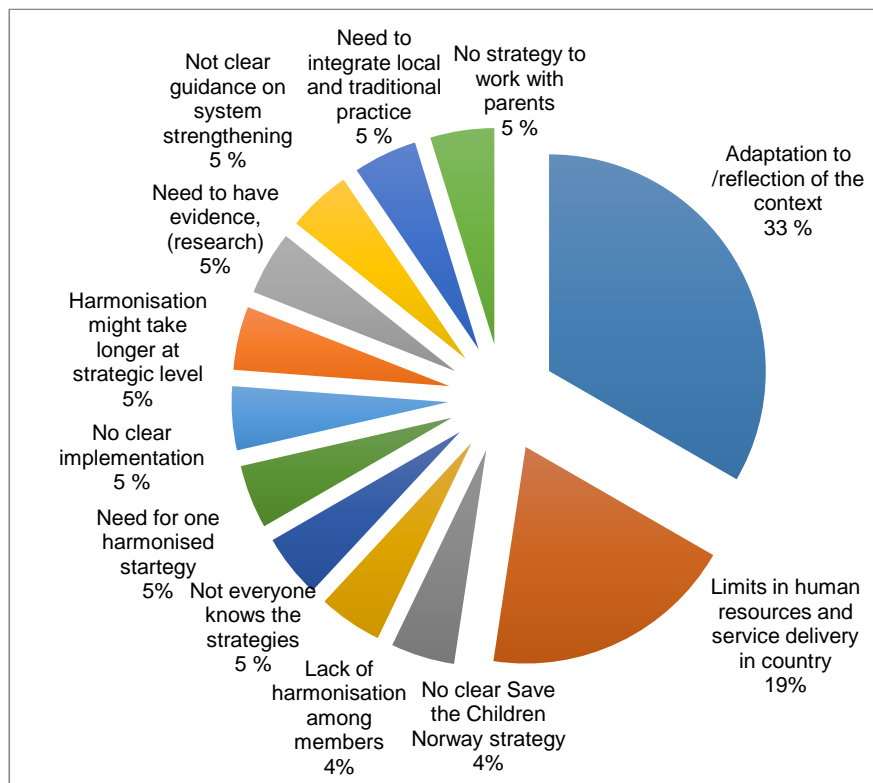


Source: Online survey completed by staff of Save the Children in the eight reviewed countries.

Despite the overall consistency between the Child Protection Initiative and the Save the Children Norway’s strategy, 66 per cent of respondents in the online survey admitted that they experience challenges in harmonising those strategies with their own country strategies (figure 2). This is an important finding and clearly an area in which additional guidance or support may be required by the country programmes in the future. Several challenges in harmonising different strategies were described, but primarily there was difficulty in adapting them to the local context (linking the strategies to cultural issues or the socio-political situation) and a lack of human and financial resources to fully implement the strategies or to fully address the main objectives.

As previously noted, the systems approach is still relatively new for Save the Children, especially in terms of its application within country programme strategies. Moving away from issue-based and fragmented approaches and focusing on specific categories of children in need of protection to system strengthening inevitably involves a period of transition. It is still surprising to find that 88 per cent of Save the Children staff did not report receiving any capacity building to help them adjust to this change in the programme focus. Only 12 per cent of staff reported receiving capacity building specifically on system strengthening. Even for this group, however, it could be argued that what capacity building they did receive (based on their responses) did not actually constitute training on the systems approach.

**Figure 2: Challenges encountered in harmonising strategies**



Source: Online survey completed by staff of Save the Children in the eight reviewed countries.

The main challenges to system strengthening related to contextualising the Child Protection Initiative and the Save the Children Norway strategies at the national level. The Save the Children Norway strategy is not overly explicit on this issue, but the Child Protection Initiative does explain the need to understand the political, social, cultural and governance situations and local power structures. Unfortunately, the country strategic plans generally do not appear to be based on or reflect sufficiently detailed contextual analysis that is needed to maximise the potential of the system-strengthening activities. It also appears that country programmes may be interpreting and applying both strategies in a prescriptive manner and, in the process, inadvertently adopting an overly simplistic or formulaic approach to their system-strengthening activities. For some programmes, the recent transition to the systems approach may be the main reason for this.

### Role of Save the Children in strengthening national child protection systems

The findings from the online survey clearly reinforce the view that the Child Protection Initiative and the Save the Children Norway strategies fail to adequately clarify the relative position or role of the organisation in the process of system strengthening. It is important for Save the Children programmes to recognise that they are at once both part of the national child protection system they are trying to strengthen and a strategically placed agent of change within that system. The strategies would benefit from being more explicit on how Save the Children will work – not just in terms of strengthening the components of the system but also in terms of the organisation’s relative position and contribution within the whole and how it will work to ensure that these efforts really bring about improvements.

There is only passing references in the country strategic plans to the actual process of system strengthening. Many of the activities outlined do fall within the framework of the five key elements for systems strengthening but do not really address how this will come about.

The plans appear to be based on the assumptions that reinforcing specific components or that improved coordination with others on specific issues or topics will automatically reverberate across the national child protection system as a whole. There is also little or no analysis of how other child protection actors, including government, UN agencies, other international or national organisations, are approaching system strengthening and what the implications of this might be for Save the Children.<sup>16</sup>

An important question that arises is how Save the Children programmes can use their resources not just within the framework of their own country strategic plans but also within the framework for the national child protection system. Consideration should be given to the comparative advantage of Save the Children within the framework or vision for the national child protection system and how the country strategic plans can be better aligned with this framework.

Almost 65 per cent of respondents to the online survey indicated that there is a national plan of action for strengthening the child protection system, but these plans are generally not reflected in either the country strategic plans or progress reports. There also seems to be a tendency to equate a national plan of action for child protection with a system-strengthening strategy. A national plan for child protection is not necessarily the same as a national plan for strengthening a child protection system or even a shared national system vision. A plan or strategy for system strengthening needs to be specifically addressed and clearly articulated at the national level.

## Reported results or achievements of system-strengthening activities

This section outlines the results and achievements that country programmes attribute to their system-strengthening activities. The consolidated findings are based on the literature review and responses to the online survey and in the semi-structured interviews. The section is largely structured around the core questions for the review in order to generate a more in-depth understanding of how the country programme staff gauge how the funding provided by Save the Children Norway has had an impact and delivered results.

### The results

Respondents to the online survey identified 20 achievement areas for how funding provided by Save the Children Norway supported the strengthening of the national child protection system (figure 3). The reported results can be clustered into three tiers in terms of the frequency with which they were reported.

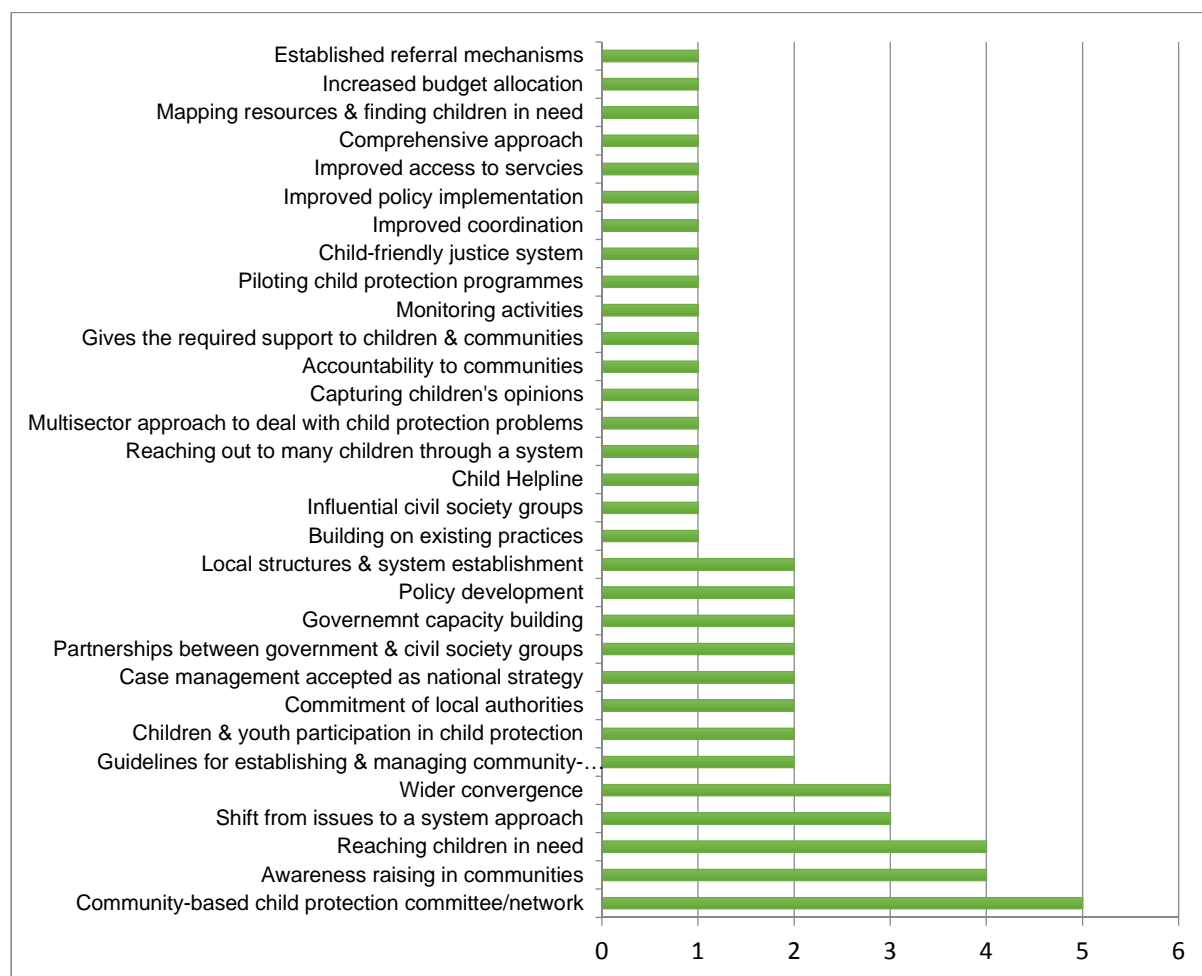
The first, or most frequently cited, tier of results includes support to community-based child protection committees and networks, awareness raising in communities, helping to reach children in need, shifting from the issues to the systems approach and greater convergence within Save the Children's protection programmes.

The second tier contains a number of responses, including improving the participation of children, capacity building of government, addressing weaknesses in the regulatory framework, case management procedures and guidelines for other areas of service provision, and improving coordination among child protection actors and with other sectors. Building greater accountability of local authorities was also mentioned as an area in which results were achieved and reflects the multilevel approach to system strengthening outlined by Save the Children Norway in the strategy document.

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<sup>16</sup> This analysis may be taking place in practice but is not coming across clearly in the strategic plans or progress reports.

**Figure 3: Reported results for system-strengthening activities** (overall frequency of reported achievements)



Source: Online survey completed by staff of Save the Children in the eight reviewed countries.

The third tier, or least commonly cited areas, in which results were achieved include improving accountability, increasing budgets for child protection, more effective coordination, making the justice system more child friendly and improving monitoring. Opportunities to pilot models and projects and undertake mappings were also identified as areas that would yield benefits for the wider system. The systems approach was also regarded as more comprehensive and building upon local practices while at the same time creating more opportunities for children's participation.

Clustering the responses to the online survey and comparing them with the semi-structured interview comments, along with the findings from the literature review and the Questback data, it is possible to consolidate the areas in which results were identified. This composite list does not use the terminology of the five key elements for system strengthening outlined in the strategy but is generally consistent with its overall focus.<sup>17</sup> The reported results of system-strengthening activities can be summarised as follows.

- **Community-based child protection mechanisms (including committees and networks).** All eight country programmes reported that effective community-based mechanisms are understood as having an important role in both preventing and

<sup>17</sup> This is because the country programmes do not always apply the terminology of the five elements in their strategic plans or narrative reports.

responding to child protection concerns and empowering local actors, including children, to take a more active part in their own protection. Community-based protection mechanisms are also seen as important in the monitoring of protection concerns facing children and the effectiveness of the overall child protection system. The promotion of community-based child protection mechanisms appears to be a standard strategy for Save the Children applied in all countries, regardless of the context.

*“Community-based structures have been capacitated through trainings and technical support and linked with formal service providers, and became functional in the identification, referrals and awareness raising endeavours to ensure the protection of children. Different types of community leaders are now acting as change agents and combatting harmful traditional/cultural practices.”<sup>18</sup>*

- **Improvements in the legal and regulatory framework** (mostly in the areas of violence against children and child justice). The country progress reports cite numerous examples of where funding provided by Save the Children Norway has contributed to strengthening the legal and policy framework for child protection, especially in terms of addressing violence against children and child justice. Ethiopia, Nicaragua and Zimbabwe did not have significant results in these areas. The mid-term review report (2012) and the mapping of Save the Children Norway’s child protection portfolio (2013) also cite the legal and regulatory framework as an area in which funding provided by Save the Children Norway was used successfully.

*“Approval of the article in the Family Code prohibiting humiliating, physical punishment in the family. Inclusion and approval of the article is due to advocacy efforts undertaken by the Group for the Promotion of Proper Treatment of Children, which includes Save the Children.”<sup>19</sup>*

- **Improved quality of service provision, including the adoption and implementation of case management procedures.** Mirroring the recent focus among child protection actors on the role of case management in improving service provision is evident across the majority of country programmes reviewed. The funding from Save the Children Norway has been used to strengthen case management procedures and this was noted as a positive outcome in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Uganda and Zimbabwe for dealing with issues of violence against children. Improvements to case management procedures are often associated with improved service delivery, greater coordination among child protection actors and a means for ensuring better outcomes for children.

*“The use of the case management model in assisting irregular migrant and other vulnerable children has resulted in better outcomes for children in targeted districts.”<sup>20</sup>*

- **Awareness raising on children’s rights and child protection:** Awareness raising continues to form a fundamental component of many of the child protection programmes receiving support from Save the Children. Across the eight countries reviewed, awareness raising takes place at a range of levels, including for decision-makers at the national level, for staff of relevant government ministries at the national and subnational levels and for community leaders, families and children. The

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<sup>18</sup> Ethiopia Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.

<sup>19</sup> Nicaragua Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.

<sup>20</sup> Zimbabwe Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.



programme in Lao PDR report interesting findings on the use of mobile phones and online technology to support this process and additional steps necessary to make awareness raising more effective. In many cases, awareness raising is often linked to particular issues, such as violence against children (including sexual abuse and exploitation), roles and responsibilities under the law or more generally children's rights.

*"Raised awareness challenged harmful amongst children and young people on the risk of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation (including the risks associated with the use of mobile phone and online technology)".<sup>21</sup>*

- **Promoting coordination and links between different levels of the system.** Coordination across the child protection system is an area that has received much attention and is perceived to have delivered positive results in the eight countries reviewed. Coordination has tended to focus on a range of issues, including strengthening regulatory frameworks, service delivery and monitoring. Similar to awareness raising, coordination is also taking place at a number of levels (national, subnational and local). Coordination-related activities have focused on the role of formal service providers, community actors and the sectors that are important in protecting children. Particular emphasis appears to be placed on the role of district or provincial structures and community-based mechanisms in coordinating the implementation of the protection system.

*"Coordination and linkages between formal and non-formal [child protection] structures. The two categories of structures complement one another but had been working in silos, each on their own pieces, not linking with the other yet, their jurisdiction should be set as such."<sup>22</sup>*

- **Mainstreaming child protection:** In line with the strategic approach, Save the Children Norway's mainstreaming of child protection activities into other relevant sectors was perceived to be one of the areas in which results have been achieved. Key sectors are education, health and justice. The mainstreaming of child protection into governance was also cited as an area in which positive results were achieved, especially in terms of ensuring that national development plans, budgeting processes and strategies were more sensitive to the needs of children.

*"The mainstreaming of proper treatment of children across Save the Children and partner programming. It has been introduced into almost all sectors and with all stakeholders."<sup>23</sup>*

- **Improving the implementation of the justice system:** Child justice is another area in which Save the Children staff in the majority of countries reviewed thought results had been achieved. Specifically, they cited the actual implementation of the child justice system. In addition to improving the legal and regulatory framework, country programmes also supported capacity building for police and the judiciary, implementation of child-friendly procedures for children in contact with the law and establishing child-friendly courts. More moderate success was reported in terms of ensuring that children are no longer detained with adults.

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<sup>21</sup> Lao PDR Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.

<sup>22</sup> Uganda Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.

<sup>23</sup> Nicaragua Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.









*“Juvenile justice and child rights 'institutionalised' and bringing positive change for children in conflict with the law.”<sup>24</sup>*

### Self-reported progress for system strengthening



The way country programmes perceived and analysed their overall progress for system strengthening in 2012 is presented in table 2 below. The table is taken from the *Global Indicators 2010–2012: Mid-term Status Report on Programme Results & Lessons Learned*. It indicates that all country programme staff believe that progress is being made. Although a useful illustration, the table may need to be read with a degree of caution, especially because it is based on self-assessment and thus not an objective or independently verified assessment (the current process for tracking and reporting on results is discussed later in this report).

**Table 2: Overall progress per country with activities to strengthen the child protection system<sup>25</sup>**

Country	Overall progress	Comment
Cambodia		Legislation is unchanged. But the programme is involved in an assessment of the child protection laws and is a member of the steering committee. Some progress on the development of child-friendly institutions and surveillance systems and increased support from the Government.
Lao PDR		Situation generally stable. Legal reviews of legislation on gender-based violence and trafficking ongoing. Progress indicated on the existence and functionality of referral systems and child protection committees at the district level. Challenge to get the Government on board and to commit funding.
Nepal		The Government has recently adopted a revised National Plan of Action for Children. This is a consolidated plan that includes child protection as one of its themes. Save the Children provided both technical and financial support. Also increased coverage of child protection initiatives and an increase in reporting of child protection cases as a result of different types of community awareness-raising activities.
Ethiopia		The Government is drafting a children's code and adopting legislation on registration, including birth registration, which is highly relevant for child protection work. In addition, the National Plan of Action on the Worst Forms of Child Labour has been endorsed by the Council of Parliament and a national strategy on harmful traditional practices is being drafted, to which Save the Children has made technical contribution through different networks. Save the Children also supported the Federal Supreme Court to establish child-friendly courts, which is being replicated nationally.
Mozambique		Generally stable, with progress on geographical coverage of child protection initiatives, clearer mandates and government support in the establishment of child protection community committees. Save the Children also has been lobbying for the adoption of a national action plan on child trafficking, which was submitted in 2012 to the National Parliament for approval.
Uganda		No change in legislation. Save the Children supported the establishment of and equipped children's reception centres in some parts of the country.

<sup>24</sup> *Cambodia Periodic Results Report 2010–2013*.

<sup>25</sup> This table is adapted slightly from Save the Children Norway (2012), *Global Indicators 2010–2012: Mid-term status report on programme results & lessons learned*. The colour bands represent different regions.

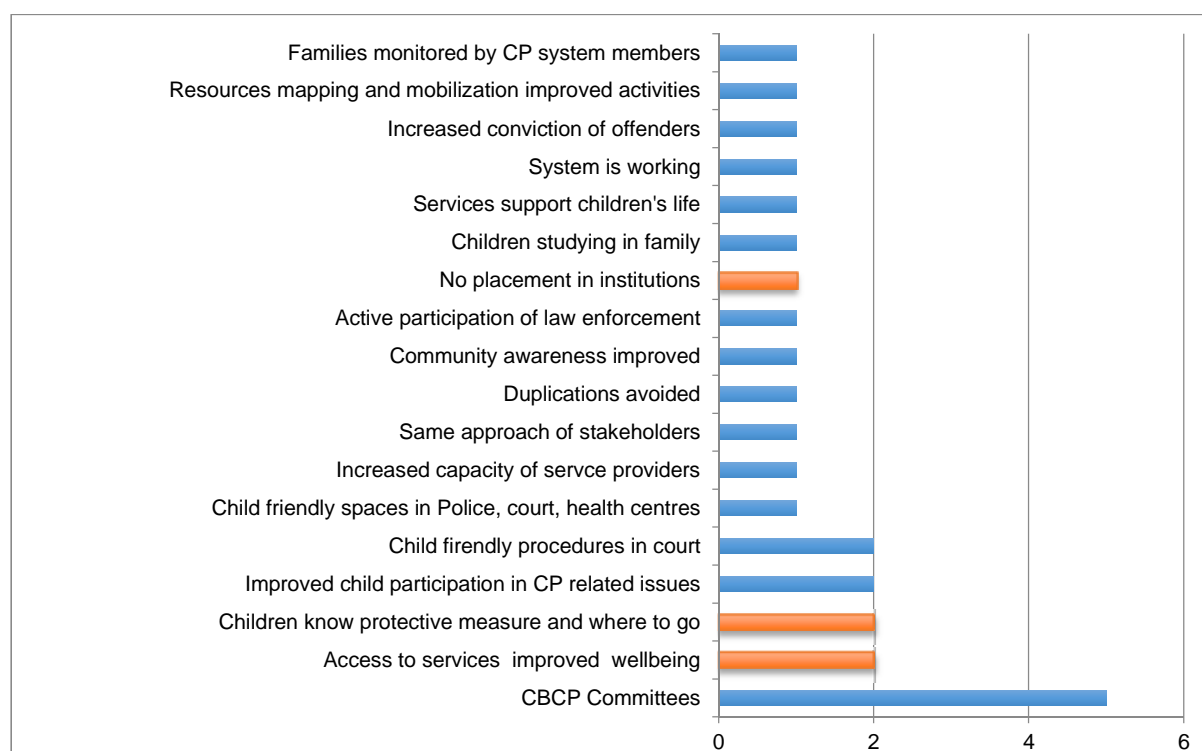
		These facilities have a big role in ensuring separation of child offenders who would otherwise be locked up with adult offenders. Also increased government support to activities (not financial) and clearer mandates.
Zimbabwe		A draft constitution banning all forms of violence was developed in 2012, with input from Save the Children. It was approved in a referendum and is awaiting signature by the president. A project to divert juvenile offenders into restorative alternatives is underway, and a national case management model is being developed, with input from Save the Children. A national training package to harmonise the operations of these initiatives is being developed and supported by Save the Children.
Nicaragua		A new law on violence against women was adopted in 2012 that takes into consideration the Convention on the Rights of the Child and concepts of the best interests of the child. The National Assembly approved the rights and obligations of fathers, mothers and children in the Family Code, which includes important advances for children, such as the prohibition of physical punishment or any other type of humiliating treatment as a form of discipline. There has been progress at the child protection policy level and the programme worked to improve child protection for trafficked children and had close cooperation with municipalities to strengthen their child protection strategies and responses.

Source: Save the Children Norway (2012), *Global Indicators 2010–2012: Mid-term status report on programme results & lessons learned*.

### Benefits or positive outcomes of system strengthening for children

Achieving positive outcomes for children is at the heart of the Save the Children Norway's child protection strategy and underpins the rationale for adopting a system-strengthening approach. The purpose of system strengthening is not to just focus on the different components of the system but to ensure that they function appropriately. A total of 96 per cent of the respondents to the online survey thought that their work on the national child protection system is delivering better outcomes for children, with 4 per cent replying that they did not really know if outcomes had improved (figure 4).

**Figure 4: Better outcomes for children associated with the system-strengthening approach**  
(overall frequency of reported outcomes)



Source: Online survey completed by staff of Save the Children in the eight reviewed countries.

Analysis of the findings in figure 4 triggers questions about whether the vast majority of the responses are actually 'outcomes' or rather refer to achievements at the level of structures, processes and procedures. Only three (represented by the orange bars) of the 26 responses given refer to specific or concrete outcomes for children, also raising questions about how outcomes are understood and applied across the eight country programmes reviewed. Structures, processes and procedures are of course important components of a child protection system, but it is the outcome associated with their application, along with other components of the system, that will lead to a positive or negative effect on the situation of children.

The literature review reinforces that analysis – the issue of outcomes for children is either not discussed or only dealt with in passing. Country progress reports, mid-term reviews, baselines and the mapping of Save the Children Norway support to child protection are largely silent on the issue of outcomes or benefits for children. It would appear that greater clarity about what constitutes an outcome is required in order to support more effective planning, monitoring and impact assessment.

Participation in coordination meetings, revisions of laws and policies or development of standards and guidelines for services are certainly important achievements but should not be confused with outcomes for children. It is only when a law, policy or standards for service provision are implemented in practice that it becomes possible to test how they work in reality and then authoritatively state that they are delivering better outcomes for children. An interesting example is included in the annual report of the Ethiopia programme for 2011: how the inclusion of certain harmful traditional practices, including female circumcision, in the penal code resulted in these practices being driven underground. The practices persisted but in greater secrecy, with the law having only limited impact in terms of delivering outcomes for children.

The reports based on the Questback data appear to indicate that results associated with better outcomes for children are being achieved. The findings from this data source, however, need to be approached with a degree of caution. Although aligned to the five key elements of system strengthening outlined in the Save the Children Norway strategy, the categories used are broad and the responses given are unsubstantiated, subjective responses from the country programmes. Currently, the country programmes are not providing sufficient evidence of impact. If outcomes for children are to be measured, then an alternative approach or mechanism might need to be discussed as part of the next strategic planning phase.

Identifying outcomes for children needs to be grounded in evidence or verifiable data and not based on assumptions (for example, a change in the law will reduce harmful practices or awareness raising will result in behavioural change). A more objective or independent system for measuring 'concrete' outcomes or tangible results for children may help to improve overall effectiveness of the system-strengthening activities.

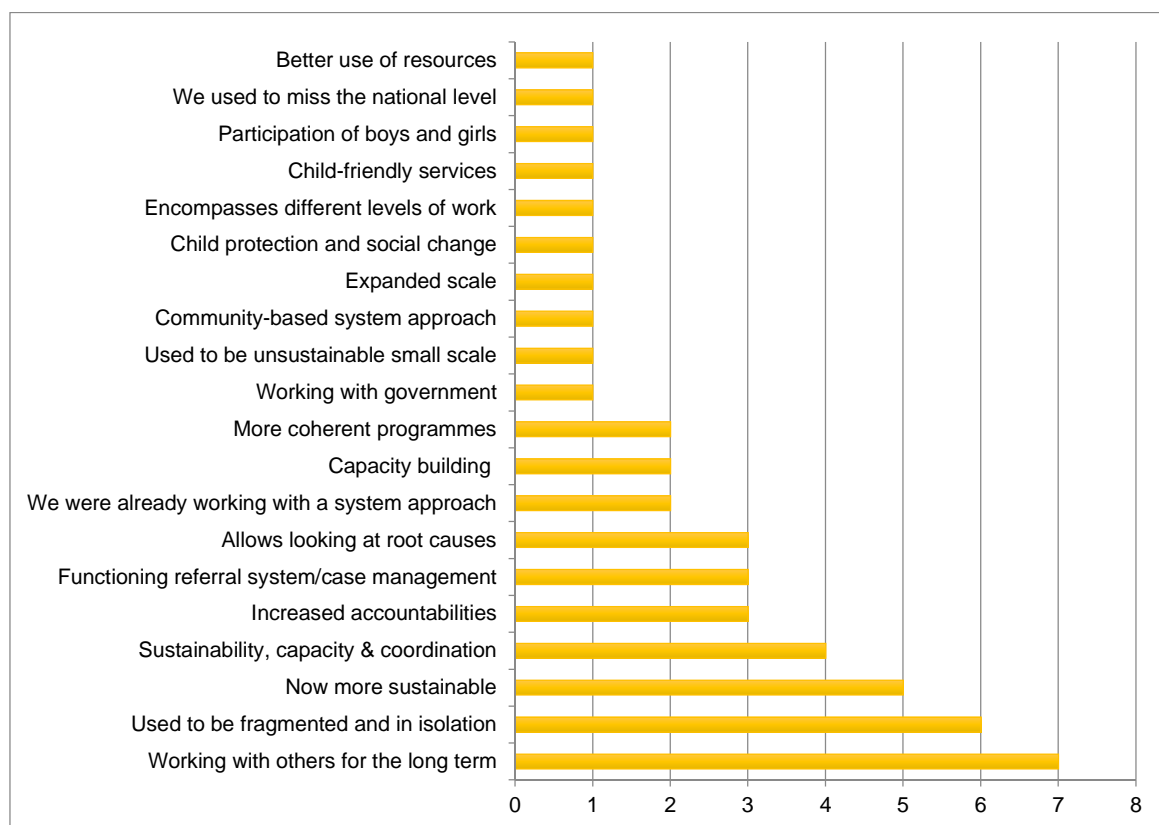
### Changes associated with working through a systems approach

With the exception of one country programme, staff with all the other programmes reported that the child protection system strengthening work has brought about changes in how they approach child protection (figure 5). Staff within the one exception reported that there was no change only because they have long been working on system building. Responses given during the semi-structured interview and reinforced by the review of the progress reports appear to indicate that the degree of change may in reality be quite limited. Programmes are being influenced by the systems approach, yet they still tend to focus on thematic issues or struggle to reposition the way they have always worked in these areas within the context of system strengthening.

The most frequently reported differences or changes were that Save the Children is now adopting a more long-term vision and working with others, including government, civil society organisations, communities, other child protection agencies and children, in a more coordinated and coherent manner. Respondents also believe that the systems approach is more sustainable and promotes more effective use of resources.

Other important differences mentioned include greater accountability among the different actors involved in child protection, the need to work at different levels (including national, subnational and with communities) and linking programmes and activities to root causes as a more effective means of bringing about social change. There is also a perception that the systems approach will help to scale up the work and potential impact of Save the Children, with 'good practices' and lesson learned either being shared across or taken up by other actors in the system.

**Figure 5: Changes associated with adoption of the systems approach** (overall frequency of mentioned changes)



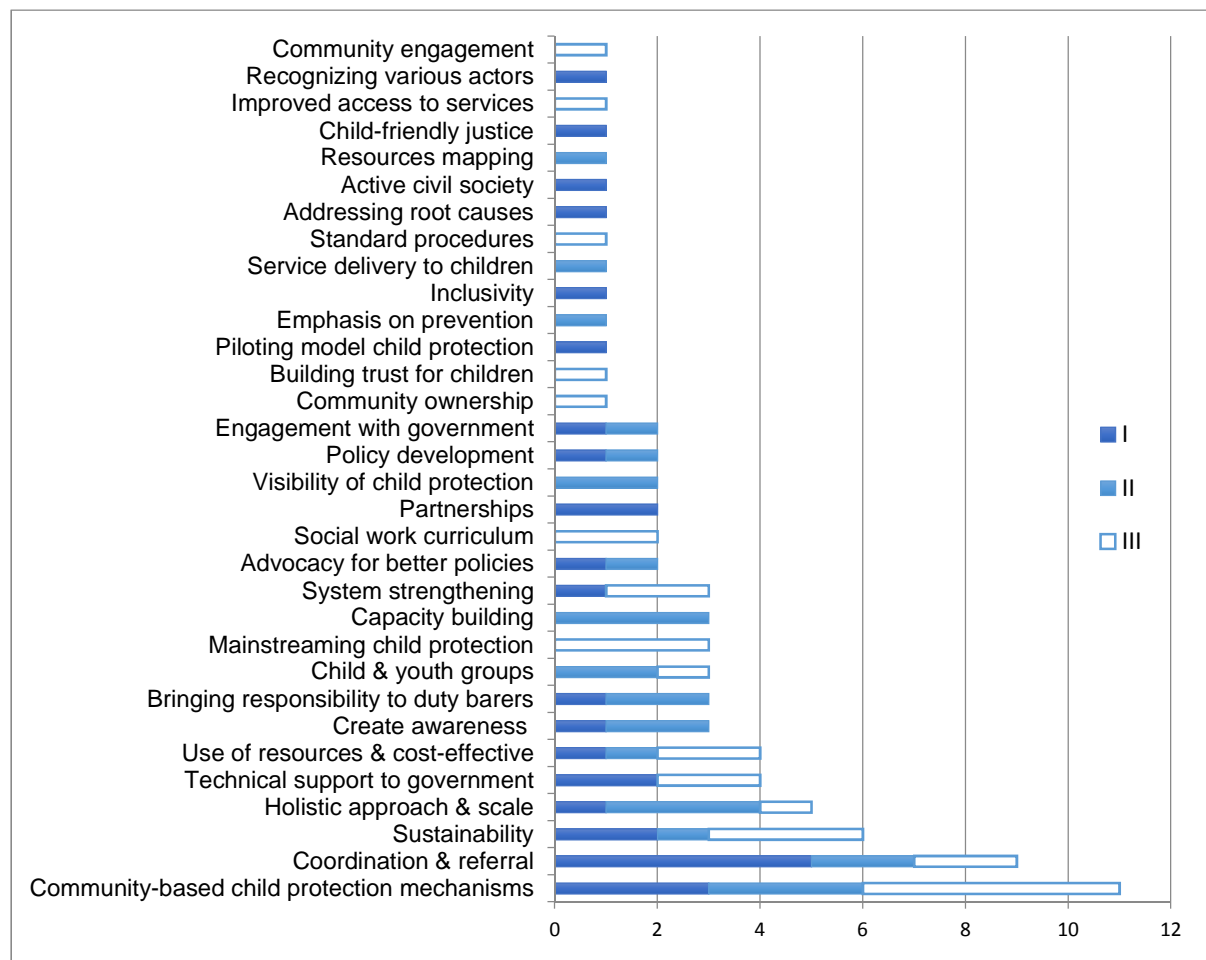
Source: Online survey completed by staff of Save the Children in the eight reviewed countries.

Even though only a small number of staff have had training specifically on the systems approach, country offices are beginning to reflect upon this approach and gain a better appreciation of what it implies for their own national programmes. Responses to the question on what is a child protection system illustrate that elements of the approach have been internalised but that a degree of confusion or lack of conceptual clarity remains.

## Strengths of the systems approach

The systems approach to child protection is seen as having a range of strengths when compared with the issues-based approach to child protection. The most frequently cited strengths include incorporating community-based child protection committees and networks, promoting sustainability through technical support to government and helping to support the involvement of a range of groups, including children (figure 6). The approach is also understood to create a more effective platform for engaging in advocacy, especially in relation to policy development and affording more effective opportunities for piloting and standardising procedures and approaches to service delivery. Additional strengths mentioned include creating more opportunities for civil society to participate in child protection activities and the development of higher levels of community ownership.

**Figure 6: Strengths of the systems approach to child protection** (three reported strengths, in order of priority)



Note: I, II and III represent first, second and third priorities.

Source: Online survey completed by staff of Save the Children in the eight reviewed countries.

Interestingly, the responses to this question did not indicate that one of the strengths of the approach was the promotion of government leadership. In an effective or functional system, the role of government is fundamental, especially in terms of coordinating or guiding how all the components of the system function in practice.

The reference to how the approach incorporates community-based interventions and networks is also noteworthy. It is interesting that despite differences in contexts, the majority

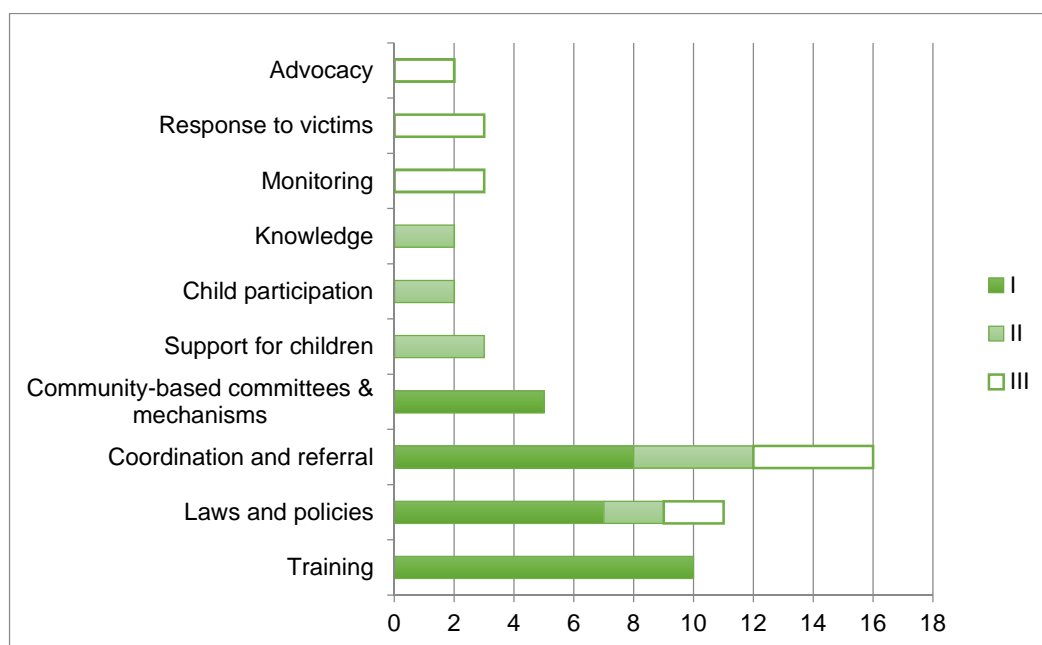
of programmes reviewed apply a very similar if not the same approach to community-based protection, such as the establishment of child protection committees. There is a growing body of literature that questions the appropriateness, effectiveness and long-term sustainability of externally driven community-based approaches to child protection.<sup>26</sup> Although, this literature does not necessarily question the potentially beneficial role of some community-based protection mechanisms in terms of their relevance in particular contexts, effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

One of the main criticisms is how the model of establishing committees has become a panacea for addressing child protection concerns and is promulgated on the basis of a number of assumptions rather than an objective analysis of how communities might best contribute towards the protection of children. Indeed, some countries, such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe, are now beginning to reflect upon how communities can be best supported to take a more active role in the overall system. One noteworthy aspect of this reflection is the need to ground support to communities in approaches that harness and build upon pre-existing strengths.

### The most important activities for strengthening the child protection system

Save the Children staff were asked to consider the most important activities that had helped to strengthen the child protection system from 2010 to 2013. The four most frequently cited activities were: coordination and referral, the development or strengthening of laws and policies, the provision of training and support to community-based child protection mechanisms (figure 7). Other important activities mentioned include improving support to children, especially to victims, and improving children’s participation. Focusing on monitoring mechanisms, knowledge management and advocacy also emerge as activities required for strengthening the system.

**Figure 7: Most important system-strengthening activities** (three reported most important activities, in order of priority)



Note: I, II and III represent first, second and third priorities.

Source: Online survey completed by staff of Save the Children in the eight reviewed countries.

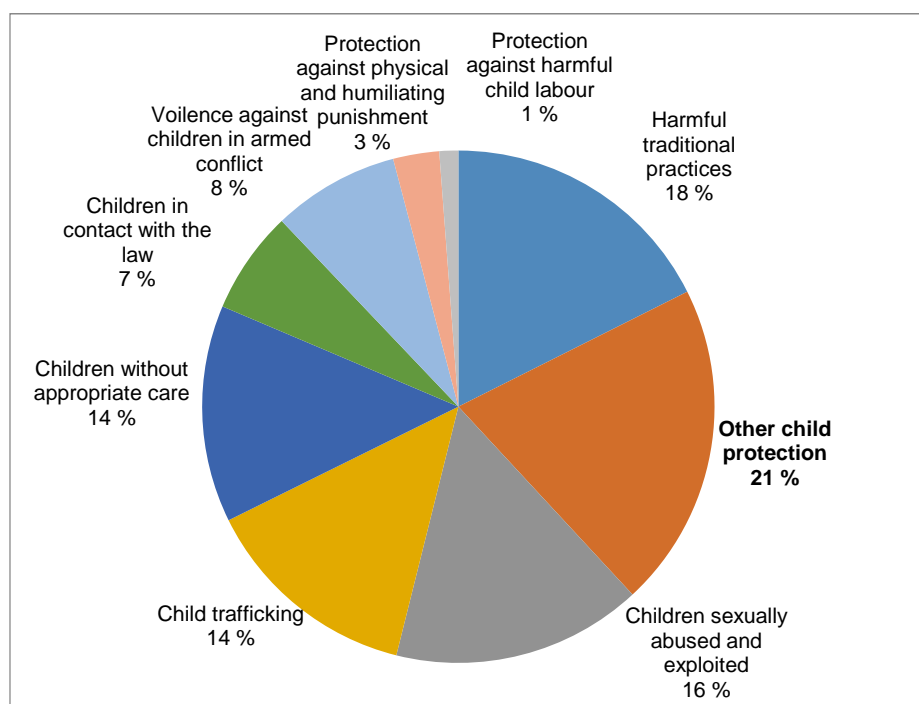
<sup>26</sup> Wessels, M. (2009), *What are We Learning About Protecting Children in the Community: An inter-agency review of evidence on community-based child protection mechanisms*, London: Save the Children Fund.



The responses given broadly correspond with the five key elements of system strengthening outlined in the Save the Children Norway strategic plan. It is unclear whether this can be interpreted as an endorsement of the relevance of the strategy or whether the strategy influenced the views of the respondents. However, comparing the findings from the online survey with the narrative reports suggests that the main areas in which results have been reported all fall within the parameters of the five key elements of system strengthening outlined in the strategy. The significance of this should not be overemphasised, as the five key elements are very broad. It is possible to ‘retro fit’ a range of activities within the framework of the strategy, even if many of them do not actually reflect a strong system-strengthening dimension.

Comparing the list of the most important areas for system strengthening with where resources provided by Save the Children Norway were actually used is informative and reinforces the view that the programmes are still in a period of transition (figure 8). System strengthening does not appear a substantive area on the basis of how funding was used; programme staff still list the main focus of their work in terms of issues or thematic areas. Aspects of the work on the various themes where funding is used are likely to encompass elements of the system. The challenge is not knowing exactly how this funding has been used or being able to attribute exact amounts to the system-strengthening process.

**Figure 8: Save the Children Norway funding for specific child protection issues<sup>27</sup>**



Source: Mapping of Save the Children Norway’s child protection portfolio.

The largest proportion of financial resources was found to be used for ‘other child protection activities’. Given that this accounted for slightly more than one fifth of all funding, it is far from ideal that such a broad category is used in this way. It appears that funding for systems strengthening falls between this general category and the thematic budget lines. The mapping of Save the Children Norway’s child protection portfolio notes that “the subthemes are interrelated and projects often put under one or more subthemes, as they touch upon several issues” and that this might explain why expenditure does not correspond with stated

<sup>27</sup> This chart represents all for the funding provided by Save the Children Norway to child protection activities, including for the eight countries assessed as part of this review.

priorities.<sup>28</sup> The same report also notes that system strengthening is often used as a “catch-all” term, for which expenditure can cover a range of items, including administration costs.

The other areas for which the most significant amounts of resources were spent include harmful traditional practices, children sexually abused and exploited, child trafficking and children without appropriate care. With the way that the financial reporting is currently done, it is unclear and impossible to ascertain the degree to which some programmes might work on strengthening the child protection system within these specific protection issues.

### **Child participation**

In terms of whether and how children’s participation has been a component in the efforts to strengthen child protection systems and the value of that, respondents to the online survey cited improved levels of child participation as both a strength of the systems approach and a positive outcome that the approach delivers. This finding was reinforced by semi-structured interviews and the literature review.

Programme staff reported that the systems approach supports more structured child participation, especially in terms of providing a conduit for children to share their views on protection issues at the local and national levels. Combining the activities conducted under the child rights governance and child protection programme gives a useful overview of how children are participating in and having an effect on different components and processes of the system.

Children are monitoring the effectiveness of systems through their involvement in reporting processes on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and becoming increasingly active agents in their own protection through participation in children’s clubs or even child protection committees/networks. They are also involved in increasing awareness about child protection issues and availability of services through peer interaction and the use of media, including radio, television and the internet. Activities supported by Save the Children Norway are also creating space for children to participate in national and local policy or programme decision-making through dialogue with local leaders or involvement in child parliaments.

*“More than 500 children, including those with disabilities, participated in the in the UNCRC supplementary report, which is currently in draft form. Meanwhile, Save the Children supported the National Programme of Action to push for the finalisation of the child rights policy. The policy was approved by senior government officials and now awaits parliamentary review and endorsement. More than 400 children participated and made submissions into this process. The policy is expected to consolidate child rights issues in the country; including enhancing coordination of children’s issues. The child rights policy has potential to influence child rights at large scale through streamlining all children’s programmes.”<sup>29</sup>*

### **Challenges and lessons learned**

This section outlines the challenges and lessons learned in relation to country programmes’ system-strengthening activities over the past four years. The section draws heavily from the progress reports submitted to Save the Children Norway and the semi-structured interviews with protection staff across the eight countries reviewed. The final part of the section draws together insights from both the challenges and lessons learned in an attempt to outline a

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<sup>28</sup> Save the Children Norway (2013), *Mapping of Save the Children Norway’s (SCN) Child Protection Portfolio*, Oslo.

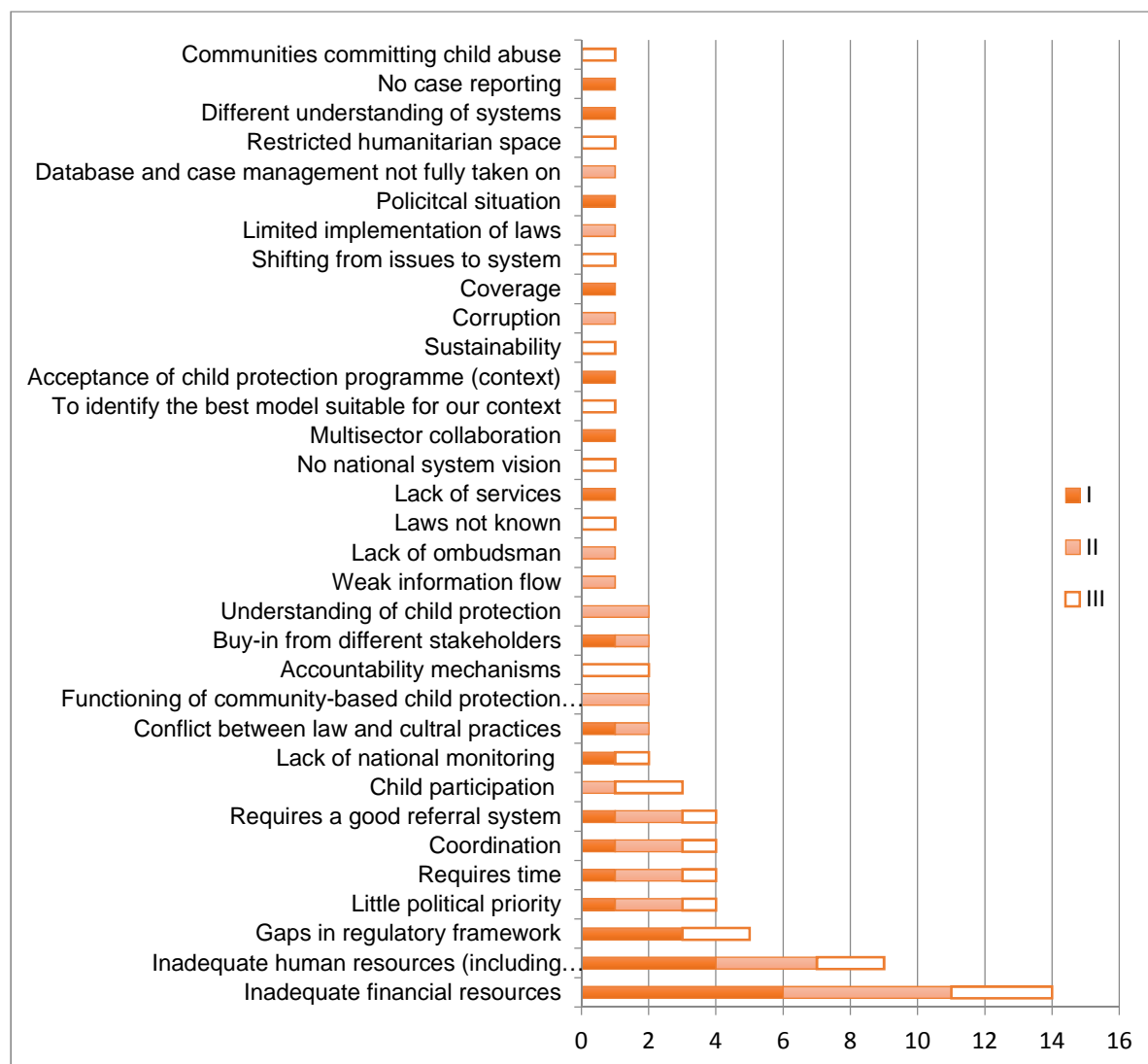
<sup>29</sup> *Zimbabwe Country Annual Report 2012*

range of enabling factors for strengthening a national child protection system.

### Challenges

Despite the many cited strengths associated with the systems approach, a range of challenges in applying the approach were encountered (figure 9). The most frequently mentioned challenges were lack of financial and human resources, gaps in the regulatory framework and lack of political will. Undertaking system strengthening was also considered to be challenging due to the time it requires and the need for coordination among a range of actors and to establish the 'buy-in' of national actors.

**Figure 9: Main challenges to implementing the systems approach** (frequency of three reported main challenges, in order of priority)



Note: I, II and III represent first, second and third priorities.

Source: Online survey completed by staff of Save the Children in the eight reviewed countries.

Interestingly, community-based child protection mechanisms were cited as a challenge by some respondents, despite also being mentioned as one of the strengths of the systems approach. This is not necessarily a contradiction but may be indicative of the intensive effort and ongoing support required to establish functioning or effective community-based child protection mechanisms. If this is indeed the case, then it raises questions on the appropriateness of pursuing this model as a core component of the strategic plans for system strengthening. The appropriateness and relevance of community-based approaches

and, in particular, ones that are established by external actors need to be carefully assessed or tested prior to their adoption and roll out. More attention should be given to pre-existing endogenous practices for protecting children rather than just assuming that establishing a committee or network is automatically the most effective approach. Where possible, it is always advantageous to support and build upon existing protection practices rather than establishing new ones.

Many of the challenges cited in the online survey correspond to those documented in the literature. In combining these two sources, it is possible to arrive at a composite list of areas in which country programmes have encountered difficulties (see further on). Many of these challenges could be classified as predictable contextual challenges and should have been given more attention during the strategic planning process.

For example, the challenge of accessing adequate human and financial resources is something that affects child protection work almost everywhere and should be factored into the strategic planning process and addressed through programmes rather than constantly being cited as an issue after implementation. These challenges also affect all areas of the system and are beyond the sphere of influence of individual agency programmes. They thus need to be addressed in a coordinated and interagency manner.

The following are the main challenges encountered through efforts to strengthen the national child protection system across the eight countries reviewed.

- 1. Contextualisation of protection and system-strengthening strategies:** Country programmes encounter challenges in adapting global and other strategies on child protection to their national context. This challenge is further compounded by the need to harmonise different strategies that exist across Save the Children, including the Child Protection Initiative and Save the Children Norway (and potentially other members).
- 2. Inadequate human and financial resources:** Child protection staff, and specifically government staff, are often either not in place or lack the capacity and logistical means to discharge their roles and responsibilities, even if they are clearly laid out (which is often not the case). The main consequences of this are the absence or inadequate (or uneven) provision of services and an inability to monitor services, conduct outreach work in communities or manage individual cases.

*“Despite commitment by government and civil society organisation which have come up with operational guidelines, training workshops for programme implementation and enabling laws, limited funding and staff shortages have heavily influenced programme achievement. Delays were encountered in implementation of the cross-border and pre-trial diversion programmes because of challenges in the process of recruiting case management officers and diversion officers.”<sup>30</sup>*

- 3. Inadequate political will:** Strengthening a child protection system requires political support and leadership on the part of a national government. Unfortunately, in many countries this support is lacking. As a result, resources for child protection remain limited, leadership for system reform remains weak and it can take a long time for laws and policies to be approved.

*“Save the Children in Cambodia has had substantial input into the drafting of the Juvenile Justice Law since the drafting process started in 2008, and there was optimism that this would receive formal approval as early as 2010. However, after six years, this has not yet received final approval. As with other draft laws and policies, this process*

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<sup>30</sup> Zimbabwe Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.

takes time due to factors inherent in the Government system, including capacity constraints, the need for consultations across departments and ministries and other reasons.”<sup>31</sup>

- 4. Overambitious planning and failing to appreciate the time required to strengthen a system:** If plans are overly ambitious or attempt to cover too many areas, difficult problems most likely will emerge during implementation. For example, a strategic plan that has too many results areas will place hefty challenges on both the human and financial resources. Staff will be challenged in terms of their ability to provide quality oversight for programmes that contain too many elements, try to target too many locations or involve large numbers of partners.

*“The Child Protection Program’s 2010–2013 strategic plan was very ambitious with 4 objectives, 11 results and 27 indicators. Budget cuts in 2012 reduced the number of results from 11 to 6 and limited programing to 10 municipalities (down from 19).”<sup>32</sup>*

- 5. Provision of and access to services:** Many services are committed to within the regulatory framework and promoted, despite the fact that they often do not exist or are only accessible in primarily urban areas. Child protection actors within the government or civil society organisations also often operate under severe resource constraints. They likely do not have the logistical means to conduct outreach or to follow up on cases that have been referred from the community level. Children and families also face a number of barriers when it comes to accessing services, including transport costs, loss of earnings if travel to a district or provincial centre is required.

*“Coupled with challenges around physical access to and affordability of medical and counselling services, which are critical physical and emotional recovery, some survivors did not get full support to recover and reintegrate well and fast from the abuse. This however was out of [Save the Children’s] control.”<sup>33</sup>*

- 6. Orientation of services:** The orientation or main motivation of services within the system is also an issue that requires attention and can lead to complications for child protection actors. Although the best interests of children is often cited as a primary principle in child protection, it is a more difficult and nuanced concept to put into practice than many people fully appreciate.

One interesting example is the issue of child justice versus child well-being. For example, in situations in which a child rights violation has occurred, should the Save the Children programme prioritise the prosecution and punishment of a perpetrator or the well-being of the child whose rights have been violated? Ideally, both should be given equal consideration, but this can be a difficult balance to strike in the case of a resource-constrained system that constantly must make choices on how to use resources. Sometimes these choices can result in imbalances in the system, where some outcomes are given priority over others.

*“In cases of abuse, the main focus is punishment of the abuser rather than recovery of the victim/survivor. Coupled with challenges around physical access to and affordability of medical and counselling services, which are critical physical and emotional recovery,*

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<sup>31</sup> Cambodia Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.

<sup>32</sup> Nicaragua Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.

<sup>33</sup> Uganda Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.

*some survivors did not get full support to recover and reintegrate well and fast from the abuse. This, however, was out of [Save the Children's] control.*<sup>34</sup>

### **Lessons learned from the perspective of country programme staff**

This section draws together the main learning points cited by country programme staff regarding their use of funding from Save the Children Norway between 2010 and 2013 for strengthening the national child protection system. The lessons learned are clustered around areas that were found to be the most common or frequently mentioned in the progress reports to Save the Children Norway. The lessons learned presented here do not necessarily represent the views of the review team; and some of them are discussed in more detail in the analysis section.

Areas of learning from programme implementation between 2010 and 2013 include:

- 1. Learning and knowledge management:** All child protection systems need to be grounded in reliable quantitative and qualitative data. However, it is not enough just to produce data or information – it has to be used. Strategies to guide research and learning need to be complemented by mechanisms for sharing and ensuring that relevant knowledge feeds into the process of strengthening or adapting the system in order to improve the outcomes that it can deliver to children and communities.

Research findings, consultations with different groups, mid-term or end of programme evaluations are needed to feed back into the system in a structured manner and to ensure that decisions relating to the operationalizing of the system are grounded in evidence and learning. This is a dynamic or ongoing process because the needs of children, the protection issues they face and the most appropriate ways of addressing them change over time.

*“The lessons learnt from evaluations, reviews and assessments conducted during the period have largely been used for programming. For instance, the project evaluation findings formed the design of the Northern Uganda Child Protection Strategy, which is the basis for [child protection] programme design in the region. In addition, the aspect of integration of themes and interventions as an approach to programming informed the debate and subsequent integration of this concept in the new country strategic plan, rather than the previous way of programming for children in the country program.”*<sup>35</sup>

- 2. Monitoring and evaluation:** The systems approach to child protection often requires Save the Children to work at a number of levels (national, provincial, district and community). It also requires engagement with a broad coalition of partners, including UN agencies, international NGOs, civil society organisations, community groups or structures and children. These activities need to be supported by a multifaceted monitoring and evaluation strategy, which should be designed in conjunction with partners as part of the strategy development process.

*“Consultations made with children in programme feedback meetings and during monitoring visits have assisted in the prioritisation of issues by the Child Protection thematic area.”*<sup>36</sup>

- 3. Nature of partnerships:** Strengthening the national child protection system requires a shift in how Save the Children engages with partners. Potential partners in the process of system strengthening are many and include the government, national and international civil society organisations and UN agencies, communities, traditional or local leaders,

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Uganda Periodic Results Report 2010–2013*

<sup>36</sup> *Zimbabwe Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.*



children and parents. A key aspect emerging is the need to establish long-term, trusting relationships (characterised by mutual respect). For example, a partnership with different organisations cannot just focus on thematic or child protection issues – if the system is to become stronger, then all aspects of the organisations, both government and non-government, involved in that system need to be strengthened.

*“A prior evaluation of the partner should be conducted to incorporate any needs for training or institutional strengthening into the agreement. Once the information is obtained on the entire portfolio of partners, the training plan for the period should be developed.”<sup>37</sup>*

- 4. Planning and programme design:** It is important for there to be clarity of purpose right from the programme design stage. All concepts and approaches should be fully understood, articulated well and grounded in the national context. This will help in making ‘better’ decisions about the aims and objectives of a programme, especially in terms of establishing its logical coherence. In some cases, programmes are too diverse with multiple areas of focus, which leads to a large number of results areas that ultimately prove difficult to manage and monitor.

*“The plans and projects should establish a reasonable number of results and indicators that make proper monitoring possible. Tools or instruments should be developed or improved for the appropriate measurement of all indicators to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. Care should be taken that the indicators and their measurement provide evidence that demonstrates that the work undertaken for children’s rights is producing positive results in children.”<sup>38</sup>*

- 5. The process of change needs to be grounded in the local context: Contextually relevant and tailor-made approaches to awareness raising and behaviour change are required. More strategic thinking needs to be given to the theory of change at the programme level. Just what is it that programmes are trying to achieve in terms of change? Based on that analysis, what are the most realistic strategies and working relationships required to bring about change? Testing the assumptions of how change will take place (causality relationships) is critical.**

*“Awareness raising campaigns must be specifically targeted to individual communities conducted using very simple methods and in collaboration with respected village elders to enhance influence. Awareness raising and capacity building of adults is crucial in creating an enabling environment for children to meaningfully participate in decision making. However, this process entails more than training workshops and events but ongoing mentoring of the practical application of child rights for all children. Within programme designs, a specific, culturally appropriate behavior change strategy should be included, with key measurements of success for implementation.”<sup>39</sup>*

- 6. Human resources:** The effectiveness of system-strengthening work is dependent, among other factors, upon the presence of well-trained human resources who are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The question of human resources needs to be considered at an early stage in the system-strengthening process and supported by analysis of the resources required to implement the system (including the human resources) and development of a fundraising strategy. Otherwise, there is a risk that the

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<sup>37</sup> Nicaragua Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.

<sup>38</sup> Nicaragua Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.

<sup>39</sup> Lao PDR Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.



work to strengthen the legal and regulatory framework, for example, will remain on paper and not translate into real services for children.

Equally important is whether the regulatory framework should be based on an ideal package of services that are clearly not possible to put in place or deliver, given the constraints that govern the contextual environments in which Save the Children operates. If a service is not possible to deliver, at least in the short to medium term periods, then why commit to it as part of the regulatory framework?

The human resource issue is also a concern for Save the Children. A number of country reports cite how a high degree of staff turnover can have a disproportionately negative impact on the effectiveness of the programme. This is especially true if there has been investment in staff, for example building their capacity to apply the systems approach, with the resultant loss in knowledge and skills then having to be rebuilt when they leave. Because Save the Children seeks to build the capacity of other actors within the national child protection system, it will remain vital that internal capacity issues are addressed in order to continue providing high-quality technical and practical support.

*“A programme of a long-term nature like this one needs to maintain some level of staff stability. There have been many staff changes both at the Uganda and [Save the Children Norway] level and this made the smooth flow of interaction and communication difficult.”<sup>40</sup>*

- 7. Community-based mechanisms:** Community child protection committees or networks for protecting children are an essential part of strengthening the overall child protection system. Community structures have influence and are both visible and accessible to children and families – much more so than is often the case with formal service providers. However, to be effective, these mechanisms often require constant support, including capacity building and ongoing mentoring. Taking the time to consult with communities and understand their perspective is essential in creating ownership and building sustainability.<sup>41</sup>

*“Community committees, if effectively monitored and with a development plan put in place, appear to be the structures that are closer to children; therefore results produced provide a direct benefit to children.”<sup>42</sup>*

- 8. Coordination:** Implementation of a national child protection system is beyond the scope of any single ministry or child protection agency (national or international). Coordination across all agencies involved in child protection is therefore a fundamental requirement for the system. Although challenging at times, it is something that needs to be addressed through targeted actions. Coordination is essential in terms of providing more effective services, combining resources, managing data and knowledge and, in short, developing the synergies or interrelationships required by all systems if they are to function properly. Coordination, however, does not just happen and requires work.

*“[Save the Children] in collaboration with implementing partners and other stakeholders have been conducting regular monitoring of child protection program to identify lessons as well as gaps of interventions to inform further improvement of interventions. Besides, there were regular review meetings and experience sharing forums conducted among*

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<sup>40</sup> Uganda Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.

<sup>41</sup> The reflections about the role of community-based mechanisms in the protection of children are open to challenge, especially the idea that externally driven or supportive approaches are effective in practice. The analysis section provides more commentary and critical reflection on this point.

<sup>42</sup> Mozambique Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.

partners to inform programming. [Save the Children] in collaboration with partners and other stakeholders have conducted some mid-term and terminal evaluations and best practice documentations to identify good practices and sharing lessons for further scale up.”<sup>43</sup>

- 9. Involvement of community and traditional leaders:** Community and traditional leaders are acknowledged as having a fundamental and vital role in addressing child protection issues at a local level. This highlights the importance of integrating ‘informal’ actors into the child protection system. Local leaders are seen as the gatekeepers to communities. Their active involvement in the community-based approaches to child protection is necessary if real impact is to be achieved. Local leaders are also potentially influential change agents, especially in terms of creating awareness about child protection issues and influencing behaviour, attitudes and practices towards children within their communities.

*“Engagement of traditional leaders in harmful traditional practices programming in challenging cultural and religious practices and raising awareness in communities was noted as vital. Strengthening the relationship with these local leaders who are community gatekeepers is therefore essential.”*<sup>44</sup>

- 10. Financial planning and costing for the system:** Financial planning and costing for the implementation of the services provided by the system is essential in terms of delivering better outcomes for children. Ministries and civil society organisations with responsibility for child protection are generally underresourced and often highly dependent on funding from donors and international NGOs. This raises serious questions regarding the sustainability of the services they provide. Financial challenges are often exacerbated the further one moves from the centre of governance; district offices, for example, are very underresourced when it comes to both recurrent and programme funding. Any proposed child protection system needs to be viable, otherwise it will not be put into practice. A realistic assessment of the financial resources available is part of the process of testing the viability of the system.

*“For example, due to the financial constraints of the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare – the ministry with the lowest budget – Save the Children had to provide material support to the District Social Welfare Services, which was not only directed to children but to all other targets groups they support. Supervision visits to the districts were made possible through the support of Save the Children, which is not sustainable.”*<sup>45</sup>

Unfortunately, it is these subnational structures that are the ‘face’ of the system or what is more accessible to communities. As the primary point of contact to at least formal service provision, it is vital that these structures function effectively. It is essential to recognise, plan for and access the financial resources that will be required.

## Enabling factors that contribute to the effectiveness of system strengthening

The enabling factors that supported system strengthening that are presented here are based on the analysis of data and views provided by Save the Children staff. They should not be treated as definitive but rather as a reflection of what the programme staff are learning about what is required to support their system-strengthening efforts. These factors, however, need due consideration and not just during the development of the strategic plan but they should

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<sup>43</sup> *Ethiopia Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.*

<sup>44</sup> *Mozambique Periodic Results Report 2010–2013.*

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

be revisited on an ongoing basis throughout the lifecycle of a programme. The enabling factors are also interconnected and mirror the dynamic nature of a system; their relevance is based on the interrelationships. As a result, they should not be applied in isolation. In other words, establishing that one or more of the factors are present or strong in a specific national context does not necessarily mean that the system-strengthening effort will be effective.

The following highlights the enabling factors for system strengthening that emerged through the review:

- 1. Shared vision for the child protection system:** This is necessary to provide guidance and a coherent frame of reference for the system-strengthening work. It is essential for the vision to be shared by child protection actors prepared to pool their resources and inputs towards the achievement of a common goal. Ideally, where the circumstances allow, it should develop under the leadership of the government, which can then coordinate the support provided by their development partners.
- 2. National work or strategic plan to implement the vision for the system:** The vision for the national child protection system needs to be supported by a realistic and costed strategy or workplan. This helps to provide concrete direction and clearly lays out what needs to be done and the resources required. The presence of a clear strategy should also help to inform the strategic plans of donors and the national and international child protection actors. On this basis, different actors can align their contributions to the system (financial or otherwise) in a more timely and coordinated manner. The result is clarity and predictability about the sequencing of the system-strengthening process and how different aspects will finally come together.
- 3. Strategic plans of various child protection actors aligned to the national vision:** Once the vision is established, then organisations involved in child protection need to ensure that their own plans and strategies are aligned to the national vision in a coordinated manner, and explain how the programme contributes to the overall system strengthening. Clearly stated and shared objectives and goals help to reinforce the interrelated nature of system strengthening. This will help to avoid parallel or fragmented approaches and ensure that all actors are working towards the same end rather than just focusing on particular components of the system. This can be challenging because many child protection organisations are traditionally used to working on their programmes in relative isolation or through degrees of coordination with others. To be effective, system strengthening requires a fundamental shift in terms of how child protection is approached.
- 4. Partnership and joint working practices:** No one organisation can undertake system strengthening on its own. In addition to development of a shared vision the process requires genuine partnership or a coalition approach. It is important for this approach to be clearly established and for all the relevant actors to commit to working in partnership. All actors are part of the same system, and their objectives and goals are ultimately interrelated.
- 5. Adequate human and financial resources:** To achieve better outcomes for children, the process of system strengthening needs to be realistic and viable, based on the availability of resources. Ensuring that the system functions requires adequate consideration of the human and financial resources. Resource requirements should be factored into the visioning-planning process for strengthening the system. It is also important to be realistic and to plan for what is achievable rather than what is ideal.
- 6. Contextual relevance:** In-depth understanding of the national context, including socioeconomic, political, cultural, governance and resources issues, is essential to

establish contextual relevance. All child protection systems must make a series of choices – choices on the laws and policies required, the emphasis of these laws and policies, the continuum of services to be provided and the way they will be oriented (such as towards children or towards children and families). To inform these choices, a detailed understanding of the context within which the system operates is required. This is necessary to establish relevance and ensure that what the system offers resonates with communities.

- 7. Build internal and external capacity, specifically on system strengthening:** Strengthening a child protection system requires a range of expertise and skills, and it is essential for organisations to ensure that their staff and partners, especially government, are conceptually clear and adequately equipped in terms of skills to engage in effective system-strengthening activities. Building capacity on child protection needs to be augmented by a range of additional skills and capacities from other disciplines, including sociology, social policy, anthropology, child and family welfare, human and financial resource management and institutional reform.
- 8. Plan for the long term:** System strengthening is a long-term process and needs to be carefully planned for – it requires commitment on the part of the organisations involved, including the provision of the financial resources needed to support the process. It is likely that the process of strengthening a system will encompass a number of country strategic plans and considerable human and financial investment. System strengthening is a more complex, longer-term process that does not fit within the traditional ‘project-based’ approach, through which child protection activities have previously been implemented.

## Section III: Analysis

This section presents analysis of the findings generated through all the research methods used for the review process. The intention is to provide the critical reflection required to support Save the Children Norway as it continues to deliver more effective protection outcomes. While acknowledging the achievements of the programmes, the analysis presented here seeks to be constructive yet challenging – in line with the mutually agreed principles that guided the review process.

As noted previously, the strategic plans for 2010–2013 were developed during what could be considered a transitional period for both Save the Children and more general global approaches to child protection. The switch from thematic issue-based programmes to the systems approach is relatively new; and like any new approach, it creates a range of opportunities but also challenges. Also pointed out previously and important to recognise is the organisational restructuring that has taken place within Save the Children and the greater emphasis placed on education and child rights governance as high level priorities with lesser emphasis placed on child protection.

Notwithstanding the ‘food for thought’ considerations presented in this section, it is important to be clear that the review found a very dynamic picture of programme staff busy trying to make a difference in their respective countries. Most of the programmes have made a remarkable effort to improve the effectiveness of their child protection activities. This effort manifests itself in a range of activities, including the system-strengthening work, and the reported results of the programmes at the national, subnational and community levels.

The review thus finds that country programme staff clearly believe that system strengthening is more effective than issue-based approaches for child protection. The staff associate a number of strengths and benefits with this approach, including positive changes in the way child protection is managed. The main strengths and benefits cited were improvements in the way staff coordinate their work with other child protection actors, including the government, UNICEF and other national and international agencies. A system-strengthening focus appears to be creating greater space for community mechanisms and civil society to participate in child protection.

The country programme staff reported that system strengthening has helped to give their activities a clearer focus, reducing fragmentation and situating their work in a more detailed appreciation of the underlying factors that lead to child protection concerns. There is also a widely held belief that the systems approach will help to support the scaling up of good models and thereby give Save the Children potentially greater influence and impact in terms of improving the quality of services available for children. Unfortunately, the evidence generated by this review finds that this is not being adequately planned for and that it is more accurate to say that there is an *assumption* that Save the Children activities or models will be picked up and expanded on a larger scale.

The systems approach was also described as promoting greater sustainability for child protection activities, although the basis of this claim may be more theoretical than practice – especially given the ongoing challenges in accessing the resources required to support child protection. It might be more accurate to say that the systems approach has the potential to foster more sustainable approaches to child protection, but only if a proposed system is viable in the first place. The real benefits of this approach are likely to become more evident through the next strategic planning period as programme staff become more familiar, improve their capacity and begin to apply more rigorous and sophisticated system-strengthening practices.

As to be expected with any new strategy or approach, challenges were encountered. These included a lack of human and financial resources (both within and externally to Save the Children), political will in support of child protection reforms and in particular to improving the legal and regulatory framework and the quality, availability and access to services. An additional challenge emerged in the developing of standards, mechanisms, guidelines and process to support service provision, including referral mechanisms and case management procedures. Interpreting, applying and harmonising different strategies and approaches to system strengthening were also deemed significant challenges. Although many Save the Children staff are experienced in child protection, at the core of many of the challenges was the need for staff to learn about system strengthening. They require additional support or training to build their capacity and effectiveness on this approach.

The remainder of the analysis here looks in more detail at areas framed around the objectives and guiding questions outlined at the start of the review process.

## Strategic plans

Given the way Save the Children has reorganised, it is important to establish consistency and clarity among international and member country programme strategies for child protection. If this is not achieved, then there is scope for confusion or even contradictions to emerge that are likely to have negative impacts on programme implementation. Even if international or member country strategies are broadly consistent with each other, the fact that multiple strategies exist is still likely to place burdens on country programmes as they try to situate their own strategies and workplans within multiple frameworks.

It is clear in the analysis of the country strategic plans that they are caught between the traditional issues-based approach to child protection and applying the systems approach. The strategic plans generally contain a long list of activities, some of which relate to the five key elements of system strengthening outlined in the Save the Child Norway strategy and others that are clearly more aligned to the issue-based approach. This prompts questions on how the strategic planning process for 2010–2013 was undertaken and what support was given to ensure that the process integrated the child protection systems approach.

There is a tendency to reduce the systems approach to working on specific (discrete) components, which is then equated with actual results in terms of the system being strengthened. This is an inherently risky assumption and likely to diminish the potential impact of the inputs provided by Save the Children Norway. Working on components of a system is part of the process; but a system is not just the sum of its parts. Targeting a component or even multiple components of a system does not automatically mean that the system as a whole will be strengthened.

Consideration needs to be given to a range of other factors that need to be strategically taken into account, including but not limited to the national context, the interrelationships between the components, the resources required to operationalise and sustain these components, coordination and management of the system-strengthening process and the role of different actors in the whole process. The system-strengthening process needs to be the fulcrum around which all protection activities are based. If the approach is not placed at the core of strategic planning, then there is always a risk that the system strengthening will end up being treated as just another thematic area.

## Contextual relevance of the strategies for system strengthening

The process of system strengthening needs to be grounded in reality and linked to the context for which the system is being designed. One part of that reality is that Save the



Children Norway-supported programmes operate in resource-constrained contexts, especially in terms of the human and financial resources available for child protection. As a result, there is a constant risk that many aspects of the system-strengthening process will remain aspirational or that a complex technical system will be designed on paper that has little to no chance of being implemented. The 'check' for system strengthening is to avoid the scenario in which the system on paper is disconnected from the operational and resource context that it is supposedly designed to influence and support.

The gap between the *de jure* and the *de facto* system therefore should be given greater consideration. And the promotion of ambitious regulatory frameworks or highly technical packages of services should be avoided, unless the resources are available to deliver on stated commitments. It is possible to argue that in countries with a highly technical or complex system, duty bearers are not only setting themselves up for failure but also for criticism. Any system that is not grounded in the socio-cultural context and proper analysis of the human resource capacity as well as the availability of financial resources is extremely unlikely to function – it will not be viable. From a strategic planning perspective, many of the constraints or challenges the system-strengthening process needs to negotiate either are, or should be, known from the outset. Realistic analysis of the context should help to guide the balance of choices that need to be made not by any individual organisation but among all the actors that make up the national system.

Looking at the experience of the country programmes and their support to strengthen the legal and regulatory framework can help to illustrate this point. Both Save the Children Norway and the Child Protection Initiative refer to the importance of strengthening national jurisdiction or the legal and regulatory framework as a core element of the system strengthening. Funding from Save the Children Norway has been used to address a range of laws and policies in the eight countries reviewed. Progress reports highlight work on laws and policies as an area in which results have been achieved yet also citing legal and regulatory reform as an area in which significant challenges are constantly encountered, especially in their implementation.

In-depth analysis and critical reflection about why similar challenges arise across different contexts and countries and a willingness to engage with the potential implications of this for the strategy are needed. In terms of the legal and regulatory framework, a series of challenges are often cited for why reforms have limited impact. These typically include questions about the level of political commitment to support change and the lack of human and financial resources to implement laws and policies. What is less evident is reflection about other possible reasons for the limited impact of reform.

There is limited evidence of country programmes questioning whether it is the actual content of the laws and policies that might be the main challenge. Many laws are more aligned to, for example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child than they are to the socio-cultural reality of the countries where they are intended to apply. The result of this is that they often fail to resonate with populations or are not seen as being relevant. Similarly, laws proposing models of a child protection system based on Western realities are likely to fail the test of implementation because they do not correspond to the capacities and resources available.

Political will and the lack of resources to support implementation are real challenges. But the relevance of these laws is also something worthy of further analysis. The purpose of strengthening these components of the system is ultimately to deliver better outcomes for children. If they consistently fail to deliver these outcomes, then maybe questions need to be asked about the benefits of continuing to invest resources in this area. To look at this challenge from another perspective, there is the issue of why resources continue to be directed at a component of the system that generally falls short or fails entirely of delivering better outcomes for children.



## Dynamics of the system – Interrelationships

Systems should be dynamic (adaptive). To function effectively, the necessary components must be in place for them to work together. Strengthening the interrelationships among these components is a core function of the systems approach. Neither the guidance for the Child Protection Initiative nor the Save the Children Norway strategy fully develops the concept of interrelationships among the components. The Save the Children Norway strategy also suggests that working on at least three of the five key elements equates with strengthening the system. This understanding, also reflected in the majority of the country programmes reviewed, underestimates the complexity of system strengthening and overlooks one of the basic principles of systems – the interrelationship between components.

Working on isolated components or a combination of elements that Save the Children believes are part of the child protection system is also problematic because it does not consider the potential for the same situation to be replicated several times by other organisations that might carry a different idea of a system. Interrelationship requires the organisation to see its work in relation to others and see how it integrates, converges or conflicts with others' work. A systemic perspective like this would allow programmes to consider at the same time that the child protection system is not an objective construct – that many models can exist and that different stakeholders have different perspectives and understandings of it. The challenge is to accept that there is no clear right and wrong on these perspectives. The national child protection system should reflect an honest balance of world views, aspirations and values. Working on a system goes well beyond the establishment or strengthening of technical aspects and processes.

System-strengthening strategies need to take into account not only the actual components of the system but also all the processes, resources, interrelationships and synergies to ensure that the construct both looks like a system and functions as one. Understanding systems in this way will then influence the way Save the Children approaches the system-strengthening process and clarifies its position in relation to other actors. The country strategic plans for 2010–2013 fail to convey a clear position on just what the role or position is and how the organisation will work to strengthen the system beyond the targeting of specific components.

## Child protection versus children's rights

The issues of contextual relevance and appropriateness are further compounded by oversimplifying the links between child protection and promotion of children's rights in general, especially promoting compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The mapping of Save the Children Norway's child protection portfolio shows that the focus of programmes is still primarily issue or thematic based. Issues about system strengthening are included in some of the strategic frameworks for child rights governance, but these appear to be more focused on children's rights and compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child than on the child protection system.

Promoting compliance is often cited as one of the core principles in the country strategic plans. But there is a risk that this might both confuse and lead to an overly prescriptive approach to system strengthening. The promotion of children's rights, child protection and system strengthening are certainly interrelated, but they are also different. Conceptual clarity is required to ensure that these concepts are applied more effectively in practice.

## Sustainability

The sustainability of system strengthening, as opposed to issue-based approaches to child

protection, is an assumption at the heart of the country strategic plans. Global and regional strategic position papers, academic discourse and recommendations from research have advocated that system strengthening is a more effective and sustainable approach, although it does not occur automatically. Key to realising the potential sustainability that the systems approach has to offer is changing the way child protection is undertaken in practice.

Looking at support to community-based child protection mechanisms provides a useful case study on the sustainability question. Long held as a more sustainable model – an assumption that research is beginning to demonstrate as being highly questionable, these mechanisms and networks are rolled out much in the same way as they have been for the past 20-plus years.<sup>46</sup> From the literature reviewed, it does not appear that the approach to community-based child protection mechanisms has been altered or modified since the adoption of the system-strengthening strategies.

Committees or networks continue to be established or supported according to a de-contextualised blueprint or model rather than on a detailed analysis of what is most likely to be appropriate, relevant and ultimately effective in the long-term in a specific national context. As a result, there is a genuine risk that the current approach to involving communities in child protection misses the opportunity to build upon pre-existing protective assets within those communities. At best, attempts are made to make community-based child protection committees or networks culturally sensitive. These networks and committees can and do function at times, but usually this is the case if the external actor is there to support them. Increasingly, the trend appears to be to hand over the support of these networks to governments that have no staff, finances or logistical means for fulfilling this responsibility.

Even in contexts in which they have demonstrated more robustness and degrees of some self-sufficiency, the community-based mechanisms are increasingly being asked to fulfil the gaps in services imagined in the system model that is captured by the regulatory framework. They are being asked to assume the role of formal service providers – something that will fundamentally alter the nature of their relationships with the communities in which they operate. Questions over whether or not this is appropriate, effective or likely to deliver the best outcomes for children are often overlooked in this process. When this is not the case, the community-based mechanisms are used to promote awareness and to identify and refer cases to a higher level; however, reports from all eight countries reviewed contain references to the generalised lack of available services for child protection.

Save the Children programmes show results in establishing and supporting community-based child protection mechanisms and the conviction that they are the right model because they worked in the ‘pilot’ or geographical area where they were highly and intensively supported by the organisation. The ‘buy-in’ of the model by the government on paper, even in law, does not make these models sustainable or actually viable. None of the programmes have produced any calculations of the financial and capacity requirements to bring these models to national scale. The government commitment in these cases could end up as another idle policy or unimplemented law.

A specific assumption that keeps on surfacing across the eight programmes is the use of volunteers as a sustainable approach. The volunteers are a prominent feature of the community-based mechanisms. They are the same aspect that features in the cited challenges of these mechanisms in terms of stability, turnover and the intense training they

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<sup>46</sup> See Wessels, M. (2009), *What are We Learning About Protecting Children in the Community: An inter-agency review of evidence on community-based child protection mechanisms*, London: Save the Children Fund; or The Columbia Group for Children in Adversity (2011), *An Ethnographic Study of Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms and Their Linkages with the National Child Protection System of Sierra Leone*, Freetown.

require. This suggests that sometimes there is confusion between cheaper solutions and sustainability.

More generally, the issue of sustainability is intrinsically linked to the availability of resources. Increasing the financial envelope for child protection is being addressed through the child rights governance programmes. Although some successes have been achieved, these are generally exceptions. Starting with the development of a viable vision or plans for the system, the human and financial requirements also need to be addressed for the potential sustainability that the approach has to offer to become a reality.

## Inclusiveness

The country programmes perceive that the systems approach has improved the way they work with a range of partners and promotes greater participation and ownership on the part of government, civil society, communities and children. Stronger relationships appear to have been developed with all levels of government. The result is a more balanced approach that focuses on how Save the Children can support national governments at the national and subnational levels. This is significant and necessary because government needs to take a leading role in system strengthening. At the same time, government needs to increase its capacity to both monitor and deliver services at the subnational level.

The systems approach was also reported to be influencing how Save the Children works with communities – not just through child protection committees or networks but also with civil society groups. The participation of children was deemed to be a positive outcome associated with the approach by giving more structure to the way children are consulted on protection issues and allowing their views to be shared more widely. Establishing stronger links between communities and national planning and policy development processes appears to have improved how children are being consulted. A positive outcome of this is that the opinions of children are being heard more widely, and they are finding increasing opportunities to influence how protection issues are addressed.

Unfortunately, the issue of inclusiveness was not something that emerged in a detailed or explicit manner from the literature review, the online survey or the semi-structured interviews. Beyond the general points mentioned here, the only other references were in the country progress reports' references to categories of vulnerable children or child participation and only one country referenced it in the results achieved.<sup>47</sup> Revisiting how inclusiveness is both approached and reported may be necessary at least in terms of how it is recorded and reported.

## Monitoring and evaluation

In the Save the Children Norway strategy, there is considerable emphasis on measurement and the need for solid data, knowledge, research and evaluation (this is also reflected in the global strategy). Although Save the Children Norway has put in place a mechanism and processes for monitoring and evaluation, this review identified a number of issues with the current way of doing things. Some of the challenges in terms of monitoring and evaluation stem for the strategic planning process in which there appears to be a degree of confusion over what constitutes results, indicators and outputs. Establishing clear indicators, results and outputs at the start of a strategic plan is essential for laying a solid foundation for the duration of a programme, especially if one of the objectives is to measure outcomes for children.

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<sup>47</sup> This was the Cambodia country programme.

The five-year strategic plan notes that “qualitative narrative reports, case stories and evaluations will continue to be the most important documentation of results. These more in-depth analyses are necessary in order to understand the complexity and causes of changes in children’s lives and thus to understand what accounts for different results in different contexts”. In-depth qualitative measurements are certainly important in an area such as child protection. But they need to be undertaken in a rigorous or scientific manner if the data and evidence they produce are to be useful for programme purposes. Furthermore, qualitative methods need to be complemented by quantitative data so that triangulation can occur. More important is the role of independent evaluation, which is essential in terms of ensuring that programmes are assessed from an objective perspective and with a certain degree of critical distance.

The review found the Questback system currently used to be lacking in terms of its ability to produce ‘hard data’ or evidence on the impact of programmes or clear results for children. The system does appear to be useful in terms of producing overview or indicative reports of progress and for picking up general trends over time in relation to the five key elements of system strengthening – at least in a macro sense. The biggest challenge mentioned in relation to Questback is that it is largely subjective and based upon the perspective of the country programme staff completing the relevant forms and data recording sheets. This subjectivity can lead to cases of contradicting macro information from year to year. Internal analysis and reflection on programmes is useful, but it might be useful for Save the Children Norway to consider how its monitoring and evaluation mechanism could be further strengthened through the use of more detailed and explicit indicators for the systems approach.

## Section IV: Conclusion and recommendations

There is a widely held perception among the eight country programmes that the adoption of the system-strengthening approach is improving the effectiveness of child protection activities supported by Save the Children Norway. The strategic shift away from focusing on specific child protection issues is seen as giving programmes a more holistic understanding of both the root causes of child protection concerns and how Save the Children needs to reposition itself to deliver better outcomes for children.

Though much of the evidence present in this review relates to process results, it is clear that the programmes are in transition and are now striving to bring about better outcomes for children through the system-strengthening approach. The discourse of systems is filtering through more at the level of programmes. Although the transition is not yet complete, experience and learning are developing. It is essential that what has been learned over the past four years is now reinforced through additional support and capacity building. This needs to happen as a matter of priority so that country programmes fully appreciate what the systems approach entails and its implications for child protection programmes at the county level.

Although the country programmes encountered many challenges during the strategic period under review, there is evidence that considerable learning and reflection have taken place as outlined in the challenges and learning subsections of the findings section of this report. The result is that the next strategic period offers the organisation the opportunity to embrace and further enhance the effectiveness of its system-strengthening activities. The transition has taken place and lessons have been learned. Now the challenge is to build on this to ensure that system strengthening delivers better outcomes for children.

As an organisation that prioritises system strengthening, Save the Children Norway has the opportunity to improve the way it works with country programmes and to influence the work of the Child Protection Initiative. Relevant learning from the country programmes and reviews such as this one can be shared and discussed within the organisation to continue improving the quality of the child protection system strengthening. The application of this approach is new, and child protection agencies need to constantly reflect on how systems are treated to ensure that the potential benefits are fully realised.

Organisations, such as Save the Children Norway, that are prepared to reflect and learn from their experiences can improve the practice and thinking on how to continue the evolution of the approach and thus deliver better outcomes for children. System strengthening is a long-term and challenging process. If the benefits associated with the approach are to become reality, then the adaptation and enhancement of strategies needs to take place to inform how the process is addressed at the level of country programmes.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the analysis at the heart of the review process. They are presented as suggestions for improving the effectiveness and impact of Save the Children Norway's efforts to strengthen child protection systems in the countries supported by funding from Norad and through participation in the Child Protection Initiative.

#### **1. Update the approach to system strengthening and strategy of Save the Children Norway**

The thinking on strengthening child protection systems has evolved over the course of the strategic period under review; as a result, it would be useful for Save the Children Norway

and the Child Protection Initiative to review and update how it approaches system strengthening, especially in terms of reflecting the emerging literature on the different typologies of systems.<sup>48</sup> This process should be conducted in conjunction with the country programmes to ensure that any revised approach is based on experience, learning and the reality of applying global strategies.

Any revised strategy or guidance notes should be based on the existing Save the Children International strategy and provide clear and practical advice on how to implement the strategy, including harmonising it with the Child Protection Initiative. Consideration should be given to providing more guidance on the contextualising of strategies within national realities (including the convincing appraisal and in-depth understanding of resources and the socio-cultural and political environment), the interrelationships and dynamics across the system and the role and position of Save the Children International and Norway in the system-strengthening process.

## **2. Clarify and give guidance on the role or position of Save the Children in system strengthening**

As an organisation committed to system strengthening, Save the Children, through the Child Protection Initiative, needs to clearly articulate its role in a particular national context. Support to the national system (and working at different levels) needs to frame the organisation's position, including how it will ensure that programme activities are situated within a wider analysis of the needs of the system or how the organisation is willing to support the fundamental process required by the system but that may not necessarily fall within its traditional areas of focus.

For example, is the organisation willing to be a facilitator and support national governments and communities to make the best choices for the system rather than pushing for Save the Children's view of the system or pushing its own models, approaches or vision for the system, in competition with others? These paths do not need to be mutually exclusive; but early experiences of system strengthening are often characterised by child protection actors advocating for and positioning 'their' approach rather than supporting governments and communities to develop a clear nationally owned vision. To be effective, this vision needs to 'make sense' to the communities it is designed to serve and resonate and be appropriate to the socio-cultural and political context in which they live.

## **3. Expand Save the Children staff capacity building**

System strengthening requires a range of skills beyond what might be referred to as traditional child protection technical skills. It demands a different skill set than children's rights programming. As a starting point, capacity building is required to ensure that programme staff fully understand or are conceptually clear on what a systems approach is and also appreciate what this will mean for them in practice. In addition, technical child protection skills need to be augmented with enhanced capacities in for example areas such as sociology, social anthropology, social welfare, social protection, institution strengthening and organisational learning. Developing staff capacity in areas will improve their skills to undertake analysis about the context in which they are working, deepen their understanding of how child protection issues are framed and addressed by communities and also the skills to undertake institutional analysis and support the reforms need to strengthening the system. Strategically, this is something that Save the Children Norway could advocate for within the

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<sup>48</sup> For example see Freymond, N. and Cameron, G. (2006), *Towards Positive Systems of Child and Family Welfare*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press; and Gilbert, N., Parton, N. and Skivenes, M. (2011), *Child Protection Systems: International trends and orientations*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.



Child Protection Initiative, considering it is the most appropriate forum for promoting greater consistency across all members.

It is not uncommon for there to be a time lag between when a new strategy comes into play and when the needed capacity building is provided. The process for developing the new country plans should ideally also encompass some form of capacity building specifically on the child protection system approach. The rationale behind this recommendation is simple – how can inputs to strengthen systems be maximised if the staff responsible for overseeing and managing these inputs are not sufficiently capable of doing so?

The capacity building should also stress that each context is unique and that different types of systems exist rather than there being a model or single approach. It is essential for programmes to be fully aware of the systems approach, child protection systems typologies and the different approaches to child protection as well as the Child Protection Initiative strategy and its guidance on systems. Practical guidance is needed on what information to gather to design a programme that is truly aimed at strengthening a national child protection system. In other words, providing programme staff the necessary understanding of the complexities and the skills they might need to bring in to make the system appropriate for the context.

#### **4. Revise the country strategic planning process and centre this on the system-strengthening approach**

The system-strengthening approach to child protection needs to be central to a country's strategic planning processes. In many of the plans for 2010–2013, it almost comes across as an afterthought or as another area of thematic programming. Country programmes need to 'think systems' at all stages of the strategic planning process, including when analysing baseline information and in defining their goals, objectives and outcome areas. Staff need to constantly keep in mind how their work to support the system will deliver better outcomes for children. This goes far beyond the idea that a system connects local levels with provincial levels or involves upstream work with the government. Consider adopting a theory-of-change method for designing programmes. This process starts with analysis of the context and finishes with the verifying of the assumptions of the causality links explaining why Save the Children inputs would bring the planned change. This will raise the bar on the collection of baseline information and its analysis as well as the rigour of the planning, with more plausible causal loops.

It might be worthwhile to involve national counterparts, especially those from different levels of government, in the internal capacity building required for Save the Children staff. A joint approach to capacity building would ensure that all relevant actors are 'on the same page'. It also may help in terms of considering the different options and approaches for building a more contextually relevant and shared vision for the national child protection system. System strengthening requires the involvement and coordination of a coalition of stakeholders.

The role of government is often central to this process. The impact of Save the Children inputs is contingent upon the capacity of a government to lead, coordinate and manage the inputs of others. Despite the proliferation of the system-strengthening approach, it is generally the UN agencies and international NGOs that have a greater understanding of what this entails. But this often inadvertently undermines the capacity of a national government to assume the leadership role necessary to ensure that the process is locally owned.

## **5. Align Save the Children Norway's reporting process with the approach for system strengthening**

Activities to support system strengthening can at times become 'lost' within the current reporting formats and strategic plans that tend to describe a range of thematic activities that may or may not be having an impact on the overall system. The reporting format should be revised and restructured, with emphasis on the components of the system and on how the system functions in practice. All programme activities need to be discussed and linked to their impact on the system rather than as thematic issues. Basically this means all objectives and activities are explicitly framed within and reported on in terms their impact for the system. Impact of all activities should be analysed for how it is contributing to or strengthening the system. The importance of documenting results and outcomes that will provide clear and verifiable evidence of better outcomes for children needs to be stressed.

## **6. Review and revise the monitoring and evaluation process to deliver solid evidence on outcomes for children**

From the evidence reviewed, the current approach to monitoring and evaluation is not sufficiently calibrated to capture the impact or outcomes for children. The approach to monitoring and evaluation, ideally in conjunction with the recommendation to review the strategic planning process, should capture sufficiently robust data and evidence. It might be useful to develop indicators beyond process indicators and bring qualitative analysis to the level of rigorous data. There is a need to overcome the confusion between qualitative data and anecdotal personal stories.

This is necessary for Save the Children Norway to demonstrate changes and better outcomes for children as a result of the organisation's inputs into system-strengthening activities. It is also important to stress that Save the Children in only likely to achieve meaningful results in partnership with others and that, as a result, the inputs it provides will need analysis as part of the overall effort to strengthen the system.

## **7. Clarify and provide guidance on what constitutes a better outcome for children**

Linked to the previous recommendation is the need to develop greater clarity on what constitutes a better outcome for children. Under other circumstances, this recommendation would be integrated into those for improving the strategic planning and monitoring and evaluation processes. However, Save the Children Norway highlights outcomes for children as one of its objectives for engaging in system strengthening, and thus the topic merits a standalone recommendation.

## **8. Improve the tracking of resources for system strengthening**

The review was tasked with analysing the level of resources committed to system strengthening between 2010 and 2013. This proved to be a real challenge, given the way that the strategic plans and budgets were developed. Because the language or systems terminology was not always used, or clearly used, in setting objectives and activities, the approach is at times lost. System strengthening does not appear as a priority area of expenditure in the mapping of Save the Children Norway's child protection portfolio.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Save the Children Norway (2013), *Mapping of Save the Children Norway's (SCN) Child Protection Portfolio*, Oslo.

## **9. Strengthen internal and external learning and knowledge management practices**

Learning and knowledge management are essential for the effective functioning of a system. Child protection organisations often display a tendency of ‘inward looking’ or allowing the mindset that ‘this is how ‘Save the Children does things’. This mindset now needs to shift. Protection staff need to think ‘outwardly’ and ensure that their learning is linked to the greater needs of the system and not just the organisation’s programming. The strategic objectives of Save the Children Norway can no longer be achieved in isolation from others; it is one actor among many within the overall system.

Prior to the adopting of system-strengthening approaches, child protection organisations tended to focus on their own programme or delivering in specific geographical areas where it might be the nominated lead agency for child protection. Working with a systems approach means that this is no longer the case. The impact of activities supported by Save the Children Norway now need to be considered at multiple levels and within the vision for the system as a whole.

Furthermore, a culture of exploring and being encouraged to think of innovative solutions or finding local ways to resolve a ‘problem’ should be supported. This links to the need to make use of the evidence and research already available within the organisation but that appears not to have been absorbed (such as the unabated success of the community-based child protection mechanisms).

Thinking internally and externally is likely to help ensure that useful learning from a leading child protection agency such as Save the Children will have a greater impact or reverberate across the system as a whole. A practical example of this shift in thinking might be to explore creating standards and guidelines for developing pilots, conducting research and proposing models for consideration by the wider child protection system. Too often, child protection organisations end up in competition with each other and advocating that ‘their’ model or approach is the best and should be scaled up. This is a negation of the systems approach and needs to be avoided. Learning and knowledge management should no longer be an internal issue for Save the Children but a tangible contribution to the effectiveness of every national child protection system.

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## Annex 1: Terms of Reference

### 1. Background

Save the Children is the world's leading independent organization for children. **Our vision** is a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation. **Our mission** is to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children, and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives. *Accountability, Ambition, Collaboration, Creativity* and *Integrity* are our shared values. Save the Children's theory of change describes how we work to create results for children: We will be the voice, we will achieve results at scale, we will be the innovator and we will build partnerships.

In the 2010-13 Strategy of Save the Children Norway (SCN) the following thematic areas were prioritized: Strengthen child rights governance (CRG); Fulfill children's right to basic education; Fulfill the rights of children affected by emergencies; Fulfill children's right to protection from violence and sexual abuse; and fulfill the right of children to protection from the impact of HIV and AIDS.

To fulfill children's right to protection against violence and sexual abuse the SCN strategy identified the following objectives:

- stronger systems for the protection of children
- more children are protected against, and get support after violence and sexual abuse
- more children are heard and participate in prevention against violence and abuse

Within the first objective "stronger systems for the protection of children" SCN defined a comprehensive child protection system through five key elements:

- national jurisdiction
- national plan of action
- child friendly key institutions
- surveillance and referral systems
- community based child protection initiatives

SCN has supported the strengthening of protection systems in 13 countries during the 2010-13 strategy period. Support to strengthening local and national child protection systems continues to be a priority area in the new SCN strategy for 2014-17. A new element in the 2014-17 strategy period is the integration of child protection into other thematic areas, in particular education and child rights Governance (CRG).

**Table 1: Total SCN funding to Child protection 2010-13 (per NOK 1000):**

Region	2010	2011	2012	2013
Africa	29 365	21 763	31 926	22 272
Latin America	3 870	3 566	3 395	2 537
Asia	11 990	12 354	9 017	4 320
Europe	16 271	13 500	5 475	2 312
Grand Total	61 496	51 183	49 813	31 441

### 2. Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the review is to document the key results achieved with funding from SCN/Norad in the strategy period of 2010-13 in the area of strengthening protection systems locally and nationally. The review should identify key successes and best practices and challenges as well as giving concrete recommendations for future programming in the area of strengthening protection systems within the current priority areas.

We anticipate that the desk review will give a thorough analysis and thus a deeper insight in the various mechanisms and components necessary for achieving sustainable results in the area of strengthening child protection systems.

The results emerging from the review process will be included in the Norad interim report for 2010-13 and be used for future strategic planning linked to the SCN new strategy 2014-17. The key learnings will be shared with various stakeholders, including Norad, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Save the Children International's Child Protection Global Initiative and other civil society partners in Norway and abroad.

### **3. Objectives and key review questions**

The overall objective of the review is to assess to what degree SCN has contributed to "stronger systems for the protection of children" and to what extent and how children have benefitted from these systems. The review will assess the different approaches taken by the various Country Offices to strengthen protection systems and provide an analysis of the main results achieved within the five key elements for a comprehensive child protection system (see the Background section).

Moreover, we would like the review to identify the key elements for success in this area and come up with good practices that may be replicated in other areas and/or brought to scale.

In the new strategic period 2014-17 the Country Offices have been asked to integrate the child protection system strengthening work into other thematic areas such as education or child rights governance. We know that some programmes already have an integrated approach, and we would therefore like the review to identify good experiences and lessons learned from this work, which we could bring into the new strategy period.

The review process shall respond to the following questions/issues (list is tentative and not exhaustive):

- Assess to what degree the SCN investment has resulted in strengthened child protection systems at the local and national levels
- Assess SCN's investments in terms of relevance and effectiveness
- Identify best practices and lessons learned
- Identify common challenges across countries
- Give an assessment of what components need to be in place in order to achieve success and ensure sustainability in the work to strengthen child protection systems
- Identify if and how children's participation has been a component in the efforts to strengthen child protection systems and assess the value of this component
- If possible make reference to outstanding work of other SC members in the area of child protection systems building/strengthening
- Assess the way marginalized groups such as children with disabilities and a gender perspective have been included in the work with strengthening protection systems.
- Identify how much of the SCN funding for the thematic area of child protection has been invested in strengthening protection systems locally and nationally
- Identify and assess lessons learned from programmes integrating child protection systems strengthening into other thematic areas such as education and child rights governance.

#### **4. Scope of the Review**

The review will cover SCN's investments in the strengthening of child protection systems during the strategy period 2010 – 2013. The main geographical scope of the review is the following selected countries from Africa (Ethiopia, Mozambique, Uganda, and Zimbabwe), Asia (Cambodia, Laos and Nepal) and Nicaragua in Latin America. These countries have received SCN/Norad funding throughout the period. The scope will be further discussed and finalised in dialogue between the consultant and SCN.

#### **5. Design and methodology**

The review will primarily be a desk study looking thoroughly at a variety of existing reports, evaluations and other documents. The following documents will be made available for the consultant during the review (list is not exhaustive):

- Strategies, policies and guidelines
- Project documents: Annual plans and reports, monitoring reports etc.
- Internal and external evaluations/review reports
- M&E data, including indicator reports
- Field visit reports
- Country specific reports published by credible international agencies to be used where relevant.

The review should include but not necessarily limit itself to the following methods:

- Desk review of relevant documents (See above)
- Key informant interviews with thematic advisors and other staff in SCN
- Skype conversations and e-mail/online survey with relevant country level staff and the CPI.

The evaluator has to take into account the guiding principles in the Save the Children International (SCI) Evaluation Handbook.<sup>1</sup>

#### **6. Organization, roles and responsibility**

The entire review process will be led and carried out by a consultant with excellent understanding of child rights and good governance for children in general and child protection programming including child protection systems in particular. Furthermore, the consultant should have extensive relevant research and/or evaluation experience and be able to extract relevant information and do thorough analyses based on existing written documentation. SCN will select the consultant based on the letter of interest and the financial proposal submitted.

The consultant will be responsible for developing a sound research methodology, planning and conducting a consultative review, managing the data collection, undertaking a thorough analysis of the data collected, as well as writing the report and presenting the findings and recommendations.

SCN will be responsible for facilitating the review process by providing relevant documents and covering the review costs. Moreover, SCN will assist in contacting relevant country offices for skype calls and e-mail correspondence.

#### **7. Deliverables**

Within the agreed timeline, the consultant is expected to submit a draft review report for comments and feedback from the respective technical staff at SCN and Country Offices. The

report shall not exceed 30 pages. The consultant will give a presentation of the preliminary findings to SCN technical staff when the draft report is ready. The consultant is responsible for incorporating the feedback from the stakeholders in the final report and submit the report on time. SCN will share the report template to be used for report writing.

## 8. Process and timeline

Potential consultants are invited to submit a letter of interest no later than **March 14th 2014** with the following information:

- a brief outline (max 3 pages) of the consultant's ability to undertake the review tasks with reference to similar work carried out previously, and a confirmation of availability within the proposed time line
- Two samples of recent relevant study reports authored by the consultant
- CV of the consultant
- Proposed budget

The review process will take a maximum of 22 workdays. Activities are outlined as per the expected timeline as follows:

**Table 2: Tentative dates for the consultancy work**

Task	Proposed date	Responsibility
Receive letter of interest from consultants	14th March 2014	SCN
Finalize the recruitment process of the consultant	18th March 2014	SCN
Contract signed with the consultant	19th March 2014	SCN & Consultant
Submit draft report	11th April 2014	Consultant
Receive comments from SCN	18th April 2014	SCN
Submit final report	25th April 2014	Consultant

**Table 3: Timeframe for consultancy work**

Activities	Duration (in days)
Desk review of relevant documents	7
Key informant interviews with technical staff in Oslo and COs (Skype)	4
Development and execution of e-mail/on line survey	2
Compilation and analysis of findings and first draft of the report	5
Development of debrief presentation and debrief with SCN staff	1
Finalization of evaluation report and submission to SCN, including presentation of final report with SCN staff	3
<b>Total no of days:</b>	<b>22</b>

## 9. Budget

Save the Children Norway will fund the assessment by covering consultancy fees.

## 10. Desired competencies and skills of the consultant

- Advanced university degree in social sciences or equivalent with excellent understanding of child rights and good governance for children in general and child protection programming including child protection systems in particular
- Extensive and proven international experience in designing and conducting independent evaluations, desk studies, and/or research related to child rights/child protection projects and programmes
- Knowledge of gender programming and work to include marginalized groups is an asset
- Good communication skills, good analytical and writing skills

## 11. Contract and payments

Save the Children Norway will sign a consultancy contract with the consultant. Thirty percent of the total amount will be paid upon signing the contract and the remaining amount upon submission and approval of the final report.

For further information please contact us:

Hanne Lotte Moen, Senior adviser on child protection, SCN  
([hanne.lotte.moen@reddbarna.no](mailto:hanne.lotte.moen@reddbarna.no))

Channe Addisu Gebre, Senior M&E advisor, SCN ([channe.addisu.gebre@reddbarna.no](mailto:channe.addisu.gebre@reddbarna.no))

## Annex 2: List of respondents

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the following individuals:<sup>50</sup>

### Regional level

- › Monica Ita Darer
- › Claire Feinstein
- › *Dominique Pierre Plateau\**

### Zimbabwe

- › Matambo, Patience (Head of Child Protection Programme)

### Nicaragua

- › Juana Mercedes Delgado

### Mozambique

- › Judas Xavier Massingue

### Cambodia

- › *Henk van Beers, Programme Development and Quality\**
- › *Kaul Lyna, formerly Child Protection Capacity Building Coordinator, begun with Save the Children in 2009\**
- › *Nong Yarida, acting Child Rights Governance PC and previously child protection staff in Prey Veng Province\**
- › *Meth Lorn, provincial coordinator in Prey Veng Province\**

### Lao PDR

- › *Khomvanh Sayarath, Child Protection Program Manager\**
- › *Olivier Franchi, Country Director\**
- › *Sarah Morgan, Child Protection Technical Advisor\**
- › *Vilathong Souksenesamlane, Child Protection Program Manager, Luang Prabang Province \**

### Online survey

The list of respondents below were invited to contribute through the online survey:

### Cambodia

- › *Henk van Beers, Programme Development and Quality*
- › *Kaul Lyna, formerly child protection capacity building coordinator, begun with Save the Children in 2009*
- › *Meth Lorn, provincial coordinator in Prey Veng Province*
- › *Nong Yarida, acting Child Rights Governance PC and previously child protection staff in Prey Veng Province*

### Lao PDR

- › *Khomvanh Sayarath, Child Protection Programme Manager*
- › *Phonsavanh, Vientiane Child Protection Programme Officer*
- › *Sarah Morgan, Child Protection Technical Advisor*

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<sup>50</sup> Names of respondents followed by the \* were interviewed as part of a similar review process conducted on programmes supported by Save the Children Australia. Given the similar focus of the two review it was agreed to include relevant sections from interviews already completed to avoid placing unnecessary burdens on programme staff.



- › *Sisouphanh Phommahaxay, Sayaboury Child Protection Programme Manager*
- › *Soudany Phommavilay, Luang Prabang*
- › *Soulivong Soukchandy, Sayaboury*
- › *Vilathong Souksenesamlane, Luang Prabang Child Protection Programme Manager*

### **Zimbabwe**

- › *Matambo, Patience (Head of Child Protection Programme)*
- › *Mathathu, Valerie*
- › *Chikoka, David*
- › *Mukanyi, Sharon*
- › *Nyahuma, Gloria*
- › *Dube, Ropafadzo*
- › *Hauser, Sharon*

### **Ethiopia**

- › *Tsion Tefera*
- › *Kinfe Wubetu*
- › *Mekdes Admassu*
- › *Belete Tadesse*
- › *Desalegn Mekonnen*
- › *Getachew Desale*
- › *Genene Yilma*
- › *Kidest Mirtneh*
- › *Elias Debebe*

### **Nepal**

- › *'Guragai, Dilli'*
- › *Kirti Thapa*
- › *Shodashi Rayamajhi*
- › *Sumit Shah*
- › *Madan Gotame*
- › *Makar Sarki*
- › *Neelam Dhanushe*
- › *Hajra Shabnam*
- › *Mina Parajuli*
- › *Dil Air*

### **Nicaragua**

- › *Juana Mercedes Delgado*
- › *Mary, Mcinerney*
- › *Luz Sequeira*

### **Uganda**

- › *Helen Namulwana*
- › *Loram, Esther*
- › *Banduga, Ismail*
- › *Kateeba, Lydia*
- › *Mubiru, George*
- › *Ochom, Charles*

### **Mozambique**

- › *Judas Xavier Massingue*
- › *Abubacar Selemangy*
- › *Áster Charmila Emídio Siteo*
- › *Carla Júlio Comé*

- › *Gina Siteo*
- › *Hector de Vasconcelos Motatano*
- › *Ivan Amaral*
- › *Lesley Holst*
- › *Marcelo Soverano*
- › *Nely Simbine*
- › *Narciso Cumbe*
- › *Paola Franchi*

## Annex 3: Issues for consideration

The following list reflects the early stages of an internal discussion within Child Frontiers on how to improve strategic planning and programme implementation for systems strengthening. These discussions are on-going and the list below will be further developed and refined so should not be taken as definitive or prescriptive. The list is included here primarily for information sharing and in the hope that it might prove useful or help to generate internal discussion within Save the Children Norway on the systems strengthening approach.

Programmes working to strengthen child protection systems might find it useful to consider the following:<sup>51</sup>

- Ensure that programmes are based on **detailed analysis and understanding of the context** in which it operates. Ideally this would be based on the findings of a national mapping exercise or other substantive piece of research that analyses how the current system functions in practice or what people actually do when child protection issues arise.
- **Avoid making simplistic assumptions about how to affect change within a child protection system.** Systems strengthening is a complex process and changes are unlikely to come about in a linear manner. In complex child protection systems they are a whole range of structures, process, actors, contextual issues, etc. constantly interacting with each other. In other words, the process of change needs to consider a wide range of different variables if it is to be effective.
- **Decisions about the process of systems strengthening need to be based on evidence** of what works in a particular context. This requires augmenting monitoring and evaluation with learning and knowledge management strategies with a clear focus on demonstrating impact. This is necessary in order to show what works and to generate models of practice that might be up-scaled.
- Programmes should be situated within the context of a **vision for the national child protection system** (or other context if relevant). Ideally the systems strengthening approach should be the nexus around which all programme activities are developed. National and international actors need to align and coordinate their strategic plans under a common vision for a child protection system driven by government.
- **Incorporate a range of different perspectives** and especially those of children, families and communities. Understanding how people both define and take steps to deal with protection issues helps in designing services that will resonate or make sense to them. Ultimately, the services provided by the system need to make sense not only to service providers but to the people who the services are intended to support.
- **Consider support to systems strengthening relative to the activities of other child protection actors.** It is essential that each child protection agency consider and articulate its contribution to the strengthening of the system, particularly in relation to the programme priorities of other agencies. In addition, agencies can discuss areas of the system that are especially weak and require attention. Even if programmes continue to have a thematic focus or are concentrated on particular groups of children, it is important

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<sup>51</sup> This list is by no means exhaustive and the ideas presented here are essentially initial thinking around guidance for systems strengthening programming.

to also think about how these programmes can also contribute to strengthening the overall systems.

- Support needs to be **balanced across all of the different components and features of the system** – a system is only as strong as its weakest part. Systems strengthening needs to fully appreciate and take into account the interrelationships between all of the different components of the system which are normally less visible but no less important than the more concrete components (e.g. laws and policies, structures, etc.).
- Systems strengthening needs to be **viable and realistic** – the intended outcomes need to be achievable and can realistically delivered within a specific time frame based on the available resources. If the goal or objectives of a strategic plan are too vague or idealistic, disassociated from or not relevant to a particular context then they are unlikely to make any positive impact. A viable and realistic system avoids wishful thinking: it must set attainable targets and allocate human and financial resources commensurate with the requirements of the system.
- **Formal and informal actors should be seen as different parts of the same system** and should be clearly linked rather than dealt with in isolation from each other. Too often informal protection mechanisms and practices are ignored by policy makers or seen as negative or inferior when compared to formal services. Existing structures for child protection should be reinforced rather than supplanted with externally driven models at both national and community levels.
- **Systems strengthening requires a range of different competencies beyond knowledge of child protection or child rights**, especially in terms of understanding systems theory, processes of change, sociology or anthropology. Child protection actors therefore need to ensure they are developing their competency to actually undertake

Review conducted by