



MANARA NETWORK
A CIVIL SOCIETY FOR CHILD RIGHTS
In The MENA Region



Save the Children
Sweden

This publication is fully financed by SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency).
SIDA has not taken part in its production and does not assume any responsibility for its content.

MANARA NETWORK

A Civil Society for Child Rights in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region

MANARA is a network of Civil Society Organisations led by Save the Children Sweden (SCS) and implemented with the members of the network. Manara Network is funded through a project by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

CONTEXT

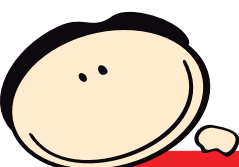
Civil society organizations (CSOs) are a driving force of society: they are partners and actors of public policy and, are therefore, essential in the development of democratic governance; they can act as independent watchdogs and advocates of human rights and are important service providers, often responding to the needs of communities at the grassroots level. With increasing attention being paid to governance and political reform in the MENA region and the widening acceptance of the importance of rights-based approaches, the role of CSOs in poverty alleviation, aid efficiency and the promotion and protection of human rights has gained increasing attention.

The role of CSOs for the rights of the child is as wide as it is varied. Civil society's critical and independent views on the respect and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are essential. As such, efficient monitoring mechanisms, including alternative reporting processes, can help ensure better respect of the CRC. CSOs can also play a major role in raising public awareness about the CRC's content and mechanisms and in advocating and lobbying for relevant duty-bearers to take the necessary measures to ensure that the standards of the CRC are respected and promoted in law and practice. Finally, CSOs can be an excellent venue for the participation of children, ensuring that their voices and opinions are heard and reflected in decisions taken about issues that affect them.

The project for the set up of the Manara network is based on the notion that civil society organizations can and should play a key role in the protection and promotion of human rights in general and of child rights in particular. The project also stems from SCS's long-standing experience with a wide range of actors in the region, including CSOs and children. SCS's experience has pointed to the importance of gaining a better understanding of the dynamics of civil society in the region and of developing a more holistic approach to supporting civil society actors, that is, striking a balance between support to service-delivery non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) and strengthening the capacity and role of NGOs and networks explicitly engaged in advocacy. The project also recognizes the importance of developing spaces and opportunities for dialogue between CSOs, including children, and government actors.

SCS's experience has also demonstrated that programmes and projects which include child participation are not only more effective, but also more respectful of the rights of children themselves. Children have the right to be heard and to have their ideas taken seriously. SCS has therefore focused on the development and integration of methods to ensure meaningful and ethical child participation throughout its programmes.

Finally, this project is based on the demand from local partners for increased support in these areas and on internal analyses which have highlighted recurrent challenges facing CSOs in their work for and with children.



SCS through the set up of Manara is supporting and strengthening the capacities of existing civil society networks and NGOs in the MENA region through the following primary focus areas:

- (a) Analysis and reporting
- (b) Coordination and networking
- (c) Advocacy
- (d) CRC and Child Rights Programming (CRP) mainstreaming.



OBJECTIVES

of the Project for the set up of the Manara Network

The overall objective of the project is to contribute to the effective development and implementation of regional and national policies, strategies and legislation in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Recognizing that CSOs can and should play an active role for and with children, the project specifically aims to support civil society organizations and children in the MENA region in their role as advocates and active development partners for the rights of the child.



“Manara Network”

The regional child rights Manara Network acts as the coordination body, providing resources, support and capacity building to national civil society organizations for the promotion of child rights in the MENA region.

Manara's primary mandate is networking, that is, pooling the expertise and experiences of civil society actors of the region (its members) who, in turn, are implementing various activities at both national and regional levels. The members are collectively responsible for defining the general direction of the network, including its strategy and plan of action. They are also responsible for mobilizing and involving actors working with and for children.

The Manara Network currently consists of NGOs selected from a wide spectrum of local, regional and international CSOs across the MENA region. Each brings unique expertise and strengths to the Network. New members are progressively identified and the aim is to have participation of at least one member per country of the 17 targeted countries.

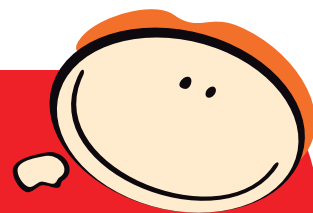


TARGETED COUNTRIES

Middle East and North Africa Region countries: Jordan, Lebanon, oPt, Iraq, Syria,

Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen

Over time, the Network will be hosted by one or more of its members. However, currently SCS is acting as the Secretariat, with technical support from the members of Manara. SCS is supporting the development of the Network and the coordination and management of all activities implemented by its members. Moreover, SCS is strengthening the capacities of the Network members and supporting them in the implementation of the activities. Once the Network and its members have the capacity to work with minimal external support, SCS's involvement will be phased out.



MANARA NETWORK STRATEGY

Component A: Analysis & Reporting

Under this component, members of the network collect and compile, for each country of the region, reliable data and analyses on the situation of the rights of the child. Activities focus on supporting the network members in developing sound research methods as a solid basis for reporting on the status of children's rights at both national and regional levels.

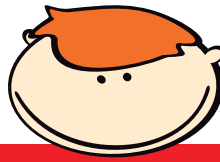
To improve the quality of reporting on child rights and contribute to the development and implementation of policies, strategies, legislation and programmes in line with the CRC, there is a critical need to understand the existing situation of children's rights in a given country, including children's daily experiences, and to document the unique experience of that country in promoting and protecting children's rights.

The Network activities focus on strengthening the capacities of its members in generating credible research and producing reliable assessments of the situation of children in each country of the region. There are four activities under the Analysis and Reporting component: the production of **National Country Profiles** and **Child-Led Data Collection reports**, **Regional Thematic Analyses** and **Alternative Reporting** to the UNCRC, UPR and ACERWC.

Country Profiles are drafted by the network members in respective countries, with the guidance of network member International Bureau of Children's Rights (IBCR) on the research methodology and content. Similarly, Child-Led Data Collection reports, led by young researchers, are supported and overseen by the members with the support of SCS.

IBCR train partners on its research methodology to draft **Country Profiles and Regional Analyses**. The Country Profiles provide an overview of the implementation of relevant international and regional child right conventions and standards as well as an analysis of existing gaps, challenges, progress, and commendable practices by governmental and non-governmental stakeholders working on children's rights in a given national context. The Country Profile is guided by the 4 guiding principles of the UNCRC (Best Interests, Participation, Survival and Development and Non-Discrimination).

Simultaneously, partners in each country will assist and coordinate selected youth in collecting qualitative and quantitative data on the situation of children in their respective country, with the support of SCS.



SAVE THE CHILDREN SWEDEN (SCS) IN THE MENA REGION

SCS brings in its long-standing experience in the region where it has been active since the 1960s. Today, it has offices in Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and Yemen, in addition to activities covering several other countries of the region. It has established and maintained close partnerships with a wide range of local non-governmental and governmental actors.

SCS is currently providing support to over 50 local NGOs in the region, with a particular focus on civil society and child rights and protection. Its collaboration with partners aims at promoting mutual learning and developing them in becoming independent and sustainable monitors and promoters of the rights of the child. SCS also collaborates with other international organizations and development agencies in order to achieve change and to influence the policies and development efforts of these agencies. At global and regional level, SCS acts primarily within the framework of Save the Children International (consisting of 29 Save the Children alliance members in the world) and looks to influence policy and development efforts at UN agencies, regional bodies and other international organizations so they become more child rights-focused.

At every level of its work, SCS has highlighted and promoted the active participation of children in all matters that affect them. It has developed and adapted a number of tools and methods to ensure the meaningful and ethical participation of children throughout its programmes.



SCS supports partners of the Manara network on working with children on Child Led Data Collection (CLDC). The process of **CLDC** consists of the following steps: The young researchers begin by gathering evidence of children's experiences and needs, through interviews with their peers, by using a concise and clear set of questions to elicit stories from children about their everyday lives and fears, and existing sources of protection and recourse. These qualitative accounts are translated into a survey which measures the extent to which the experiences of a wider population of children tallies with those whose 'everyday stories' were gathered. This child-friendly survey is administered using dynamic formats (such as a series of paper cut-outs, for example), conducive to high response rates and easy data gathering by young peer researchers. Once the survey data is analysed, findings are fed back to the network of young peer researchers who then draw on data beyond their own personal experiences to evaluate existing protection mechanisms. Again a simple set of ratings and suggestions is used to enable young peer reviewers to provide measurable evaluation data, capable of being used to prioritise those protection gaps and existing mechanisms most in need of attention and further development.



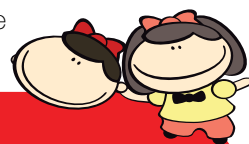
The Country Profile and Child-led data Collection reports are seen as complimentary activities, allowing for a comprehensive basis for advocacy and action on children's rights issues across the region.

The Manara Network also produces a **Regional Thematic Analysis on common issues facing children across the MENA region**. The regional thematic analysis or research is intended to emphasise a regional perspective on common problems and issues facing children in the region, and to feed into networking and advocacy messages and activities. Attention is also given to supporting alternative reporting processes to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and other UN human rights review mechanisms.

Component B: Coordination

The second component seeks to increase the exchange of good practices and expertise amongst CSOs and governments as well as to foster joint initiatives amongst partners and stakeholders across the region.

A key added value of this project is comparative analysis and an enhanced knowledge of the situation of children's rights at both national and regional levels, highlighting achievements and remaining challenges common to a regional ensemble. This project will **facilitate dialogue between governments of the region and CSOs** around children's rights, with a focus on progress made. The results of the studies and research conducted by member CSOs of the network and participating children is presented to decision makers at the national as well as the regional levels in order to facilitate dialogue between CSOs and governments to work jointly on identified child rights issues. Moreover, the Manara Network continuously works on identifying and creating national and regional initiatives in order to exchange experiences and prioritize child rights on both the national and regional agendas.



Component C: Advocacy

The third component of the Manara Network aims to further the integration of the concerns and recommendations of child rights CSOs and of children themselves in decisions taken by authorities at national and regional levels, including policy and legislation change.

Dialogue and exchange between CSOs and governments has been promoted at both national and regional levels. Activities focus on encouraging close coordination between key regional and national governmental and civil society actors, including the Children's Rights Unit of The League of Arab States, the Arab Inter-parliamentary Union, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the national Higher Councils for Childhood, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child of



Specific **Advocacy trainings** are provided for partners, to develop their skills and capacity in sharing the analyses produced and advocating for good governance and the full implementation of the CRC. Activities to influence decision-making processes in favour of children's rights is undertaken, with **advocacy strategies** developed and implemented at the national and regional levels.

To ensure and provide children with the opportunity to actively engage in affecting decisions that impact them, children participate in advocacy activities, including the following: based on the child-led data collection process, the young researchers in each country use the **Animate-it technique** to create animated films, with the support and guidance of the Manara Network members, in order to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by children and the protection gaps identified through their research. Animation is a powerful tool that can enable children's creative expression. Through the **Animate-it technique** children use animation to discuss their concerns, report on their situation and educate other children and adults about issues important to their lives. Through this medium, children are able to tell their stories free of external effects such as social pressures.

Animation can be an excellent advocacy and awareness raising communication tool. Children raise awareness on issues affecting their lives and advocate for change based on their rights guaranteed by the UNCRC. The Animate-it tool, inexpensive in terms of cost, is highly efficient in attracting attention of decision makers (duty bearers) because it is simply "animation", which everyone enjoys watching, particularly because it is done by children. It is human nature that adults pay much more attention to children than to their peers.

Component D: CRC & CRP mainstreaming

The final component aims to ensure children's needs and rights are a priority in all development efforts across the MENA region. The project will focus not only on child rights actors but also on other relevant development and human rights actors, including national human rights institutions, human rights NGOs, CSOs working with and/or for children and child and youth-led organizations. National development plans and, when these exist, poverty reduction strategies will be analyzed through a child rights perspective and recommendations developed in this regard.



Moreover, capacities of the Manara Network members is strengthened on child rights programming (CRP) which means using the principles of children's rights to plan, implement and monitor programmes with the overall goal of improving the position of children so that all boys and girls can fully enjoy their rights and can live in societies that acknowledge and respect children's rights, so that they are able to influence the planning of the above mentioned stakeholders to be based on child rights.





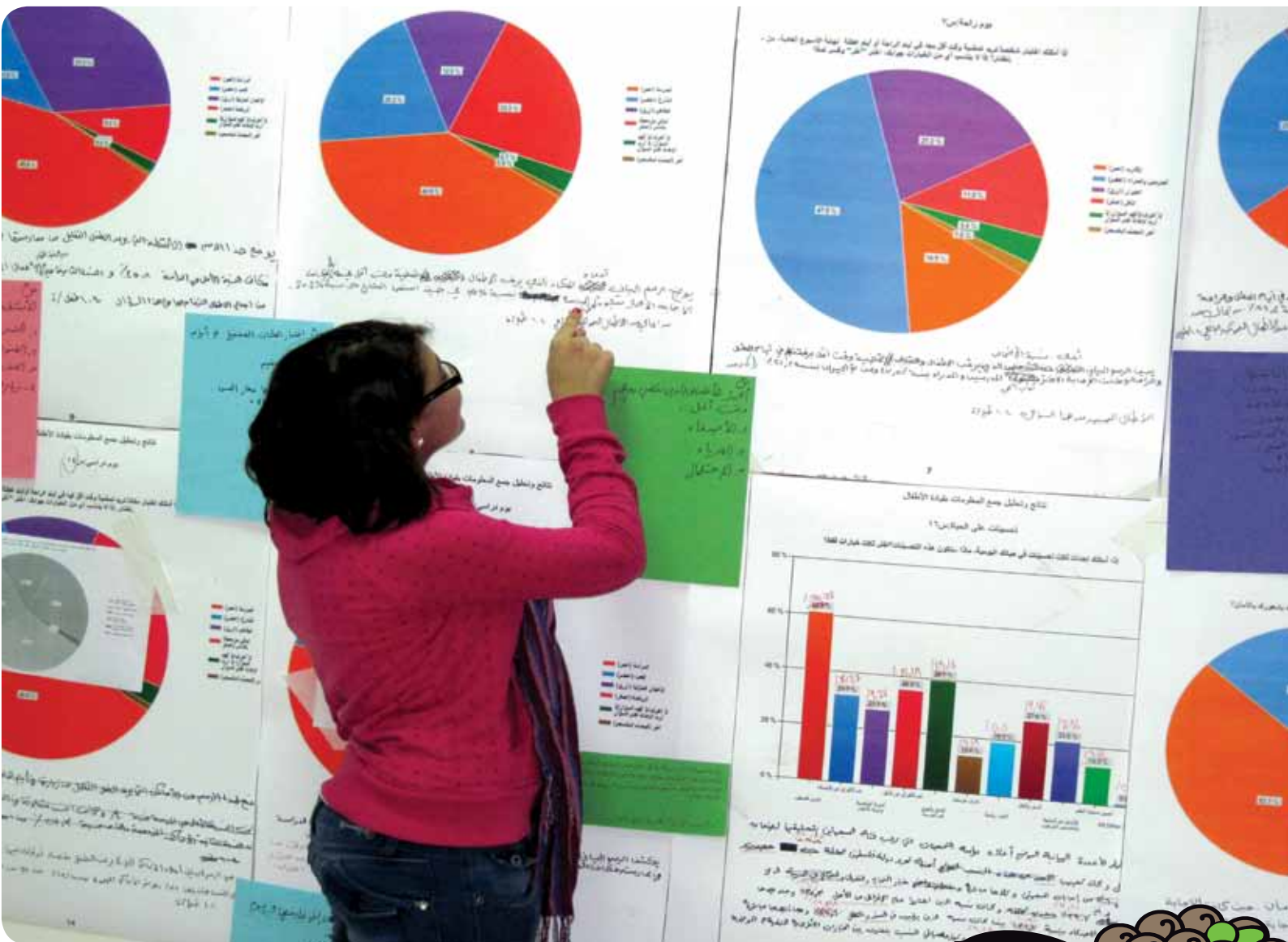
“ANIMATE IT”-CHILDREN MAKE THEIR OWN FILMS



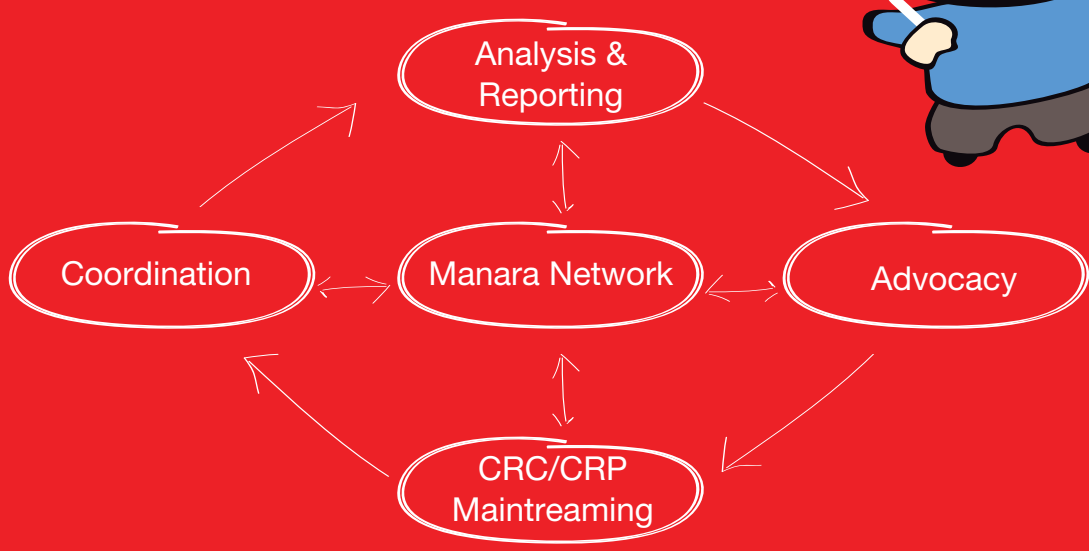
The “ANIMATE-IT” method enables children to design and produce animation films about issues that concern them. The method was created in 1982 in Sweden by Erling Ericsson and has been used in over 40 countries. Since 1996, it has been adapted to the MENA region. Since 2007, SCS conducted and its partners in the MENA region are using the method as a tool for increasing understanding and knowledge about the CRC.

The method involves using a specially designed box made of wood, which can easily be made by a local carpenter, a web/video camera tied to the top of the box and simple material to create the animated film. After the film is created, some computer work is done to finalize the product. Children can easily be trained to use the equipment and produce their own animation films.





A Civil Society for Child Rights

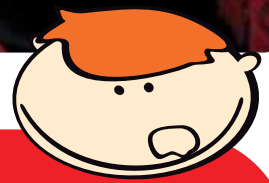


STAKEHOLDERS

Other actors

Collaboration with each government in the region is sought in order to develop their sense of ownership towards the reports and analyses produced and to facilitate the dialogue and partnerships under the coordination component; this includes the Higher Councils of Childhood and the relevant government ministries.

Close cooperation with the UNICEF headquarters as well as its MENA regional office and national offices is ensured, particularly with regards to the development of indicators for child rights, support to alternative reporting processes and raising awareness and advocacy campaigns. Ongoing collaboration with regional and international organizations is sought, including the Arab Council for Childhood and Development (ACCD), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR), World Bank, and international NGOs, including Defence for Children International DCI, Child Rights Information Network (CRIN), Amnesty International, Plan International etc.



The Network also works in close coordination with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the NGO Group on the CRC, the League of Arab States, the African Union, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Coordination with these actors serves to integrate their perspective and expertise in the development of the strategy and the implementation of the Manara Network activities. This collaboration involves the dissemination of information and analyses to influence decision making processes in favour of children's rights. Cooperation is continuously nurtured, including liaising with adequate respondents and contacts in each country, participation in regional seminars and joining forces to advocate for children's rights at the national, regional and international levels. Finally, the local and international media are also invited to support the dissemination of reports, seminars and findings, and to contribute to raising awareness on issues related to children's rights in the region.



For more Information

Save the Children Sweden

Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa

P.O.BOX: 1137- 167

Beirut- Lebanon

Tel: +961 1 7386545/, Fax: +961 1 739023

Website: <http://mena.savethechildren.se>

For more information on Manara Network visit: www.manaracrc.org

MANARA NETWORK





MANARA NETWORK
A CIVIL SOCIETY FOR CHILD RIGHTS
In The MENA Region

This project is funded by (Swedish International
Development Cooperation Agency)