Evaluation Report

Thematic Evaluation of Save the Children Norway's Cooperation with Partners

Nepal Case Study

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15th September 2011

Contents

Abbreviations

AIN	Association of International NGOs
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRG	Child Rights Governance
CSP	Country Strategy Plan
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ECD	Early Childhood Development
HDI	Human Development Index
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
INGO	International Non Governmental Organisation
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
SCD	Save the Children Denmark
SCI	Save the Children International
SCN	Save the Children Norway
SCUK	Save the Children United Kingdom
SCUS	Save the Children United States
SWC	Social Welfare Council
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UP	Unified Presence

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

This evaluation of Save the Children Norway's approach to cooperating with partners comes more than 10 years after this became the established SCN way of working. In the late 1990s, the last remaining direct implementation projects were phased out. An evaluation of SCN's global partnership approach was carried out by INTRAC in 2001 so another external review of this key aspect of SCN's way of working is timely.

But the evaluation is also important in the context of the unification process of the Member agencies of Save the Children to capture the positive aspects of what has been the experience to date in partnership. The Nepal evaluation is one of a four country review on the impact of SCN's cooperation with partners also covering Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Nicaragua (plus a review of partnership in Ethiopia organised separately). In addition to country reports there will be an overview analysis and together these are expected to inform the future partnership policy of Save the Children Norway and possibly that of SC International.

Save the Children Nepal was established as a unified presence of SCN, SCUS and SC Japan (SCJ) in 2009/2010 and from 1st January 2011 became a country programme under the auspices of Save the Children International (SCI). The evaluation aims principally to look backwards in learning lessons up to 2009 but also includes aspects of the present as partners described more recent experiences. The fieldwork took place in July 2011 drawing on semi structured interviews with a cross section of fifteen partners and two former partners. In addition, a workshop and focus groups were held with children, interviews were held with key informants in Nepal, relevant documents reviewed and a validation workshop was held with partners and SC Nepal staff.

In terms of the context, Nepal is unusual in that international NGOs are obliged by law to partner with local civil society organisations. This has meant that the quality of partnerships is a concern for all INGOs and their network has developed a set of partnership guidelines promoting similar principles to those of SCN. CSOs have increased in number exponentially to over 30,000 since they were liberalised in 1990 but only a much smaller percentage are fully active and have a constituency of members. Nepal is also distinctive in having some 10,000 active children's clubs disseminating and working towards the realisation of children's rights, a movement largely driven by Save the Children in the 1990s.

The main findings were as follows:

Understanding of Partnership
Partners considered the main elements of partnership to be a shared vision and values, mutual trust, respect and equality. These concepts are in harmony with SCN's policy and with SC Nepal's draft partnership policy. However, partners raised the notion that inequity was inevitable in a donor/receiver relationship and, on a broader level, questions were raised about how far the principles of the Paris Declaration for harmonising donor programming with national agendas is being followed in practice. To mitigate issues of dominant agendas, partners expressed the view that they should be actively involved in country level thematic strategy development so that community views and experiences are adequately fed into approaches. Recognition was given to the need for transparency and for open debates to maintain the mutuality of partnerships

and manage expectations on both sides. In relation to the types of partnership, SC Nepal staff aim to distinguish more clearly between partnership and sub-contracting, shorter and longer-term collaboration in the upcoming policy.

Partner Selection
Partner selection for SCN in former years was based on shared values and commitment to children's rights as a starting point, followed by joint working over a 'courtship' period of a few years before the relationship matured into a partnership. Partners and SC Nepal agreed that this was a good practice. The majority of former SCN partners had not undergone a formal assessment of organisational capacity although this will be expected in the future. SC Nepal has begun participatory organisational assessments with partners that lead to capacity building plans and targets. This would be a more positive approach for the future than an audit approach.

Proposal Development
For SCN partners in former years, proposals were tailored to SCN strategic plans and based within budget ceilings but there was flexibility and partners were encouraged to introduce their own ideas. Partners expressed a concern that proposals have become more focused on coverage for service delivery and less on community empowerment and they were also concerned that annual (as opposed to multi annual) agreements do not provide sufficient security for their work with communities.

Following up with Partners
SCN had followed up very closely with partners, providing mentoring support on a regular basis, engaging them in review meetings and annual partner forums and providing training workshops. While the majority of SCN staff had treated partners with respect, less confident staff could take a 'bossy' attitude sometimes that can challenge the foundation of mutual respect. Partners noted that since unification regular contact had been maintained or increased and valued the placement of technical advisors in regional officers. However, regret was expressed at the reduced contact with senior management that has left partners feeling more distant from decision makers.

Financial Accountability
In terms of systems, procedures and accountability, partners had been familiar with SCN's systems and considered them to be appropriate. Since unification, SC Nepal had provided partners with financial software that they can also use with other donors that was considered a positive move. However, concerns were expressed about the shift to monthly (from three monthly) reporting periods, the fact that the monthly period does not coincide with a calendar month or with the Government's four month reporting period and there have been delays in fund disbursal at the beginning of the year. One partnership had been terminated under the zero tolerance to fraud policy demonstrating that this is taken seriously and acted upon.

Capacity Building
SCN in former years made considerable investments in capacity building that were highly appreciated by partners. These included child rights and child participation, technical sectors and organisational development. The weakest investments were considered to be in advocacy, network building and resource mobilisation for sustainability. SCUS had managed a large organisational development programme over several years while SCJ had made considerable investments in the technical sectors. Since unification a positive move was the introduction of 2% of partner budgets for

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organisational development. The major concern was how to maintain the strong drive for capacity building with demands for rapid results and reducing training budgets.

Children as Partners
Children from child clubs analysed the extent to which they were involved, consulted, collaborated or led projects with their adult partners. They collaborate more than lead especially in terms of identifying problems and deciding how to address them. Children considered that partners have provided good support in training and material support but they would like partners to more closely align to children's own plans rather than providing ad hoc events. They also expressed concern about visits (such as this evaluation) that extract data and do not provide feedback.

Monitoring and Evaluation
SCN had emphasised qualitative monitoring through case studies and interviews in addition to quantitative data on results. Partners expressed a view that qualitative monitoring has reduced in favour in head counting for service delivery through the Total Reach system and they were also concerned that the data tends to serve SC Nepal's needs more than their own. However, they were satisfied with support received in M&E.

Exit Strategies and Sustainability
The SCN policy specifies that phase out should be planned from the early stages of a partnership as part of the project cycle. SCN and partners agreed that this had not happened and that staff found it a sensitive area to address. Nevertheless, SCN had introduced an innovative programme of linking NGO partners to private companies with the aim of promoting sustainability.

Changes in the Capacity of Partners
SCN had made a significant difference to the mission, strategy, reputation and institutional growth of partners and especially to their child rights/child participation focus. SCUS had also helped organisations to grow, especially in terms of governance, systems and management while SCJ had catalysed capacity in technical sectors. There were multiple examples of service delivery practices that SCN had supported partners to introduce (home based ECD, child friendly schools, child clubs) while significant achievements were made in advocacy (adoption of the child friendly model by the Ministry of Education, declaration of schools as zones of peace, contributions to the Child Rights Act and adoption of Minimum Standards for Child Care Institutions). In terms of development in partner's inter-relationships, their view is that they developed closer relations with the District Education and Health Offices, the All Party mechanism at District level and with community and user's groups as a result of SC support.

Evaluation Recommendations
Recommendations include: a) maintaining an emphasis on the *quality of partner relationships* in the future (drawing on a set of ideas based on partner views), b) engaging partners in strategic planning and local situation analyses, c) continuing to invest in capacity building and considering new options such as e-learning, d) placing annual contracts in a medium term framework e) addressing issues of upward or downward accountability through a set of specific suggestions, f) continue to link NGOs to the private sector g) train children's clubs in the project cycle and other proposals h) address dilemmas of donor reluctance to invest in long term capacity building through a four-way debate (GoN, donors, NGOs and INGOs) and analyse a set of specific points in relation to the draft partnership policy.

1. Introduction

<u>1.1 Background to Evaluation</u>
This evaluation of Save the Children Norway's (SCN's) approach to cooperating with partners comes more than 10 years after this became the established SCN way of working. In the late 1990s, the last remaining direct implementation (sometimes known as 'self implementation') projects were phased out. An evaluation of SCN's global partnership approach was carried out by INTRAC in 2001, so another external review of this key aspect of SCN's way of working is timely.

But this evaluation is also important as other countries follow Nepal in the organisational transformation towards a single presence managed by Save the Children International (SCI). In this process, the wish would clearly be that the positive aspects of what has been the experience to date in partnership are not lost, while the negative aspects are recognised and addressed.

In reviewing the partnership approach, the key SCN document is the *Policy for Strengthening Local Capacity 2007-2009.* Key points are as follows:
- *Sustained* impact on children's rights can only be achieved when national and local government and local people take responsibility for their future.
- SCN recognises that the State bears the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that children's rights are implemented. SCN can work with the State directly as an important partner, especially ministries of education, social welfare and justice.
- The goal of SCN with civil society partners[1] is to *build their competence to influence State duty bearers* to fulfil, respect and protect the rights of children. Influencing the State can be through highlighting potential abuses or showing new models to address a problem. Civil society also has an important role to play in informing the public about their rights while child rights based civil society organisations (CSOs) build their advocacy work on evidence generated from direct interaction with children. SCN supports partners to become change agents within their society and carry out advocacy work, constituency building and service delivery.
- SCN considers a mix of state and civil society partners as a strength although working with civil society would normally be prioritised. When supporting the State directly, SCN will facilitate dialogue and participation between civil society and the state on the realisation of children's rights.

This perspective implies that building a <u>child rights based civil society</u> can be a goal in itself. This is quite different from working with partners as a means to achieve a specific project objective. The SCN Global Strategy 2010-2013 states that *'Our primary goal is achieving results for children. Lasting change is dependent on building local capacity and, in certain situations, increased capacity for partner organisations is in itself a goal.'*

The Policy for Strengthening Local Capacity also sets out a number of principles on which partnerships should be based including common goals in the short or long term, equity and respect, transparency and trust, sharing information, mutual learning, adjustment to local contexts, child rights programming as a basic framework and quality assurance/value for money. It should be noted that the principles that form the basis of

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[1] Principally NGOs, faith based organizations and child led groups

SCN's work in partnership are in close harmony with the priorities identified by southern partners in a 2010 survey on partnership conducted by Keystone[2]. Partners in the Keystone survey emphasised mutual respect and accountability, transparency in programmes and finance, clarity of procedures, openness in discussion, not being treated as a sub contractor, flexibility and openness to changes, support to strategic planning and promoting the position of the southern partner in advocacy. The *practice* of partnership will be tested against these approaches and principles in the evaluation.

This Nepal report is one of four case studies being carried out as part of this evaluation – the other countries being Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Nicaragua[3]. These countries will each have a similar report, and there will also be a global report bringing all these experiences together, synthesising the key learning points.

1.2 Terms of Reference and Summary
The main purpose of this evaluation as expressed in the Terms of Reference (ToR) – is to provide an insight into SCN's work with partners, build learning and ensure accountability by:

1. Providing evidence of impact (positive and negative, intended or unintended outcome/impact) of SCN's cooperation with partners in five different countries; to what extent and how a) partners have been strengthened as providers of and advocators for children's rights, and b) how SCN through partner cooperation has added value to the overall capacity of key actors in the society where we work to address and fulfil children's rights.
2. Provide an oversight of different implementation models and identify and document good practices in cooperating with partners, both government and civil society, appropriate to the aim of the partnership and capacity building of the partner. This assessment should also provide evidence of enabling versus obstructing factors in different contexts and discuss how this could be taken into account when setting the objective for partnerships and selecting partners and modalities.
3. Contribute to increased knowledge and understanding by bringing the organisation up to date on research/evaluation findings on partner cooperation (short state of the art report) and bring insight into and awareness of different and sometimes multiple objectives in partner cooperation.
4. Based on the above, provide input to the formation of future partnership cooperation in SCN supported programmes and SCI.

The full ToR is shown in Appendix A. The first, second and fourth objectives are covered in this report with respect to Nepal. The third has already been addressed by a separate paper on current thinking on partnership more widely, which will be incorporated in a summarised form into the global report.

1.3 Methodology
The methodology for the evaluation was initially outlined in the ToR issued by SCN (Appendix A) and further developed by INTRAC through its Inception Report, which was

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[2] In 2010, Keystone, a consortium of UK, South African and US based non profit organizations, undertook a large survey of southern partner perspectives on partnership. SCUS and SCUK participated in the survey. *NGO Partner Survey, 2010* available at: http://www.keystoneaccountability.org
[3] In addition, a parallel but separate evaluation is being carried out in Ethiopia, which will also feed into the overall learning.

then revised in the light of comments made by SCN staff and other stakeholders. The key aspects of the methodology can be summarised as follows and most data was collected in Nepal from 4-22nd July 2011.

Semi structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 15 current and 2 former partners (Appendix B and briefer version below).

Name	State/CSO / Strat Period / Budget in USD	Name	State/CSO / Strat Period / Budget n USD
Central Region		*Kathmandu*	
1.Tuki Association Sunkoshi (Child Sensitive Social Protection)	CSO 2000-2005 100-500,000	**9.Central Child Welfare Board (CCWB)** (Child Protection system strengthening)	State 2000-2005 100-500,000
2.Shakti Samuha (Child Protection from trafficking)	CSO 2000-2005 40-60,000	**10. CBR Patan (phased out)** (support for children with disabilities)	CSO Before 2000 20-40,000
3.Children-Women (CWISH) (Child Protection from sexual abuse)	CSO 2000-2005 60-100,000	*Eastern Region*	
Mid West Region		**11.SoVAA and Coord (SSCT)** (HIV and AIDS – youth capacity and prevention)	CSO 2006-2009 20-40,000
4.Soc Aware Centre (Child Protection –safer environment for girls)	CSO 2000-2005 60-100,000	**12.Child Dev Center(CDS) (**Child clubs, child protection)	CSO 2000-2005 100-500,000
5.Dalit Welfare Organization (DWO) (Access to quality ed, disaster risk reduction, child protection)	CSO 2006-2009 100-500,000	**13.Bhawani Intregrated Dev** (Education: ECD, school health, nutrition) – **SCUS**	CSO Before 2000 100-500,000
Western region		**14.Aasman Nepal** (Education: quality and child labour) – **SC Japan**	CSO 2000-2005 100-500,000
6.Hoste Hainse Child Dev. Society (HHCDS) (Child Protection – reinteg children affected by armed conflict)	CSO 2000-2005 40-60,000	*Far West Region*	
7.Gaja Youth Club (GYC) (Education – standards ECD, learning achievement schools)	CSO 2000-2005 100-500,000	**15.Comm Dev Center** (Education – teacher training, ECD facilitator training, livelihoods, income gen)	CSO 2006-2009 60-100,000
8. Safe (HIV/AIDS education in schools and through peer groups)	CSO 20-40,000	**16.Nep Nat Soc Wel Assoc (**Education: teacher training, school health, disaster m'ment, life search/rescue) – **SCUS**	CSO Before 2000 60-100,000
		17.Samaj Sewa, Doti (HIV and AIDS:community based care, CABA, prevention)	CSO 2000-2005 40-60,000

Table 1: Partners included in Semi Structured Interviews for the Evaluation

Interviews were based on a standardised protocol used in each of the case studies. The sample included 12 partners initiated by SCN (with a cross section across strategy periods and length of partnership, size of budget and principal thematic area). In addition, two partners initiated by SCUS and one partner by SCJ were included to identify good practice lessons and two former partners were interviewed to learn lessons on exit strategies.

The summary of the cross section of partners included in interviews is as follows:

Table 2: Summary of Partners in Semi Structured Interviews					
Strategy Period	**No. part**	**Size of budget**	**No. part**	**Principal Thematic Area**	**No. part**
Older than 2000	3	20-40,000	3	Child protection	6
2000-2005	10	40-60,000	3	Education	6
2006-2009	3	60-100,000	4	HIV&AIDS	3
Not recorded	1	100-500,000	7	Social Protection	1
				Disability rights	1
	17		17		17

Further to the semi structured interviews, data collection included:
- Interviews with key informants from the following institutions: Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Social Welfare Council, Ministry of Education, Norwegian Embassy, UNICEF, Association of International NGOs in Nepal (Appendix C)
- Interviews with SCI in Nepal staff (list in Appendix C)
- Initial meeting with partners and SCI staff to discuss perceptions and expectations
- Validation workshop towards the end of the fieldwork to debate initial findings with partners and SCI staff
  - Children's participation through a workshop with 15 children (7 boys, 8 girls) members of children's clubs plus 3 focus groups with a total of 25 boys and 9 girls). In these activities, children analysed the extent of their participation in club activities around the project cycle.
  - Questionnaires with adults supporting children's groups to assess their perceptions on the extent of children's participation
- Analysis of documentation (reference is made throughout the report)

The perceptions and experiences of partners were compared across size of partner (by budget) and length of partnership but no specific trends were observed by these groupings. Only one Government partner was included and some specific differences have been highlighted in relation to that partner compared to civil society organisations.

1.4 Constraints of Evaluation
The principal constraint was that there was no time to meet with state representatives at District level.

1.5 Time Perspective and Terminology
The report seeks to look backwards to learn lessons from SCN's engagement with partners up to the unification of Save the Children Nepal in 2009 and also to look forwards to current experiences. This makes terminology very important. Where the term SCN is used it relates to looking backwards to perspectives and experiences prior to

unification. In referring to current or future perspectives, SC Nepal is used. SCUS and SCJ are used to relate specifically to aspects of those organisations prior to unification.

<u>1.6 Structure of Report</u>
As mentioned, this is one of four case study reports, which all in turn feed into the global report. It is thus meant to stand alone, but also be part of a broader process. The report follows the same questions as in the ToR, but in some the order is adjusted to help the logical flow as follows:

- Programme description (brief overview of the context, country strategy and partner portfolio in Nepal – descriptive part of Objective 2)
- Relationship between SC and its Partners (analytical part of Objective 2).
- Changes in Capacity and Behaviour of Partners (first part of Objective 1)
- Contribution to Overall Capacity to Address Child Rights (second part of Objective 1)
- Summary and Recommendations (Objective 4).[4]

2. Programme Description

<u>2.1 Historical Development</u>
Save the Children UK was the first of the SC Members to establish a base in Nepal in 1976, followed by SCUS in 1981, SCN in 1984 and SCJ in 1992. Up to unification in 2009, SCN had spent twenty five years working in Nepal, working through a mixture of self-implementation and partnership for a decade from 1987 and exclusively through a partnership approach from 1997 to unification in 2009[5].

SCUK phased out in 2004 and SCN, SCUS and SCJ unified in 2009/2010 with SCN as Managing Member. SC Sweden and SC Finland are also Participating Members. On January 1st 2011 the Nepal Country Office became the first Save the Children International programme globally. At the point of unification, SC Nepal worked in 56 of the 75 Districts in the country.

<u>2.2 Context</u>
Three aspects of the context in Nepal are especially relevant to approaches to partnership and to partner selection: a) the regulatory environment for international NGOs, b) national civil society development and c) the service delivery context (state institutions) and progress towards the MDGs.

Regulatory environment for INGOs
INGOs are obliged by the Social Welfare Act of 1992 to partner with national organisations; direct implementation of programmes by international agencies is not permitted. The Social Welfare Council (SWC) oversees INGO interventions in Nepal and SWC approval is required for programme implementation. The SWC also undertakes assessments/evaluations of INGO performance and undertook an evaluation of SC in 2009[6]. Currently there are 235 INGOs in Nepal of which some 200 are active in

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[4] Objective 3 is addressed in the separate 'State of the Art' report, but the lessons learned from this are reflected in the analysis throughout the report.

[5] See: ODC, SCN, CWIN, 2002, *Evaluation of Partnership Approach of SCN,* 2002 on partnership in Nepal.

[6] SWC, 2009, *Assessment of projects supported by Save the Children Norway in Nepal (SCN/N), 2005 – 2009,* Social Welfare Council.

programme implementation and 98 are members of the Association for International NGOs in Nepal (AIN)[7].

The Social Welfare Council informed the evaluation of plans to introduce new regulations that will oblige both INGOs and large NGOs to partner with locally based organisations at District level rather than bringing existing partners to the Districts. The aim is to further extend the capacity of locally based organisations. The legal framework as a whole promotes local ownership of programmes and has accelerated the development of local CSOs.

Given that all INGOs in Nepal work in partnership with national organisations, the quality of partnership is a major issue and the INGO coordination group, Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN), has developed a set of partnership guidelines (2005) to promote high standards of governance, performance and accountability in partner relations[8]. The guidelines, effectively a voluntary code of conduct for INGOs, promote accountability to stakeholders (including rights-holders), transparency on how resources are raised, mutual learning and sharing with partners, longer-term partnerships, transparent partner selection based on clear criteria and written contractual agreements with specific programme objectives, indicators and time-bound targets.

SC in Nepal, as one of the leading members of AIN and a participant in the working group on partnership, was part of a recent analysis of the extent to which the guidelines are applied in practice (2010[9]). Principal conclusions were that there is a high level of accountability to NGO partners and stakeholders but accountability to donors is higher. INGOs were found to be strong on demonstrating programme effectiveness through reviews, evaluations and impact measurement. Transparency and engagement with Government is not as strong at District level as at central level.

In addition to the code of conduct, the AIN website includes tools, training materials (including a whole set developed by SCUS) and many examples of good practice in NGO partnership.

Civil society development
Civil society development was closely controlled until the end of the Punchayat (single party) regime in 1990. From an estimated 37 NGOs in 1987[10], the number has grown exponentially to some 30.284 national NGOs registered with the Social Welfare Council in 2011. However, respondents in the evaluation considered that the vast majority are inactive and the NGO Federation of Nepal (NGN), with a membership of 5,227 organisations, may be a more reliable indicator of active development CSOs. Several respondents in the evaluation stated that many apparent NGOs function virtually as family businesses while others are linked to political parties, so there is a strong emphasis on the quality of governance when partnering with CSOs.

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[7] Information provided by SC Office in consultation with AIN.
[8] *Partnership Guidelines for Working in Nepal* available on http://www.ain.org.np
[9] AIN, 2010, *The Institutional Governance Practices of Members,* AIN, Kathmandu.
[10] Asian Development Bank, 2006, *Overview of Civil Society, Nepal.*

As part of a global survey in 2006, Civicus undertook an analysis of the development of Nepali CSOs (2006[11]). Key findings were that CSOs are diverse in nature reflecting social, economic and political plurality although they tend to be urban based. However, they had very limited infrastructure and weak human resource and communications capacity. The majority were ineffectual in policy analysis and in holding the state to account. The recommendations, not surprisingly, included redoubling efforts by INGOs in their work to build capacity amongst NGOs.

In relation to children's participation, Nepal is exceptional in having some 10,000 functioning children's clubs[12]. SCN played a significant role in establishing many of the clubs, largely evolving from the child-to-child model in the early 1990s[13]. The network Consortium of Organisations Working for Child Participation (established in 2000) that brings together around 50 organisations promoting clubs has the capacity and constituency to lobby and dialogue with the state on child rights issues. A second network for child rights, CZOP (National Coalition for Children as Zones of Peace) that includes 26 organisations also dialogues on children's rights and social policy.

State Institutions and the MDGs
In spite of political turmoil with ten years of conflict from 1996 and difficulties in state building since that time[14], social indicators in Nepal have improved considerably in recent years (poverty, child mortality, water and sanitation, malaria, TB) and in some areas the MDGs are likely to be achieved[15]. However, development is uneven across the country and across ethnic groups.

Service delivery is focused through 75 Districts that have District Development Committees (DDC) while development planning is also undertaken at local level through Village Development Committees (4,000 VDCs). At the present time, the new Constitution is still under debate and there is uncertainty of whether the country will eventually adopt a federal system to ensure effective inclusion of all groups. This could have far-reaching effects on governance and service delivery in the future but for the present, SC Nepal is focusing largely at District and Central levels. Some funding streams are available for NGOs at District level.

UNDP's analysis of the Human Development Index across regions showed the Mid Western Region to have the lowest ratings in terms of human development (and to have been most affected by death and displacement during the armed conflict)[16]. The region with the lowest percentage living in poverty is the central development region, including Kathmandu.

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[11] Dahal, D and Timsina, T. 2006, *Civil Society in Nepal, Searching for a Viable Role,* Civicus, available at: http://www.civicus.org/new/media/CSI_Nepal_Executive_Summary.pdf   Sourced 6.9.2011.
[12] According to the Consortium of Organisations Working for Child Participation
[13] *Extracts from Children's Clubs of Nepal: a Democratic Experiment, October 2001.* Available at: *http://www.planotes.org/documents/plan_04205.pdf*
[14] The Comprehensive Peace Accord was signed in 2006 and an Interim Constitution established in 2007. The national Constituent Assembly was established in 2008 and the monarchy formally ended but it has not been possible since that time to reach consensus on the new constitution and state formation.
[15] SCI Annual Report, 2010.
[16] UNDP, 2009, *Nepal Human Development Report 2009,* Kathmandu, UNDP.

2.3 Summary of Strategy of SC Nepal

SC Nepal's 2010-2013 strategy emphasises an integrated approach to realising children's rights based on working in partnership with (mostly) CSO partners in a reduced number of Districts (planned to phase down to 20 Districts). Seven thematic areas are addressed: Child Rights Governance, Basic Education, Protection, Health and Nutrition, HIV and AIDS, Livelihoods and Emergencies and Disasters. Monitoring programme achievements is a priority and is expected to strengthen during the strategy with a reinforced database.

SC Nepal has a very strong reputation and is clearly regarded as the leading child rights agency, together with UNICEF (based on interviews with Social Welfare Council, Ministry of Education, NORAD and UNICEF).

2.4 Partner Policy and Strategy

A draft Partnership Policy has been prepared (February 2011) but not yet finalised. The draft encompasses the objectives of partnership, values and principles, typologies, approaches to capacity building, criteria for partner selection and indicators of successful partnership. Some suggestions in relation to approaches and gaps in the draft policy are included in the recommendations of this report.

2.5 Number and Type of Partners

Based on the partner list supplied for the evaluation, Nepal has a total of 82 funded partners, of which only 7 are state partners and 75 are CSOs. SC Project staff agreed that there is an imbalance in partnership between state and civil society, especially at the District level. SC also has non funded partnerships with UNICEF, Ministries and works with private sector organisations.

In terms of the average volume of funds managed by each partner, more than half of the 82 partners, (47 or 57%) received up to US$60,000 in funding, while 35 received over US$60,000 (Table 3). Of the 16 partners in the $100-500,000 bracket, the highest volume of funding to a single organisation is US$240,000. Over 75% of partners receiving over US$100,000 are long standing partners, between 5 and 15 years.

Table 3: Number of Partners by Grant Size and Recent Partnerships, 2011						
Region	**Up to 20,000**	**20,001-40,000**	**40,001-60,000**	**60,001-100,000**	**Over 100,000**	**Total**
Number Partners by grant size	13	18	16	18	16	81 (one not recorded)
Total partner funding by grant size	113,532	541,159	768, 947	1,389,746	2,812,419	5,625,803
Number new partnerships in last 3 years by grant size	8	9	3	6	4	30

Almost half of all funds managed by partners (USD 2.8mn) are implemented by the larger organisations managing budgets of over US$100,000. Clearly larger budgets imply lower transaction costs for SC Nepal as small organisations with lower budgets require the same (or often more) follow up and capacity building. However, SC Nepal has maintained multiple smaller grants with some two thirds of those established in the last three years being below US$60,000 (Table 3). Maintaining a balanced portfolio of smaller and larger partners allows for innovation alongside stable and reliable

programme implementation. Of 7 state partners, only 1 received funds over US$60,000 (Appendix D: full partner list).

Partners are based in all regions of Nepal with the highest total budget by region in the Western region and in second place the Mid Western region that has the lowest HDI indicators (Table 4)[17]. (Budgets included in table 4 are indicative only and were increased as more funding became available during 2011 reaching a total of US$7.5mn allocated to partners).

Table 4: Number of Partners and Cumulative Partner Grants by Region, 2011							
Region	Central	Kathmandu	Eastern	Western	Mid Western	Far Western	Total
Number Partners	11	7	14	21	16	13	82
Approx. funding by region in USD	806,675	411,370	1,055,527	1,312,457	1,280,969	758,805	5,625,803

Overall, 13 partners have more than ten years' experience of working with a Save the Children Member, while a further 28 have 6-10 years' experience (Table 5). However, it is evident that SC Nepal has remained active in seeking new partnerships as 15 were formed in the last 2 years.

Table 5: Partners by Length of Partnership 2011						
Region	Before 2000	2001-2005	2006-2009	2010-2011	No date recorded	Total
Number Partners	13	28	24	15	2	82
	16%	34%	30%	18%	2%	100%

In numerical terms, more than a quarter of partners (24 in 82) focus on protection as the principal thematic area and this rises to more than a third including those that work on protection together with education. However, many of these partners are part of CAAFAG programme (children associated with the armed forces and groups) and each partner implements a small component of the programme with a relatively low budget and coverage. In reality the highest percentage of funding and programme effort is likely to be what emerges from Table 6 as the second thematic area: education. Basic education includes primary and ECD and is the main thematic focus of 15 partners in 82, with a further 7 partners integrating education with livelihoods and health. Relatively few partners are working specifically in Child Rights Governance and only 1 partner recorded as working principally in health and nutrition.

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[17] NB. This table is based on information provided by SC Nepal at the time of the evaluation but it should be noted that values were indicative only as there was an increase in funding to partners during 2011 as more funding streams became available.

Table 6: Partners by Thematic Area								
Region	Child Prot	Basic Ed	HIV and AIDS	Emerg and Dis	CR Gov	Health and Nut	None stated	Total
No.Partners	24	15	13	8	4	1	3	
Prot with educ	7							
Ed with health		7						
	31	22	13	8	4	1	3	82

Geographically, there is a broad spread of thematic areas across regions (see Appendix E).

2.6 SCinNepal Structure and Staffing
Based on the organisational charts for the 2010 SC Annual Report, there are some 228 posts within SC Nepal (not including Bhutan), of which some three quarters are within programmes (as opposed to Support Services) and around half in the regional offices (as opposed to central level) (see Appendix F). The Regional Offices are largely responsible for the identification, selection and ongoing relationship with partners. In relation to the breakdown of staff by the number of partners, the Mid West region appears to have a higher staff to partner ratio than other regions, partly due the fact that it is a large geographical area with difficult terrain and has many isolated, remote zones (like the Karnali region).

Table no. 7 Regional Offices – Number of Posts in relation to Number of Partners, 2011					
	East	Central(inc. Kathmandu)	West	Mid-West	Far West
Number of Posts	19	14	18	43	18
Number of Partners	14	18	21	16	13
Ratio posts to partners	1.35	0.77	0.85	2.68	1.38

Within the HR Department there is a mid-level post, Coordinator of Partners and Organisational Development that is responsible for designing approaches to building partner capacity.

2.7 Breakdown of Funding
Based on a chart provided to the evaluation, the total funding in Nepal almost tripled between 2007 and 2010 in view of the unification process; 2007/8 are figures for SCN only, 2009 includes funds from SCUS/SCJ from April and figures for 2010 reflect all funds (see Table 7).

The percentage of funds allocated to partners appeared to reduce from 71.49% in 2007 (SCN alone) to 60.68% in 2010 (SC Nepal). However this comparison is indicative only as more funds become available during each year of which part are allocated to partners (and may not be reflected in these figures). Further, some funding streams, notably the Global Fund, are not included in the system for reasons of donor regulations. However, funds for 2011 (information provided separately) total US$13 million as of September 2011 of which US$7.5 million (58%) is allocated to partners, also suggesting a reduction in the percentage of funds allocated to partners.

Expend Type	2010 (ER 72.56)		2009 (ER 77.44)		2008 (ER 65.21)		2007 (ER 70.35)	
	USD	%	USD	%	USD	%	USD	%
Direct implement.	4,438,981.93	30.75	2,973,404.05	27.70	1,411,474.16	18.59	1,322,460.97	21.58
Partner implement.	8,761,026.57	60.68	6,327,857.90	58.96	5,517,319.95	72.65	4,380,189.92	71.49
Support services	1,237,507.06	8.57	1,431,722.33	13.34	665,676.95	8.77	424,499.49	6.93
Total	**14,437,515.56**	**100.0**	**10,732,984.30**	**100.0**	**7,594,471.08**	**100.0**	**6,127,150.38**	**100.0**

Table 7: Expenditure Analysis Provided to Partnership Evaluation
Converted from Nepali Rupees at exchange rates stated

3. Relationship between SCN and its Partners

This section is based principally on the sample of 15 current and 2 former partners plus other respondents included in semi structured interviews.

3.1 Conceptual Issues – Understanding of Partnership
The principal question in relation to concepts is whether partners and SC in Nepal shares the same notions of what constitutes an effective partnership.

The main concepts referenced by partners related to working together for common goals and objectives in a context of mutual trust, respect and equality. A shared vision and values were referenced as was the importance of mutual learning. One partner referred to *'mixing ideas and objectives (of both partners)'* and another to notions of *'moving together … while both partners have a voice ..'.* Another referred to partnership as meaning '*common understandings and joint efforts but also respect for each other's policies and guidelines.*'

SC Nepal's draft policy on partnership refers to many of the same basic principles: common purpose, mutual respect and recognition, transparency and accountability, flexibility and local adjustment, maintaining a balance of power and equity, mutual learning and long-term perspective.

However, it was on the question of maintaining a balance of power and equity where most issues were raised. Of the 12 SCN initiated partners[18], 7 CSO partners referred to notions of the *inevitability* of inequality due to the donor/implementer relationship. Of these, comments included: *'… a partner with money has more say and is more like a bigger brother' ……. another commented* '*ultimately the donor's decision is final and we are mere implementers'* and a third*, 'sometimes the relationship is between a giver and receiver and is not equal'.* SC Nepal's draft policy also acknowledges that equality is often not possible but it should be mitigated as far as possible by joint decision-making and transparency.

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[18] The 14 SCN initiated partners includes two partners than have ended their agreements but not the 3 partners that were initiated by SCUS or SCJ. The reason is that non SCN initiated partners were not part of full evaluations; interviews were intended principally to identify good practice lessons.

Government officials in analysing questions of the balance of power and equity referred to issues of donor harmonisation in the context of the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action and observed that *Nepal's* sustainable development agenda should take precedence over donor country or global agendas. One official respondent recognised that, in reality, donor demands for results often inhibit the capacity of INGOs to invest in the gradual capacity building of weaker organisations. In this context, some donors in Nepal have reduced funding for capacity building although the Norwegian Embassy representative clearly still supported long term organisational development of NGOs. The state official argued that donors should be challenged on this point.

An issue was raised of whether the end goal should be sustainable *results* for children's rights or sustainable *organisations* to deliver those rights. SC staff interviewed considered that sustainable *results* should take precedence and that organisations are means to an end. Given that SCN's policy states that building partner organisations as an end in itself is appropriate <u>in certain situations</u>, it can be argued that in the current state of development of CSOs in Nepal, it is not necessary to build local organisations as an end in itself.

<u>3.2 Characteristics of SCN's Partnership Approach in Practice</u>
CSO partners initiated by SCN valued the 'intimate, accessible and flexible' relationship and the fact that SCN had supported and encouraged innovative ideas beyond the project document. Importantly, there was a strong consensus (11 in 15 partners) that SCN's long term commitment to capacity building had been positive and distinguished SCN from other INGOs. Both Government and CSO partners valued the fact that SCN (and SC Nepal) had not tried to influence partners in political terms.

The one *state* partner included within the sample considered that SCN had provided technical and financial support closely aligned Government of Nepal (GoN) policies and organisational objectives. Other non-funded state partners interviewed (Ministry of Education, Social Welfare Council) concurred with this view and observed that the unification of Save the Children Members in Nepal was a positive move in that officials can now work with a single SC interlocutor. SC Nepal also has greater capacity to work at scale and is considered to be an ally of the Government in promoting donor harmonisation. SC is part of a Government/donor consultative group on education in view its expertise and leading role in that area.

However, in relation to issues of the power balance and whose agenda is followed, several points were raised. Two CSO partners and a state official noted a tendency towards global agendas in programming or data collection becoming more important than local needs. A CSO observed there is *'too much global and too little local'* while an official observed that it should '*set up agendas based on local reality'.* Two CSOs considered they had not been adequately engaged in strategic planning and that this also has an impact in the extent to which agendas are influenced towards global or local needs. Still in the context of SC agendas, another two long term partners considered that the relationship had shifted towards NGOs being sub-contractors to implement SC defined programmes and that project planning had become more restrictive and limited to annual contracting (rather than multi annual and strategic).

In the same vein, an official raised the question of whether most capacity building was designed to help organisations to implement programmes or whether in reality it focused

currently on donor driven needs for data collection. In essence, the official questioned whether capacity building aimed to enhance downward or upward accountability.

In terms of the *types* of partnership, SC staff raised the issue that not all working relationships should be considered as partnerships and this should be more carefully delineated in the future. Partnerships should be considered as longer term and one of the regional offices expressed the view that they should be of three or more years' duration and distinguished more clearly from sub-contracting. This question should be made clearer to partners themselves and relates to a separate point raised about the need to focus more on managing partner expectations. A senior staff member considered that part of managing partner expectations could be through being more open with partners about the constraints and dilemmas that SC faces as an agency.

3.3 Selection of Partners
SCN's policy for Strengthening Local Capacity requires country offices to undertake an initial analysis of shared values, policies and practices related to child rights followed by an assessment of administrative and technical capacity to achieve impact.

There was a consensus amongst partners and staff that shared values on children's rights was used the most fundamental criterion and a pre- condition to partner selection. Partner identification was mostly undertaken by teams in the Regions and staff were confident that they understood what was expected even though working criteria are in the process of finalisation.

In some cases, identification came through joint work in emergencies (e.g. through response to the Bhutan refugees or an earthquake) as SCN identified which groups appeared most concerned about children's interests and rights. In other cases, SCN identified grassroots associations or youth clubs that gradually formalised into associations and a partnership.

Once potential partners had been identified, SCN worked jointly with them over a period of two to four years, described by partners as a period of 'nurturing' or 'courtship'. During this time, some partners managed very small amounts of funding to test capacity. Once both sides were convinced of the value of a partnership, they would formalise the 'marriage'. Most partners felt this was a valuable and useful process.

In terms of a more formal assessment, no partner referred to having undergone a formal process of analysis of accounts packages and financial management systems. This may be because SC staff noted that it was only possible to undertake some 5-6 full assessments each year. Staff also observed that analysis of organizational capacity was usually included in programme evaluations after the partnership had been launched. Looking forward, SC Nepal is introducing participatory organisational development assessments with key partners that lead to a capacity building plan. If this approach can be used with procedures for partner *selection*, it will be regarded as more positive than undergoing assessments.

In relation to broader landscape scanning for partners within a strategic framework, the current approach is to seek a more limited number of strategic partners within the 20 focus Districts. Other aspects that could be addressed within strategic partner selection are: a) the balance between state and CSO partners at District or Regional level b) thematic area balance of partners in relation to local HDI/MDG indicators and c) the mix

of new partners to introduce innovative approaches to key rights issues compared to partnerships of longer duration.

SC Nepal is increasingly using bidding as a process for partner selection based around a specific set of programme goals. This shift reflects a reduction in 'free' money that had formerly allowed SCN to build the capacity of potentially good organisations and to support the organisation's own project ideas. However, the draft policy has retained 'limited search' partner selection that will allow for the introduction of smaller partners that would not be able to compete in bids but demonstrate commitment to child rights and have the potential to grow.

3.4 Development of Proposals

The majority of partners observed that in the formative stages of the partner relationship, project ideas tended to come from SCN based on the country strategy paper (CSP). As partners gained experience and a partnership agreement, they developed their own proposals and SCN staff provided comments. They were given a budget ceiling as a guideline and tailored proposals to the thematic areas and strategies within the SCN Country Strategy Plan but, as noted, SCN was flexible and partners were encouraged to be innovative.

Three issues were raised in relation to proposals and planning. First, as already noted, two partners observed that they had not been effectively engaged in recent strategic planning processes; one because they were not invited to engage in strategic planning by sector and the other because the time period allowed for consultation on the draft SC Country Strategy was too short for meaningful engagement. In order to fully 'own' strategic approaches, partners considered it was very important to engage at this stage.

Secondly, several organisations referred to the increased demands for data collection (see section on Monitoring and Evaluation), with the effect at proposal stage being to shift the emphasis towards a focus on coverage of service delivery rather than community empowerment. The third issue raised relates to time periods. With SCN, there was an expectation that if performance was adequate, partners would continue for the strategy period. Since unification, however, there had been a shift towards annual agreements not necessarily framed within a longer time period. There was a consensus amongst partners that one year agreements do not provide a sufficient level of security for their work with communities.

3.5 Visits, Communication, Accompaniment

Visits to partners amongst SCN initiated partnerships were frequent, varying from more than one or more a month (5 in 12 partners) to a visit every other month (7 in 12) depending largely on the distance from the SCN office. Regular interaction was considered positive and helpful, not intrusive. Phone communication was more frequent still and there was a consensus across partners that written communication was timely. Most partners considered that SCN was ready to help, one partner observed that when they request help, '*SC does everything it can'.*

However, two critical points were raised on communication and contacts. Although most SCN staff members were considered to have had appropriate skills and to treat partners with respect, four partners drew attention to some staff members taking a 'bossy' attitude and considered that this tended to happen more with less confident staff members.

Further, one partner considered that SC Nepal tended to be paternalistic towards their youth organisation, not taking them sufficiently seriously.

The second question raised is that since unification, partners now have more interaction with Programme Coordinators and Thematic Coordinators from Regional Offices, but much less with senior management of SC. Reference to the greater distance from senior management was made by some two thirds of partners noting that they had regular contact previously through review meetings in which SCN management were present. Now those events are rarer and partners feel more remote. Specific comments included, '…*currently interaction is more frequent, but not as close …' and '..when international and senior officials visit our organisation, all our senior management team and chairperson are present. If our chairperson visits SCI, will the Country Director give us the time?'. '.. The current hierarchy has many filters … our inputs may mean something else by the time they reach the top'.*

One organisation, while agreeing that they were more remote from senior management, pointed out that it did not affect their work on a day to day basis. On the positive side, another partner observed that the '*the Programme Coordinator is trying to understand the reality of our organisation – this is new and positive'.*

One partner also considered that orientations by SC are now less systematic; while SCN had held planning and orientation meetings in January each year, currently it could be halfway through the year.

3.6 SCN Systems and Procedures
Partners were familiar with SCN's procedures prior to unification that were based around project approval, three monthly financial/narrative reporting and annual auditing. Partners were required to have a separate bank account for the funds but were not obliged to adopt the SC chart of accounts. With unification, many of these procedures remained the same but there was a shift to monthly reporting, alterations in coding and partners have been supplied with a software package, FAMAS to use for SC accounting (which they can also use with other donors if they choose).

Government partners were and continue to be treated differently from CSOs and are not obliged to produce audits, nor does SC undertake financial systems reviews of Government partners. In addition, Government partners are still allowed to report on a three monthly basis rather than monthly. Nevertheless, producing three monthly reports is difficult for Government partners as the State works to a four monthly schedule meaning they need to prepare two sets of reports. Given that the Government partners also have to compile information coming in from the Districts, reporting is often delayed.

CSOs were generally happy with the financial software and one expressed satisfaction with the fact that they can use it with other donors. However, two comments were made on the changes in systems. First, ten of fifteen partners were not happy with the shift to monthly reporting and several referenced finding it difficult to align activities to a monthly schedule from 16th through to the 15th. Secondly, most of those partners also noted that disbursement was slow at the beginning of the year due to lengthy planning processes but that throughout the year it was timely. However, one partner observed '*from the financial perspective, SC is now much more rigid and the Finance Department is more demanding … everything is set up to be easier for SCI'*

Annual *partner* audits no longer appear to be a specific requirement within the SCI Grant Management Manual[19] but SC Nepal has continued the practice and is also guided by donor requirements. In a review of 5 audits written in English (several are in Nepali) all included income received (some from all donors, not just SC) and an analysis of expenditures (but not against budget lines). However, none referred to verifying the partner information against SC books (an expectation from SCN's audit guidelines). Only one company gave details of various specific issues identified (a difference in the closing balance of the previous year and opening balance of the current year and expenditures with no corresponding vouchers) and provided recommendations. The Finance Department informed the evaluation that they try to review whether problems identified by auditors are addressed by the partner.

3.7 Capacity Building
SCN's Policy for Strengthening Local Capacity 2007-9 specified capacity building as the key element to ensure locally sustainable results for children, both through good practice in direct services and in advocacy.

In Nepal, SCN provided considerable investment in capacity building, principally through workshops and mentoring. Identification of training and capacity building needs was largely undertaken at partner meetings and in individual follow up with partners, although it does not appear to have been as systematic as the policy expects. Reviewing perceptions of the former SCN partners on capacity building the strongest areas of capacity building were thought to be in organisational development (mission/strategy, management systems, HR, Finance, Programme planning, M&E) and in child rights and child participation. The weakest were in advocacy, building linkages/ networks and in resource mobilisation/sustainability (see Appendix G).

Since Unification, selected partners have undergone organisational assessments and have been supported in developing organisational development plans. These have included investments in governance, part of which has come from SCUS's strong experience in organisational development capacity building from 2003 to 2008 through modular training as part of the Sandeep Project[20]. The former US partners interviewed had participated in the modular training and made reference to its positive impact as well as to the benefit of providing governance training tailored to Board members. SCJ had focused more on technical training than organisational development, according to the former SCJ partner.

Since unification, another positive change had been the introduction of a budget line of 2% of the total for partner organisational development. This was in addition to any SC initiated training offered. There was a consensus amongst partners interviewed that this was very helpful although most felt it was not sufficient. SC Nepal, on the other hand, observed that they are struggling to maintain the 2% in the face of donor demands, especially for short term partners.

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[19] SCI Grant Management Manual January Version 1, January 2011, p.55-56)
[20] Sandeep (through USAID funding) provided opportunities for 35 NGOs to participate in a lengthy modular organisational development training programme. Contextualised training materials (in English and Nepali) were produced through the project and are now posted on the INGO network website. The Project also developed a structure for training that included intermediary support organisations, some of which are still working with SC.

A third change since unification is the supply of FAMAS financial software to partners to improve efficiency in reporting. In general partners considered this a positive move and especially when it could be used with other donor funds.

In the future, SC could consider other methodologies for training and capacity building, including possibly e-learning at a distance.

Are modern technology and social media offering any potential to strengthen or change the way SCN work with local partners and networking?
Of partners included in the evaluation, 9 have their own websites, 2 have started Facebook pages, 1 has a blogspot and 2 are featured on linked websites of which they are members (Child Nepal and Consortium of Organisations Working for Child Participation). They are using the sites to provide information on their work as well as to network with other organisations in the same field. There is no evidence as yet of the sites being used for active debates or information sharing amongst members.

In the partner evaluation in Nepal in 2002[21], reference was made to a plan to install an intranet for partner use as well as supporting their own website development. It is not clear whether this happened but an intranet continues to be a useful idea for partners to access to key documents, share ideas and develop advocacy campaigns. Discussion could include how this idea links to other networks such as the Consortium of Organisations Working for Child Participation (COWCP) and to another organisation CZOP (Children as Zones of Peace), both of which are large membership organisations that can be influential on child rights with the Nepali Government and have active websites that could be used as a hub for campaigns.

In addition, children in clubs requested opportunities to link to other clubs or children's parliaments internationally (see next section). They do not have regular access to the internet and the majority do not appear to use mobile phones on a regular basis. However, children reporting receiving some computer training and could possibly be linked (through occasional partner events using their equipment) to other children's clubs or parliaments internationally, for example, by Skype and a webcam[22].

3.8 Children as Partners
The evaluation aimed to review how far children consider themselves to participate meaningfully around the project cycle, whether activities are led by children and what children need from adult partner agencies.

Nepal is exceptional in the broad spread of child rights clubs as described in section 2.2 so there is a great deal to learn from the experience. A review of children's clubs in Nepal in 2001[23] found that the degree of independent identification of projects by children was low but that where this had happened (such as children choosing to fix damaged water pipes or addressing teachers spitting in school) the action was more effective and safer than if the agenda was identified through awareness raising agendas on children's rights (effectively set by adult facilitators). Although the sample for the

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[21] ODC, SCN, CWIN, 2002, *Evaluation of Partnership Approach of SCN,* 2002 on partnership in Nepal.
[22] Although this would only be possible by electing child representatives able to communicate in English or another common language.
[23] Rajbhandary, Hart and Khatiwada, 2001, *Extracts from the Children's Clubs of Nepal: a Democratic Experiment,* PLA Notes, Issue 42, pp.23-28, IIED, London.

current evaluation was small, it would appear to endorse the conclusion that the identification and analysis of problems was undertaken closely with adults; most children in the groups did not consider that their projects were child led and adult facilitators agreed with this assessment.

The summary of children's perceptions on the extent of their activities around the project cycle in Table 8 shows that these groups considered their activities to be mostly undertaken in collaboration with adults at the stage of identifying and analysing problems and deciding how to address them. They considered themselves more likely to lead at the stage of implementation and reviewing what had worked through their meetings. Adult partner perceptions were broadly similar with only implementation being viewed as child led (Table 8, adult responses in brackets).

Table 8: What was the Extent of your Participation round the Project Cycle? *Consolidated Results from Children (bold) and Adults (in brackets)*					
	Situation Analysis	**Strategy**	**Action Plan**	**Implement**	**M&E**
Not involved or not done yet (not involved)			**1***		(1)
Consulted (consulted)	(2)	**1** (2)	**1** (1)		**1** (2)
Worked together with adults (collaborated)	**3** (3)	**2** (3)	**2** (4)	**2** (1)	**1** (1)
Child led (child led)	**1**	**1**		**2** (4)	**2** (1)
Total	5 children's groups 4 adult partners				

* One group informed the evaluation they do not prepare plans – they go directly to implementation.

The issue is not that activities being child led is necessarily 'the best' but more that children should feel they are engaging in a meaningful way about questions that are real and immediate for the majority of the group. For example, one children's club is working on questions of early marriage and child labour. However, when the children were asked what they considered to be their major problems, they identified frequent teacher absenteeism and very high teacher-child ratios in school. It may be more appropriate to work from children's own priority issues at the time as a starting point for projects as opposed to broader issues in the realisation of children's rights.

In addition to the question of whether children are addressing the issues closest to them, there is second question about whether children are adequately protected in the ways they address issues. For example, one group described being actively engaged in campaigns against child labour to the point of directly lobbying restaurant owners if they heard of children working there. This could be a risky practice for children and it may be helpful for partners to debate with children which kinds of actions are appropriate and effective.

In relation to the kind of support that children receive from partners, they reported stationery for clubs, mentoring support on how to manage clubs and in developing work plans. They have also received computer training and network formation. The kind of support they would like to receive in the future includes a) personality development training (leadership training) b) support for the library c) monthly programme support from the partner based on our workplan rather than ad hoc events and d) further

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investment in coordination and networking with other clubs. In relation to new ideas or suggestions, children proposed extending clubs to other geographical areas so others could benefit from the same opportunities (they considered that demand is high), sharing domestic and international experiences and visits within and outside the District to other clubs.

One club considered that the partner support is extremely positive but that they do not always follow up adequately. For example, the club had received notebooks at the beginning of the year but they had run out. SC in Nepal was only known distantly but the same club observed that SC sends people to talk to children in an extractive way (collects information but children are not informed about the follow up).

3.9 Monitoring and Evaluation
SCN had traditionally emphasised the importance of in-depth qualitative monitoring using case studies, as well as reporting on quantitative results. As part of the SCN (Oslo) Five Year Plan (2010-2014)[24] and subsequently together with SCI, a set of global indicators is being introduced to measure results. In addition, SCI introduced the Total Reach system of monitoring people reached directly and indirectly by programmes. Training on that system has already been rolled out to partners in Nepal and there was also extensive training and data collection 2010/2011 to establish a baseline for the change indicators in the 20 focus Districts. A database is currently under construction to monitor the results.

In addition, SCN and latterly SCI have supported partners to develop their own monitoring systems using project specific formats. The majority of partners expressed appreciation for the efforts made in strengthening monitoring and evaluation with training taken out to the Districts. However, three messages came across strongly from partners.

First, some two thirds of partners considered that the strong drive to collect quantitative data that has overtaken qualitative information. They also considered that frequent changes in the formats used to collect that data make it difficult for partners to manage the system. Comments include the following from three different CSOs: '*By the time we get used to one format and begin to use it properly, a new format is introduced and we have to start over'.* '*There is now too much quantitative and too little qualitative data. SC is becoming a statistical based organisation'. 'SC sometimes asks for so much data they got lost in their own information'.* One CSO also asked who would be responsible for collecting all the data in the most remote areas where SC cars will not reach.

The second strong message from partners is that data collection is designed as a top down system is not focused on data needs generated by partners and communities. One partner also referred to the top down requirements becoming bifurcated at the top; '*We have to produce information for the Core Process Harmonisation System but also for the Common Approach to Sponsorship'.*

Thirdly, partners observed that indirect beneficiaries are difficult to trace and count (Total Reach system).

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[24] Save the Children Norway, Oslo, October 2009

3.10 Exit Strategies and Sustainability
The SCN policy specifies that phasing out of formal partnerships should be well planned and that mechanisms should be established from the beginning of the relationship. Exit should be viewed as a natural part of the project cycle. In Nepal, however, there was a consensus amongst partners and within the SC staff team that this discussion did not take place at an early stage of partnerships. Discussions of possible future phase out tended to be informal, not put in writing and former SCN staff in discussion agreed that they found this a difficult and sensitive area to address clearly and directly.

As a result, partners have tended not to take possible phase out seriously and this includes the case of one partner that was reluctant to believe it was happening right up to the moment of closure. The latter partner was informed two years before the exit but '*we never believed it would happen and did not sit together and make a mutually agreed exit plan'.* This is of especial concern at a time of transition and in view of the fact that SC Nepal is currently phasing down to 20 focus Districts and reducing the total number of partners to a small group of strategic partners in each District.

Only one partner referred to a specific and structured discussion of phase out. With that partner, SC Nepal had provided support to a plan for resource mobilisation, including technical help to developing proposals to other donors. Another partner had bought land and hopes that SC Nepal may support their efforts towards institutional independence but this had not been addressed formally. That partner understood from SC Nepal that in the future they should expect to compete for funding through a bidding system.

In relation to the State partner included in the sample, SCN had provided long term support since 2003 and latterly SC Nepal had provided the funding for Child Protection Officers in 27 Districts. In terms of sustainability and exit strategies, the principal question is whether the Ministry will be able to absorb those salaries in the future. The Ministry responsible states that they intend to fund those posts once constitutional changes are clear. This means SC will have catalysed the establishment of a permanent institutionalised child protection system.

Of the two partners interviewed that were phased out, one was a result of internal issues of fraud under the zero tolerance policy and the other in view of a phase out from that thematic area (disability). Both partners had found it very difficult to secure alternative funding and sustain services to target populations after phase out. However, both were continuing with minimal services. Overall, however, half of the fifteen partners referred to already having other funding sources, most of which were INGOs or, to a lesser extent, through the District Development Committees.

In spite of the fact that exit strategies have been weak, SCN introduced and SC Nepal has continued an innovative intervention aimed at linking NGO partners and schools to the private sector for funding ('Adopt a school' and linking NGOs to banks). A number of organisations are benefiting from funding in this way but SC Nepal has had to dedicate two staff members to mobilisation of the private sector that is very expensive in resources.

3.11 Horizontal Partnerships
Partners were linked by SCN to government bodies, especially at District and Regional level and to other partners through an annual Partner Forum and review meetings. Joint meetings were highly valued, especially when senior management was present but

these are expensive to hold and have been reduced in frequency. SCN also made efforts to link NGOs and their experiences and learning to the media and supported a radio station to publicise issues of children's rights. Partners were encouraged to seek other donors in addition to SCN.

4. Changes in the Capacity and Behaviour of Partners
This section examines what differences result from SCN's approach to partnership. How has the capacity and behaviour of partners changed? This question is answered at three levels, using the 'three circle' model developed by INTRAC to understand organisational capacity: 'to be', 'to do' and 'to relate'.

4.1 'To be' – Identity and Internal Functioning
The majority of former SCN CSO partners considered that SCN had made a significant difference to the development of their organisations overall in terms of mission, strategy, reputation and institutional growth especially at District level (nine in twelve partners). Without SCN's support, most of the partners considered that they would not have developed as a strong CSO with a good reputation on child rights issues (education and protection) in their districts. They expressed every intention of continuing to work in the area of children's rights even if they did not continue as an SC partner. They also expressed a greater understanding of children's rights to participation as a result of SCN's work. In that sense, SCN made a real contribution to developing a child rights based civil society.

In terms of organisational development, organisations considered that they had become more systematic and referred specifically to strengthened strategic planning, financial and administrative policies and holding general assemblies where annual audits are presented. Some had grown considerably as membership organisations. For example on partner, founded in 1994 and supported by SCN from 1998, grew from a membership of 2,500 and 40 District Chapters in the early years to 4,000 in 2004 and 53 District chapters by 2009. The partner also successfully diversified in terms of other partners and donors. SCN and SCUS support were especially referenced as having supported the organisation from the early days and in providing long term predictable institutional backing as well as technical assistance.

Former SCUS CSO partners referred especially to organisational development. They had developed stronger internal policies on technical issues and had become more effective in governance due to SCUS training. One of the organisations also referred to becoming a stronger membership agency and to having grown significantly from having 1 staff member in 1998 to 64 in 2011 as well as achieving a vast increase in funding). These partners considered that through gaining prestige and a good reputation in working with SCUS, doors had been opened to other funders. The former SCJ partner considered that their greatest growth was in technical knowledge on child protection, HIV and Education.

4.2 'To do' - Programming
The test of whether partners have become more effective in programming is whether they have built programmes on stronger analysis, evidence of impact on children rights and the extent of adoption of service delivery models and of advocacy impact.

Although it was not possible within the evaluation to review impacts directly, in terms of service delivery models, the following results were identified from reports and partner information:

a) home based *ECD* and minimum standards developed and being replicated across Districts,

b) child friendly schools based on a set of criteria that have been expanded across Districts through District level education plans and have led to impacts of increase of school enrolment, decreased teacher absenteeism, decreased child marriage and exclusion during menstruation and an increase in engagement on school management committees

c) child clubs that have expanded across Districts using models introduced by SC and further developed by partners over the years. To further consolidate models of children's participation, the clubs have established an umbrella body that serves as stronger voice for children's issues and provides a pathway for continued participation of child club 'graduates'. Child clubs clearly have a considerable impact on individual children's confidence and leadership skills as well as collective impact on local issues. As one girl observed to this evaluation, '*I would not have had the confidence to talk to you without the experience of the children's club'.*

In terms of advocacy, SCN and partners including SC Alliance partners, achieved considerable successes including: a) the child friendly school was adopted by the Ministry of Education and the aim is for universal coverage (although partners observed that it is more effective in areas where CSOs are active in this area, b) during the conflict, 748 schools were declared Zones of Peace as a result of SCN and partner lobbying for child protection, c) a draft Child Rights Act had been draw up by 2009 with SCN and partner inputs and d) Minimum Standards for Child Care Institutions were also drafted.

4.3 'To Relate' – Linkages with Others
SCN aimed to develop linkages both horizontally between partners and bringing state and CSO partners together as well as vertical linkages so that evidence from service delivery models could be used in advocacy for policy and legislative change.

At local level, partners referred to closer relations with the District Education and Health Offices as a result of SCN's work and also with District and Village Development Committees. Recognition was also given to SCN's influence in stronger horizontal linkages with the All Party Mechanism at District level, community based and user's groups. Partners also referred to greater accountability to their constituencies and local communities.

However, critiques were made as follows: a) SC has tended to use partner material and successes in advocacy and partners did not always feel they were sufficiently recognised b) according to the Social Welfare Council, SC and partners have not collaborated sufficiently closely with the Village and District Development Committees.

5. Overall Capacity of SCN to Address Child Rights
This section reviews the external factors that enabled and constrained SCN's capacity to address children's rights as well as identifying how SCN added value with partners in Nepal towards realising children's rights.

The external factors that enabled SCN's capacity to promote children's rights through partnership were:
   a) SCN Nepal benefited from a stable funding base and was able to provide secure medium term (3-4 year) funding linked to a strategic plan. Most of the funding emanated from Norway through NORAD or SCN's own funds and was not restricted project funding so allowed for flexibility and for partners to define their own goals. This environment has changed. Although overall SC Nepal funding has grown considerably, funds are tied to specific projects, restrictions are much greater and there is much less flexibility to allocate resources to building a child rights based civil society. These limitations make openness, transparency and mutuality in partner relations and innovation in capacity building even more crucial.
   b) The regulatory framework in Nepal promoted partnership and expected INGOs to build the capacity of NGOs. In the interests of national ownership, it seems likely that other countries will adopt this model in the future so the Nepal experience is particularly in that light. However, in an environment in which some aspects of the Paris and Accra Agendas are being emphasized at the expense of others (results being emphasised and ownership/harmonisation being challenged) in practice it is likely to be increasingly difficult to focus on building the capacity of NGOs.
   c) It has been possible to maintain a strong dialogue with the Government of Nepal and the GoN appreciates the level of engagement of INGOs with key ministries and recognises the value of international experience.
   d) Unlike in some countries, in Nepal there is a very large number of community based and district level national CSOs allowing for considerable choice (and competition) amongst CSOs.
   e) Nepal has a strong overall skills pool so SCN and SC Nepal have been able to recruit a strong staff team with good technical skills. Staff retention has also been high.

External factors that constrained SCN's capacity to promote children's rights through partnership were:
   a) The political situation over the years, including the lengthy armed conflict and very restricted access to many areas of the country followed by uncertainty over the constitution and state structure.
   b) Many CSOs are considered to have political affiliations or effectively to be a family business so selection has to be extremely careful.

In terms of the added value of SCN, three factors have been identified. The first and most important factor was the very strong and clear emphasis on children's rights (including child participation) that was referenced by many partners. Secondly, the majority of partners in identifying what was distinctive about SCN referred to medium term stable funding and a strong commitment to technical and organisational capacity building. Thirdly, the Government and CSO respondents considered that SCN's international experience of how rights could be realised in practice was very valuable.

6. Good Practices
Good practices in partnership, based on experiences of SCN, SCUS, SCJ and SC Nepal, that could be replicated include the following:

a) Training board members in the principles and practice of good NGO governance was an especially important practice in an environment in which doubt had been cast over the legitimacy of some NGOs.
b) Encouraging partners to actively seek other donors and provide training in resource mobilisation from an early stage.
c) Providing 2% of NGO budgets for organisational development and allowing partners to decide how those funds should be deployed.
d) Spending some 3-4 years getting to know potential partners in a collaborative relationship before it matures into full partnership.
e) Linking NGOs to private sector companies to strengthen mutual confidence and open opportunities for possible funding.
f) Investments in monitoring and evaluation training, especially where the NGO is able to set up their own system related to their own needs, not only those of the donor.
g) Direct partnership with community based organisations (e.g. children/youth clubs, trafficking survivor's organisation, community based women's organisations etc.) Although the approach is challenging and time-consuming, SC staff consider that it is very effective in strengthening grassroots organisations.

7. Implications of Changes within Save the Children

As a result of the unification of the Save the Children Members and subsequently establishing SCI, a number of positive and negative results have been identified for partnership.

From a positive point of view, the Government of Nepal is satisfied to be working with only one interlocutor. Some good practices (such as 2% of budgets for capacity building) have been broadened out to partners of other SC Members and there has been a positive exchange of experiences and technical skills.

On the negative side, unifications has brought new policies and regulations that are not yet fully 'bedded in' and partners and staff agree that this has resulted in some confusion over which regulation to follow. There are increased demands on data collection, changes in forms and systems and in some cases partners have to provide two sets of data for different programmes within SCI (e.g. the Core Process Harmonisation System as well as the Common Approach to Sponsorship). Monthly reporting is unpopular amongst partners in Nepal as is the fact that the month is not a standard calendar month. There is also less capacity to innovate as there has been a reduction of 'free' money and contracts are for only one year with no security of continuing or stability. Overall, there is a sense that the new systems are intended to serve SCI's needs for data rather than the partner's own agenda and data needs. Finally, partners were concerned that they are now more distant from SC management and that there is a risk that the organisation could become too large and bureaucratic.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 The **partnership relationship** of mutuality, respect and transparency has been the key to effective partnerships and every effort should be made in the future to retain the quality of those relationships. This will include:

- Ensuring that partners continue to feel valued and that they have opportunities to contribute to SC Nepal's thinking through active engagement in strategy development by thematic and geographical area. This also requires allowing sufficient time for their effective participation.
- Maintaining contact by senior management with partners in the Districts. Aim to attend regional meetings whenever possible and, if that is not possible, seek other methods of direct communication and listening to partners. Two possible alternatives would be to send out regular letters with updates and invite partners to share their views in written form and to provide an open invitation to meet with Chief Executives and Chairs of Boards when they are in Kathmandu.
- Managing the expectations of partners by explaining and debating the dilemmas and difficulties that SC Nepal faces in terms of reducing non-earmarked funding, donor expectations for accountability and so on.
- Being sure to acknowledge partner successes by name in reports and inviting them to be present in meetings to provide presentations on their own work whenever possible.
- Consideration to training staff of SC Nepal, especially those who interact most with partners, in the key elements of partner relations.
- Maintain the practice of participatory organisational capacity reviews of partners leading to a capacity building plan (rather than an audit approach).

8.2 In relation to partner engagement in **strategic planning,** it may be helpful to share the results of the existing baseline studies with partners in each District, to identify gaps in information and jointly complete situation analyses on child rights. Such situation analyses would serve as the basis for joint SC Nepal and partner plans by District and/or thematic area. Child Protection Officers and children's clubs could be engaged in this exercise.

8.3 **Capacity building,** both in technical areas and in terms of organisational development, has been extremely important for partners performance in programmes, capacity to grow and secure funding from other donors and to achieve sustainability as an organisation. Although donors are providing less support to long-term capacity building currently, SC Nepal is committed to continued investment and is also being pressed by the government and the AIN Code of Conduct to do so. Options for maintaining and increasing the reach of capacity building could be debated with partners by regional technical personnel. Analysis could include the relative popularity of a number of options:

- On line technical and managerial courses at a distance that could be linked to accreditation (though a local institute) and possible annual prizes for progress. Accepting that this is a very large task, if the idea is popular with the NGOs, it could be an inter-agency project by AIN in conjunction with the NGO Federation of Nepal.
- Continued use of the SCUS materials and revitalisation of local support structures developed through the Sandeep project.

- Links to the NGO Federation of Nepal's Knowledge Centres in each region to provide modular training based on the consolidated results of organisational assessments.
- Providing systematic technical assistance on specific areas identified through partner organisation assessments.

8.4 **The length of contracts** is a source of concern for partners as annual agreements do not provide the medium term predictable funding needed to fully invest in programmes. It will be difficult for SC Nepal to guarantee longer periods in the future but it may be possible to develop framework agreements with strategic partners for the length of the strategy period that are conditional on funding being available.

8.5 Partners had not been adequately prepared in **exit strategies** and this is a particularly important issue in view of the gradual phase out in many districts across the countries and reduction in partners. Some ways forward could be:
- Be transparent with partners on the reasons, plans and timescale for phase out and establish clear plans rather than allowing them to foster false hopes.
- Offer training in proposal writing to interested partners and ensure that partners have access to sufficient data to produce well thought out proposals with strong indicators and monitoring systems.
- Review which partners are linked to the private sector for possible funding and how those likely to be subject to phase out could be framed as attractive to private funders.
- Provide training for SC Nepal staff on how to handle phase out. This should include not just planning for phase out existing partners but including sustainability and exit strategies in the project cycle with all partners from the beginning.

8.6 There is a perception that SC has sometimes been **more accountable to donors than to local communities** and that there are occasions on which the **agenda has been led by global rather than local demands.** Fuller engagement of partners and the communities with which they are working in strategic planning would go some way to mitigate this issue but more needs to be done.
- Support partners in the development of their own local research and monitoring systems and identify where data coincides with that required by SC Nepal. Consider how data collected can be fed back and debated with partners and communities as well as being used in upward accountability.
- For Government partners, the state reporting schedule could be paramount. Review whether it is possible for SC Nepal to adjust to the state's four monthly reporting period rather than the existing 3 monthly period.
- Review whether the 16th to 15th of the monthly financial reporting schedule is essential. It is likely that other country programme partners also feel this is prioritising SCI's needs over their own.
- Review how the reporting needs for different SCI programmes can be harmonised so that partners do not have to provide two separate sets of reporting data as happened with the Core Process Harmonisation and Common Approach to Sponsorship.
- Consider with SCI the issue of the length of time it takes to get a large partner programme fully on board with any changes (changes in policies, reporting formats, procedures etc.). Assuming that it takes some 2-3 years to fully roll out

changes, encourage SCI to assume that changes should be for even longer duration – around 5 years – in the case of implementation with partners.

8.7   The current programme of **linking partners to the private sector** is positive and innovative but expensive in staff time. SC Nepal could consider hosting a meeting of partners that have already benefited from the programme to discuss what suggestions they have for sustainability of the programme and for extension to other partners. Some possibilities could be:
- A financial contribution by partners that benefit toward a pool of funds to help to sustain the liaison posts with the private sector.
- Partners that have benefited organising teams of their own senior staff to make contacts and follow up with the private sector. This could include partners working in education directly making the contacts for the 'adopt a school' programme, perhaps in conjunction with the Schools Management Committees of those schools.

8.8   In relation to **children's clubs** and the support they receive from partners, children considered that partners often provide support ad hoc (not related to the plans children had made) and the ideas they work on do not always emanate from their own priorities. In terms of SC Nepal, children observed that they are often asked for information but it tends to 'extractive' (they do not receive feedback). Proposals to address these points are:
- Consider proposing that partners provide child-friendly training to child clubs in project cycle management. Ensure that the focus is on children identifying their own issues that are most immediate to them and help them to define the best ways to go about tackling those questions.
- Debate with partners whether some approaches taken by children could put them at risk and whether other possible approaches could be analysed with children. (For example, children going directly to restaurants and demanding that child workers are returned to school could put children at risk; a safer approach could be children's participation in publicity campaigns, peer education and engaging authorities with the responsibility of addressing the issue directly).
- Consider linking representatives of children's clubs (perhaps through the Consortium of Organisations Working for Child participation to similar clubs and children's parliaments in other countries. This could be done by occasional Skype exchanges where language is not a barrier or by the exchange of written materials.
- Provide the participant child clubs with feedback from evaluations or studies in relation to how their comments were incorporated and possible future directions.

8.9   In the context of the **dilemmas** in balancing the demands for short term project results with the long term capacity development of partners as an objective in itself, it may be useful for SC Nepal to encourage other members of AIN to work with the Government of Nepal on hosting a four-way debate (GoN, donors, NGOs and INGOs). This could consider the following questions:
- How can small innovative organisations that do not yet have a track record and could not meet all governance and programme management criteria be developed? This is a particular concern if the SWC is intending to promote more local level partnerships.

- Is it possible to broaden out the practice of including a line item for capacity building into proposals – the 2%.
- Are donors interested in jointly supporting a capacity building package that focuses on organisational development at different levels for different sizes of organisation? (Building on work already done through SCUS and other organisations).

8.10 In relation to the draft **partnership policy,** the above points should be taken into consideration as well as the following specific points to address:
- In view of the importance of the partnership *relationship* it may be helpful to place greater emphasis on this aspect and especially on notions of mutuality. For example, the policy could begin with references to the objectives and partnership principles and values and subsequently discuss criteria, norms, procedures etc.
- Indicators for successful partnership could also be adjusted thinking about mutual relationships. For example, they could include an indicator assessing the the extent to which each partner considered the partnership had evolved within the values and principles, as the norms and procedures.
- The policy could include a description of how SC regards the respective roles of CSOs and the State and how SC engages with each. This is well set out in the SCN Policy on Capacity Building.
- The evaluation applauds the fact that the draft policy has specifically included a section on the 'limited search' process that allows SC Nepal to partner with organisations that are not able to compete in bids but have the capacity to grow.
- It may be helpful to consider including a section setting out SC's intentions in terms of the portfolio at district and central level and this could be linked to the previous point. For example, SC Nepal may intend to develop a balanced portfolio of state and CSO partners at district level for testing models of service delivery and at national level for exchanging policy perspectives.
- The criteria for partner selection would need to include that the organisation is legally registered if funds over US$500 are to be disbursed (from SCI Grant Management Manual).