



# A REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO GLOBAL BRAND STRENGTHENING

An overview of brand work across the global federation of SOS Children's Villages

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## Abstract

This article provides an overview of the current brand-related developments within the non-governmental and non-profit organisation SOS Children's Villages, including an outline of the current brand strengthening and capacity-building approach. It outlines past and present internal branding approaches of SOS Children's Villages International, including how the organisation's brand content was developed and expanded and a detailed look at the ongoing international brand strengthening and anchoring process. Finally, it presents an explanation of the SOS touchpoint management toolkit "Brand Into Action" which was designed to encourage and measure efficiency of internal branding and build the foundation for future brand strengthening and capacity building, inside and outside the organisation.

## Introduction

SOS Children's Villages operates in more than 130 countries to support families and help children at risk grow up in a loving home. For more than 60 years, we have worked with partners in communities around the world to either help families care for their children, or to provide an alternative, for instance an SOS family, in which the love of a caregiver is essential.

Everything we do is based on the best interests of the child, and each has an individual development plan. Uniquely, we provide practical support over the long term, so that each child or young person can grow up to develop resilient relationships and become a self-reliant adult. SOS Children's Villages has over 35,000 employees. It also works with partners in the provision of its services to children in need around the world.

## Why is brand leadership important for SOS Children's Villages?

Non-profit organisations are facing significant structural and organisational challenges on many levels. And as sources of income become ever more restricted for NGOs (whether from public funding, corporates or individual donors), the potential for reputational damage to result in decreased revenue must be managed. Within SOS Children's Villages International, the Brand Leadership Consulting department is one of the structures designed to help do so.

The NGO world is also increasingly organising itself and managing issues in the same way as companies and for-profit organisations. Once it has reached a certain size, a NGO just like any other company has to install up-to-date organisational structures and processes that reflect a changing global market.

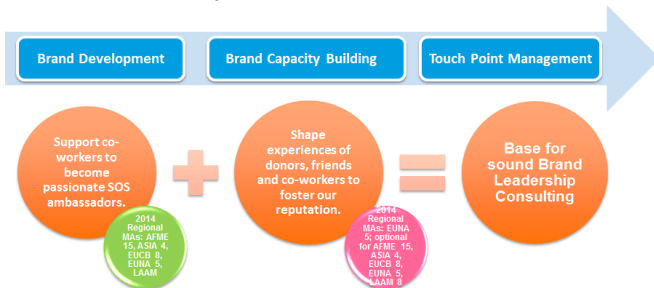
SOS Children's Villages, like some other international NGOs, operates under a federation structure, in which national member associations are independent and have a great deal of autonomy, but must comply with certain standards in order to use (and benefit from) the SOS Children's Villages brand. In such a situation, where the brand is a major component of the quality assurance system, the management of the brand cannot be left to chance. It must be actively strengthened from the 'headquarters' (the General Secretariat), with attention paid not just to 'policing' practicalities such as use of the logo and other visual elements, but also to fostering a common understanding of what the global organisation stands for and what binds its employees together.

"Brands are not controlled by managers but rather evolve in social discourse among people and organizations interested in the brand. Brand managers are confronted with the fact that they are not the only 'owners' of the brand who can actively manipulate brand images in the minds of passive consumers. However, this is not to say that brand managers cannot play an important part in the creation of brands. As they belong to the core of a brand interest group they have a prominent role in stimulating and altering brand-related social processes. They can actively contribute to the brand through products and

services, communication activities, events, people and platforms on which the interactions of brand interest group members may take place.” (Mühlbacher et al; 2008)

## Anchoring the SOS Children’s Villages brand at an international level

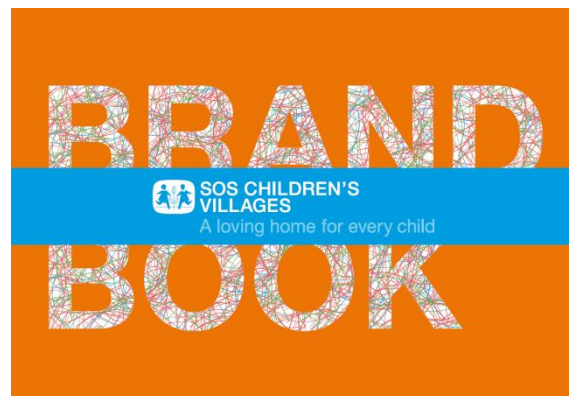
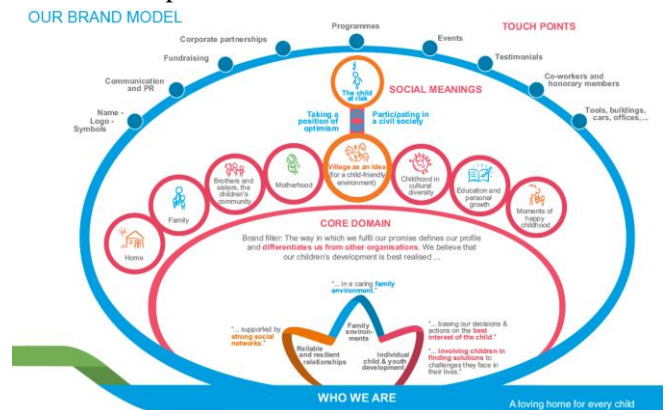
Donors and partners are also looking for convincing arguments that persuade them to contribute to an NGO, as well as to support their work consistently. Faced with increasing competition and limited resources, the question becomes: How can SOS Children’s Villages build a clear, understandable and unique profile within society? The approach of the Brand Leadership Consulting department is therefore designed to help management determine the strategic positioning of the organisation, ensuring that it reflects uniqueness and increases brand recognition. We strive to ensure that SOS Children’s Villages becomes the first choice for providing a loving home for every child, by enabling ONE consistent, global brand based on SOS Children’s Villages’ common mission: "to do the best for children in need". By establishing and maintaining our reputation internationally, a consistent basis of recognition is formed and donor retention can be more effectively ensured.



## Brand Development

At the outset, brand development was a challenging process. This was mainly due to parallel processes taking place simultaneously (the strategic development of the General Secretariat) and to different ideas among leaders and employees of what the future core identity of SOS Children's Villages should look like. Further adding to the challenge was the fact that the organisation operates in over 130 countries with varying cultural backgrounds and levels of economic and social development. Forming a cohesive and recognisable brand, while still allowing sufficient room for local adaptations, therefore needed to be taken into account. Shifting the brand development process from a communication-focused approach to a more holistic one also posed a significant challenge.

The process started with a strategy of small steps: The first was to raise awareness about the importance of brand and its development, and to share brand work with leaders and employees. A dialogue was created around the topic of brand in the worldwide organisation. Subsequently, the **SOS Children’s Villages Brand Model** and **Brand Book** were created. These are the organisation's main source of reference in terms of identity and provide an overview of the major approaches and aspects of the organization's brand development.



The SOS Children’s Villages Brand model and Brand Book

## The three key elements of the Brand Model:

### 1. Core domain

The **core domain** is the essence of the SOS Children’s Villages brand – the values and principles from which everything else grows, and our unique proposition. Underpinning the SOS Children’s Villages Programme Policy, the core domain can be seen as our commitment to reliable and resilient relationships, family environments, and individual child development.



## 2. Social Meanings

People do not donate primarily because of the high quality work SOS Children’s Villages is doing, but because what we are doing is meaningful to them. The brand derives power from emotions; and emotions come from **social meanings**. Social meanings relate what we are doing to a set of pre-existing images or concepts in people’s hearts and minds.

## 3. Touch points

Individuals come into contact with the organisation and ‘experience’ SOS Children’s Villages at various **touch points**. There are numerous ways in which this happens, in many contexts, whether through one-to-one personal contact, written or electronic communications, or events; and the context may be the delivery of programmes, fundraising, or advocacy.

### Each co-worker’s individual journey - Coaching and staff development

To strengthen the brand means showing our employees how to understand and express it. This is a process during which co-workers internalise the brand content, learn about both its strong and weak points, integrate strengths into their daily activities, and identify areas for improvement. National brand advisors are trained to guide employees through the brand journey, through a series of steps:



Ultimately, the goal is that all SOS Children's Villages employees will become passionate SOS brand ambassadors. The purpose is not to increase the number of brand specialists, tools and processes, but

rather to make it part of the mindset, decisions and actions of leaders and employees.

## Brand Capacity-Building

Brand capacity-building aims at guiding each employees individual brand journey, and translates it into a 4-step procedure which is designed to enable brand advisors and other trainers to train, to teach, to guide and to inspire others. These modules can be adapted to suit the individual needs of the member association, and can be combined or abbreviated as necessary. In a number of cases, these modules can be integrated into Human Resources materials for new and existing colleagues. Ideally, the brand training process looks as follows:

### Step 1: Brand Orientation

The session introduces the concept of brand and explains our core domain and promise, social meanings and touch points. It provides a broader overview of the process of brand strengthening, gives an overview of available sources of information, and aims to lay the foundations for building a strong commitment to the brand.

### Step 2: Brand Training

The objectives are to help employees integrate brand contents into their daily work, taking into consideration the key issues and challenges they currently face, and exploring how they can overcome those challenges and make real impact at the brand touch points.

### Step 3: Brand Workshop and Projects

Here employees learn how they can take ownership and do their part to help embed/integrate the brand. The workshop gives them tools for fostering shared images and collective thinking. Participants identify brand-related projects and actions which they discuss with other participants to set up the planning and implementation process.

### Step 4: Brand Dialogue: In-person and online

The main idea of this dialogue is to establish a regular exchange between our different departments/functions and Brand Leadership Consulting, in order to jointly reflect on practical experiences/the impact of brand-related aligned projects and/or actions and to foster touch point management. This approach is designed to



collect overall feedback to make sure that the brand has a meaningful integrated impact in all our areas of work, reaching every level of the organisation.

## Touch Point Management

Our organisation's touch points are the areas in which our organisation comes into contact with the outside world and makes an impression on society. By strategically analysing and evaluating these touch points, we can improve the quality of our stakeholder relationships and ensure consistency and support for our work around the world. Touch point analysis makes brand work concrete and relevant for strategic development. For our member associations, it is a motivating and inspiring addition to the strategic planning and other development processes. After a process of capacity building, national brand advisors can move on to touch point analysis, in order to move through the brand journey and foster the creation of passionate brand ambassadors.

Through touch point analysis, our member associations can also gain insight into potential areas for development. This process then allows person responsible for brand in each country to analyse the brand-related situation and identify strategic priorities that will drive the future brand work. Individual developmental measures or areas for improvement that are identified during touch point analysis can be integrated into the planning process as good practice, which allows the federation to even better support and service member associations according to their needs.

Putting our brand into action means enabling the leaders of the organization to actively make a positive contribution to the value of our brand, and therefore, to the organisation as a whole. Our brand advisors help facilitate this process, by consulting on issues such as:

- How is our brand frame influenced by innovations in the context of new initiatives such as “Villages of Tomorrow”? Are we an innovative organisation?
- How should we strategically and efficiently position our brand/our organisation through advocacy and external fundraising communications?
- Why should stakeholders support our brand?

## The Touch Point Analysis Toolkit



The Touch Point Analysis Toolkit, called “**Brand Into Action**” was designed to help its users reflect on various touch points and to come up with concrete ideas/actions to strengthen them. The outcome of the touch point analysis is used during the preparation phase of the strategic planning process.

The workshop is divided into modules, each comprised of a different activity. These activities are designed to first encourage workshop participants to work together to determine first what the brand is, why the brand is so important, and what actions they can take to improve the SOS Children's Villages brand reputation.

## Setting the stage for the future: Brand Leadership Consulting

One of the key learnings from the last five years of global brand strengthening was that NGOs like SOS Children's Villages cannot compete without a strong brand. Therefore, goals were set to optimise brand activities on all levels of the organisation, and make it an even stronger unifying and inspiring force that increases commitment and loyalty. Designed to serve as a sounding board to line managers, the Brand Leadership Consulting department continues to provide a source of advice, support and action on brand-related matters.

*The brand defines our strategic framework for action: it describes the way we see ourselves and the principles on which we act. The entire organisation is focused on the brand and derives all its decisions and processes from it. The result of putting brand into practice is our unique and distinctive profile. We create trust that enables us to attract promoters, sponsors and long-term companions. Consistency of the brand makes us more attractive and broadens*

our access to the emotional, social and financial resources around us – provided that we consistently express our brand identity at each and every touch point with the outside world (CEO Richard Pichler 2008).

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<http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/>

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