

# Advocacy in public policy in Honduras

October 2007

Since our arrival in Central America in 1974, Save the Children UK has contributed to the construction of a rights based framework, which has led to dramatic changes in the lives of children and young people. This case study highlights our work in the Caribbean and Central America over the last five years and the changes we have inspired. It is a record of the lessons we have learned, the challenges we have identified and the recommendations we have for all those involved in development work and the defence of human rights, especially the rights of children. Since the closure of our programme in the Caribbean and Central American (CARICA) in March 2007, the legacy of our work for children continues through the ongoing work of our dedicated partners throughout the region. This particular study focuses on advocacy in public policy in Honduras.

## The programme

Save the Children UK's advocacy programme was carried out on two levels: actions on specific issues related to our thematic programmes (child labour, juvenile justice, commercial sexual exploitation, emergencies); and general lobbying for public policies that benefit children.

The programme carried out a range of lobbying activities, research, awareness-raising and network-building. A major aim was to facilitate at the highest levels of government the drawing up, approval and implementation of legislation and public policies designed to protect children in Honduras.



*One important aspect of Save the Children UK's advocacy work was training public servants dedicated to children's issues in how to effectively argue for greater budget assignments for their own projects. Here participants in a two day workshop on budgets sponsored by SCUUK lighten the mood with an interactive cultural presentation following an intense day of working sessions.*

## Why we did it

The programme worked on the premise that institutional weaknesses have prevented the Honduran state from fulfilling its undeniable responsibility, ratified in numerous international agreements, to protect children's rights. Thus our advocacy strategy was geared toward assisting the government in reducing the vulnerability of its children and young people. We promoted legislation aimed at creating an adequate legal framework for protecting children and at establishing the mechanisms necessary for effective implementation of this framework.

It was clear from the outset that the implementation of effective child protection would require a great deal of political will on the part of the government, which needed to marshal significant technical and financial support for the endeavour. We turned to civil society organisations, helping them gear up for the job of keep-

ing the government on task and holding it accountable. We also found it necessary to lobby directly and through partners against legislative proposals that were potentially harmful to children.

## What we did

The programme directed a campaign with significant media coverage that featured each major candidate in the past presidential election sign the Pact on Childhood and Adolescence. In doing so, the can-

## Contents

The programme	1
Why we did it	1
What we did	1
Our partners	2
Results	2
What we learned	2



**Save the Children**  
UK

## Advocacy in public policy in Honduras

didates made a public commitment to improve protection for children. We also promoted the approval of a general framework for child protection called the Youth Law, or *Ley de Juventud*. Parallel initiatives supported by the programme included the elaboration of a National Action Plan for Childhood and Adolescence, and a National Opportunities Plan.

We lobbied for adequate funding of existing child protection mechanisms and trained national NGOs and youth organisations in budget literacy so that they can more effectively lobby for improved implementation. The programme also provided training and training materials to government technicians responsible for carrying out child friendly policies.

### Our partners

We worked primarily with the following organisations in our advocacy work:

Alianza por la Infancia, Adolescencia y Juventud (Alliance for Infancy, Adolescence and Youth), a coalition representing governmental and non-governmental organisations created to promote and monitor the Presidential Pact for Childhood and Adolescence;

Movimiento Mundial por la Infancia (Global Movement for Infancy) a coalition of international organisations working for the rights of children, charged with following up on governmental commitments made at the World Summit for Infancy and Youth in 2000.

Coordinadora de Instituciones Privadas por los Niños y sus Derechos, (COIPRODEN or the Coordinating Committee of Private Institutions for Children and their Rights), a network of 30 NGOs dedicated to promoting compliance with children's rights.

Foro Nacional de Juventud (National Youth Forum): a forum that brings together a broad range of Honduran youth organisations.

### Results

The programme achieved significant advances in the areas of legislation, policy formation and training with regard to child labour, commercial sexual exploitation, emergency preparedness and juvenile justice. The specifics of those successes are described in the chapters pertaining to those thematic programmes.

Other results in general lobbying included the creation of consensus for support of child protection policies through the Presidential Pact and related Investment Agenda for Childhood and Adolescence. Our work with children via the Youth Forum resulted not only the general Youth Law being passed, but also in thousands of children gaining a voice in the process and learning from the experience of participating in a national advocacy campaign.

Honduras now has, in the National Action Plan for Childhood and Adolescence, a guide which provides a timeline for specific actions designed to improve the lot of children. The plan establishes mechanisms for government, civil society and international cooperation and division of labour, and prioritizes action with respect to the geographic areas with the most pressing needs. National NGOs have been trained and are on standby to lobby for adequate financing of children's services during the congressional budget process.

### What we learned

Political advocacy requires a secure knowledge base and a well defined plan of action. Effective lobbying starts with a convincing analysis of the problem you are trying to address. This should include comparisons of alternative approaches, feasibility studies, and cost benefit analysis. Like any lobbyists, the programme must be able to articulate an array of convincing arguments backed by data from the most reliable sources.

It is helpful to quickly identify the key actors, or those who will be targets or allies of your lobbying efforts. Map the power structures most pertinent to your cause so that you are sure to lobby the people

who actually have decision making power or influence over policy. The programme also hedged its bets by lobbying potential decision makers during national election campaigns.

Direct lobbying of decision makers should be reinforced via a media campaign and the mobilisation of civil society around a particular issue. We found it particularly rewarding to directly involve children in advocacy.

Mobilisation of civil society should draw from as broad a base as possible, bringing all the pertinent institutions and sectors together in pursuit of the protection of children's rights. Each will bring a unique set of skills to the complex task of shaping public policy, which requires effective communications, media relations, and proposal writing. The coordination and maintenance of alliances requires constant attention.

Despite tremendous advances on paper, resources have not flowed as easily as ink, and the establishment of a progressive agenda did not forestall the proposal of regressive legislation and policy. The programme adopted a strategy of intense direct lobbying with government officials and other key individuals in an effort to create the social capital necessary for change. In recognition of the gap between stated policy and state action, we trained hundred of individuals from our civil society partner organisations and from government on the workings of the budgetary process.

We found the media to be a powerful ally once we had invested time and resources into educating reporters and editors on the issues of children's rights, and found them to be receptive when we offered quality information. Media efforts were given an extra boost when politically important national partners delivered the message.

The incorporation of children gave advocacy efforts credibility, in part because of its explicit recognition of children as protagonists with rights and demands, rather than passive beneficiaries. Our processes were informed by the children's own

## Advocacy in public policy in Honduras

perspective on their needs as well as their ideas for addressing them. Their actions in presenting these views were a motivational factor for adults. Efforts to involve children should include activities appropriate to different ages so as to allow for the broadest possible participation.

The creation of adequate child protection mechanisms in an atmosphere of limited resources is a long range proposition and efforts to achieve this end should be imbued with a spirit of persistence, clarity of objectives, and group cohesion. Still, it is important to celebrate achievements at each step of the process in order to maintain motivation.

Save the Children UK's insistence on backing its arguments with unassailable information and backing its word with faithful delivery created relationships of trust and credibility with national partners and thus facilitated their active cooperation and our ability to unify diverse partners around common goals.

Advocacy work that focuses on child rights and foment child participation should expect to encounter a conservative backlash that favours punitive reaction over prevention when dealing with young people in conflict with the law. Some in Honduras claimed that our emphasis on children's rights eroded traditional family values and relationships. Politicians often find it more expedient to capitalise on the social stigma surrounding youth rather than trying to tap into their potential. This is a good reason for building as broad of a base of support for advocacy efforts as possible. Articulate children who are educated on the issues can put up their own best defence.

### Other learning case studies from the Caribbean and Central America

- [Child labour and poverty reduction in Honduras & Guatemala](#)
- [Juvenile justice in Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua & Guatemala](#)
- [Child participation in Cuba](#)
- [HIV and AIDS in Jamaica](#)
- [Commercial sexual exploitation of children in Honduras](#)
- [Emergency preparedness in the Caribbean and Central America](#)

#### Feedback:

If you have any comments regarding any of the issues highlighted in this case study or are interested in acquiring further information on "Advocacy in public policy in Honduras" or any of our other work in the Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, and South East Europe region, please contact the LACMESEE Regional Office at [lacmesees@savethechildren.org.uk](mailto:lacmesees@savethechildren.org.uk)

#### Learning case studies:

This case study is one of a wider series focusing on learning from experience in key areas of our programmes work. If you have ideas for topics we should examine in other learning case studies or any other comments please contact Gema Vicente at [g.vicente@savethechildren.org](mailto:g.vicente@savethechildren.org)

## Advocacy in public policy in Honduras