

Engaging civil society to influence the CRC List of Issues Prior to Reporting

Evaluation Executive Summary January 2021

About the project

In 2021-22, the UK Government is being examined on its implementation of the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#) by the [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child \(the Committee\)](#). The [Equality and Human Rights Commission \(EHRC\)](#) supported the [Children’s Rights Alliance for England \(CRAE\)](#) on a project to engage Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the initial stage of the process. This would create CSO-led recommendations to the Committee of what it should request from the UK Government in its [List of Issues Prior to Reporting \(LOIPR\)](#). In doing so, CRAE aimed to build CSOs knowledge and capacity on child rights. The project was led by staff at CRAE with input from a Steering Group of 10 CSOs.

This evaluation

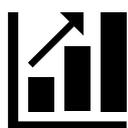
[Tom Burke of amplify training & consultancy](#) led an evaluation to assess the extent that the project has achieved its intended outcomes and capture lessons learnt to improve future reporting processes. Its findings have been developed from:



Review of project

documentation and CRAE

monitoring data: including looking at CSOs engaged on the Charity Commission register.



Analysis of CRAE evaluation

data: 27 out of a potential 60 participants of oral evidence sessions completed a short questionnaire designed by CRAE (response rate of 45%).

Interviews with CRAE and CSO

staff: 14 interviews with staff and participants lasting between 20-60 minutes.



Analysis of previous CSO

Shadow Alternative Reports: analysis of CSOs which has endorsed the 2008 and 2015 England shadow CSO alternative reports.



Recruiting civil society organisations

CRAE took a broad and pragmatic approach to seeking CSOs engagement in the project. For the written evidence there was an open call for evidence. For the oral evidence sessions, an invite-only approach was initially taken with additional members invited from those who had submitted written evidence. Most engaged were recruited by CRAE directly, from associated networks and coalitions or, more rarely, from social media directly.

122
civil society
organisations
involved

CRAE engaged a broad and wider range of CSOs – from large, household name, children’s charities to smaller, specialist policy and legal advocacy groups.

Almost all who took part were motivated by the opportunity to hold the UK Government to account on its commitment to children and to advance their ongoing campaigning or policy and legal advocacy. With limited capacity and grappling with the Covid-19 pandemic, many stated that they would not have been able to engage in the examination process independently. Many noted that they had regular contact with CRAE, trusted them to lead the project well and to minimise any burden of involvement. Some were involved due to their organisations previous history of involvement in the CRC reporting process or their personal commitment and history of human rights activism.

Gaining evidence from civil society organisations

46 organisation submitted evidence either orally, in a written submission or both. The estimated total combined expenditure of charities contributing evidence is more than £930m; employing over 15,000 staff & engaging 66,000 volunteers.



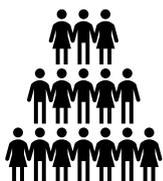
31 written submissions were received. Submitting evidence was perceived by the majority as broadly a very positive aspect of the process. CRAE staff found the input to be high quality and helpful in enriching the final report. Most organisations welcomed the prescriptive process for submission; but for a few, the level of prescription for the new LOIPR process and resulting criteria set by CRAE could have created barriers for smaller CSOs to engage.



60 people participated across six oral evidence sessions. Of those who completed an evaluation form (n=27), 70% rated the session as excellent. Most participants found the sessions well facilitated, that their perspective was valued, and they could express themselves. Many thought they were good sessions given the inherent challenges of limited time and needing to boil down to thirty issues. A minority found that the sessions were at times too rushed and that shorter, more focussed sessions would have been useful.

The civil society report to the UN Committee

A report of the issues from the evidence was produced by CRAE with input from the Steering Group and others. It is perceived by CSOs as a high quality and rigorous piece of work. CRAE staff summarised a complex range of issues ensuring a broad but deep exploration of child rights violations in a short space. Some outside of the project steering group would have appreciated additional engagement in the production of the final report.



91 organisations endorsed the final report; up from 76 endorsing the 2015 alternative report - a 16% increase in endorsements. 44% of the organisation which endorsed the 2020 report had not previously endorsed any CSO shadow report.

A wide range of organisations endorsed the report:

- 10% had expenditure of less than £100,000 and 8% had expenditure of more than £50 million.
- The highest expenditure of an organisation (2019) endorsing was Save the Children UK at £308m and the lowest recorded was Social Workers Without Borders with expenditure of just £2,794.

- Just ten organisations of the 91 who endorsed had more than ten staff earning more than £60,000 (11%). 28 organisations who endorsed had no staff earning more than £60,000 (31%).

Launching and promoting the report

110 people attended an online launch event and feedback was broadly very positive; especially in terms of the range of attendees and having cross party and Ministerial speakers.



CSOs valued the support provided by CRAE to promote the report. Achieving media coverage was challenging given a crowded news space and similar reports having received recent coverage. However, the report received coverage in sector press and good reach via CSO social media channels.

How was the project managed?

Ten organisations participated as a Steering Group for the project. Interviewees who took part were broadly very positive about the experience. The status of an expert Steering Group and opportunities to connect with others like minded peers was valued by members. Some outside of the Steering Group would have liked a wider level of engagement in the overall process and for their organisations contribution to have been better acknowledged in the final report.

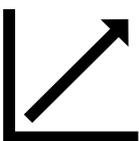


All interviewees were invited to feedback on their experience of working with CRAE staff. A clear and consistent theme was that staff were professional, polite and competent; there was significant respect and praise for their knowledge, understanding and judgement.

The most common concern raised by interviewees was the lack of children’s participation in this stage of the examination process and a desire for increased participation in the remainder of the examination.



CSO Capacity Building



The majority of interviewees stated that their understanding of the CRC has increased through their engagement in the project. For some, they had previously a low level of engagement with the CRC and learnt more through the process. For those participants who had a higher understanding of the CRC, many stated that the process led to increased understanding of particular child rights issues and the connection of these to their work. For those with the highest level of engagement with the CRC, they found the process – and the output – important as it allowed a wider range of child rights issues to be presented beyond what they themselves could articulate or cover in a submission to the Committee. Regardless of previous experience of working with the CRC, there was near universal attribution that project participation significantly built understanding of the new ‘simplified reporting process’.

Engagement in remainder of UK examination process

The vast majority expressed a willingness to be involved in the remainder of the examination but with very low level of recall of opportunities for future involvement or clarity on what role they could play. Most explained that they would trust CRAE to inform them at the appropriate moment and were actively expecting this role to be played by CRAE. Whilst recognising the value of engagement, there was a clear expectation that this would be as a contributor and a supporter rather than due to independent activity. This was especially important for those who had stressed the process was 'easy' and that the relatively limited time it took for participation compared to the impact it had.



Lessons learnt and recommendations

Overall, this has been a successful project which achieved its stated ambition. It has been delivered in a short period of time and against a backdrop of significant challenges caused by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. This evaluation indicates the effectiveness of CRAEs delivery of the capacity building for CSOs. The project has increased knowledge across CSOs of the CRC and child rights violations more widely, and more significantly, the CRC reporting process and the forthcoming examination of the UK.

1. **Extend the project timeframe:** future projects for CSO engagement would benefit from more time.
2. **Review the project scope:** greater impact may be achieved in future projects if they focus on CSO engagement in the whole examination cycle rather than just one step.
3. **Strengthen project monitoring and evaluation:** appoint external evaluators earlier and have clear baseline data at project inception.
4. **Set clear and tangible targets:** the project plan would be strengthened with clearer expectation as to what specific success would look like.
5. **Continue a focus on capacity building on child rights and CRC reporting:** there remains an unmet need for information and support to CSOs on the CRC and the examination process.
6. **Ensure an even stronger focus on engaging a broad range of CSOs:** smaller, specialist and user-led organisations without discrete policy functions or which may not be part of current CSO consortia and alliances could be better engaged.
7. **Fine-tune aspects of project delivery:** evolve the project governance with increased transparency and opportunities for engagement; revise the written submissions process including how submissions are used; and revise the report production and sign-off process.
8. **Evolve and enhance communication activity:** consider how CSOs can better amplify the messages and stimulate media coverage for shared impact; increase coordination with other human rights bodies seeking to communicate about the examination process.
9. **Resourcing for child participation:** CRAE and the EHRC should strongly consider its role in resourcing children's leadership at each step of the CRC reporting process.

For more information

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