

## Mobile Text Message Campaign in Gaza

**January 2012** - A mobile text message was sent out to 20,000 Palestinians living in Gaza as a part of a campaign carried out by the Children's Committees which were established in 10 public schools located in the Access Restricted Areas (ARAs)\* in Gaza. This came as part of the "Child protection mechanisms through a school based approach in Gaza" project. The text messages aimed to raise awareness on the issue of violence against children and moving people to take actions to stop violence against children. The message, released in Arabic said "**Our children are our future, lets protect them from violence**".

10 committees of a total of 100 boys and girls aged between 8 to 14 years old -10 children from each school- were established to empower children to better advocate for children's rights, such as the right to education, child rights violations or any other children's issues. The committees aim to for children to become actively involved in their own learning and development from an early age. The committees were elected by the school children.



\* The Access Restricted Areas denote the area close to Gaza's border with Israel. The Israeli military has indicated the boundary of the no go area to be 300 metres from the border but, in practice, it extends up to one kilometre and two kilometres at its widest point in North Gaza. The number of people directly affected is estimated at approximately 113,000 people or 7.5 per cent of Gaza's total population and 35 per cent of the arable land in Gaza (OCHA & WFP 2010: 'Humanitarian Impact of Israeli-imposed Restrictions on Access to Land and Sea in the Gaza Strip').

After forming the committees, a package of training was provided to the children to empower them to better organize and lead awareness raising campaigns. The training included child rights, communication skills, advocacy and successful meetings. The idea of the mobile text messages was proposed by the children during the planning phase of the information campaign addressing the issue of violence inside the school, as they wanted to send out a relevant and timely message which summarized their thoughts and reached as many Gazan residences as possible.



The selection of the text message was a bit challenging because having all the children deciding on one message was a hard job. However, when developing the message it is important to keep in mind that it should be short, informative and concise, restricted to a 160 character message. It should not give ambiguous information, and should be sent out once or twice within a set time frame because you don't want to bombard people with messages. Also the timing of sending out the message is very important, for example you shouldn't send a text message at 5 am in the morning.

To guarantee that the message will go to the right audience, a demographic targeting should be planned accordingly with the Cell phone company. In our campaign, the recipients were targeted to be between the ages of 19 to 40, living in the ARAs, pre-paid card customers (in order to reach the poor to average segment of the population in which violence is applied habitually), NGO workers (in order to draw their attention mainly for fundraising purposes) and governmental figures.



However, a lesson learned from this experience is that to make it more interactive and to ensure efficient two-way communication, there should be a reply option to the sender which is connected to the organizer, SCS and its partner Can'an in this case, or to make a call asking the receiver to express himself/ herself in some way through a poll or survey, in a specific set number of character message, poem or statement. Asking the receiver to do something would be more valuable and even more encouraging to the audience to express themselves — to 'talk' back, to suggest, and to respond.