



Children and Young People as Citizens

PARTNERS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Overview



Save the Children

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Overview

**Promoting Children and Young People
Participation and Citizenship Rights in
South and Central Asia**

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Edited by: Judith Amtzis

The vision

Save the Children works for:

- a world which respects and values each child
- a world which listens to children and learns
- a world where all children have hope and opportunity

The mission

Save the Children fights for children's rights.

We deliver immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide.

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Preface

“We worry what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget he/she is someone today” (Stacia Staucher). The work of Save the Children is rooted in the principles enshrined in the Convention of the Right of the Child (CRC) and committed to support children claiming their rights. Save the Children in South and Central Asia has a vision for tomorrow grounded in the reality of today, we believe that “Children are not only the future but they are also the citizens of today” (Children’s Forum, UN Special Session on Children, 2002)

Girls’ and boys’ active participation: their right to be heard, have influence on decisions that affect them and become partners in action are fundamental principles for Save the Children. As a consequence it was decided to look at examples of how children, from various backgrounds, in South and Central Asia have actually organised themselves and been able to influence their own daily living situation. This work carried out in 2001 and 2002 by Claire O’Kane on behalf of Save the Children, revealed an immense and impressive richness in what children have achieved.

This resulting set of publications compiles our learning from the study. It provides a wealth of examples of children’s participation and citizenship in families, communities, schools, work places, local government bodies and other settings. It highlights the many diverse and creative ways in which children organise themselves, let their voices be heard and create change in their lives, appropriate to their different cultures and situations. These experiences of children are enriched with analysis, reflections and lessons learned that are important for all organisations working to promote children’s participation and rights.

The publications indicate that it is easier to motivate children to raise their voices, to organise themselves and to claim their rights than it is for adults to listen with respect and respond constructively. There are clear messages about this major challenge and other ethical issues to be considered in promoting children’s participation.

The publications are the collective work of a great many children and staff of partner organisations and Save the Children members in South and Central Asia. Thanks to all of you for your contributions and willingness to get involved in this work. You have made this documentation possible.

Our very special thanks go to Claire O’Kane for her hard work, commitment and dedication, and for her deep respect for the views and rights of children. Thanks also to a core group of Save the Children staff members, Asif Munier, Y.Bhavani, Chandrika Khatiwada, Prakash Koirala, Ranjan Pouldyal and Unni Rustad, who all made substantial and creative contributions. The publications were finalised and edited by Shikha Ghildyal, Ravi Karkara and Judith Amtzis. Our sincere thanks for your contributions and commitment to make this a living, working document.

These publications are dedicated to the children of South and Central Asia. We hope that they will open a great many eyes as to what children can accomplish and what support can help them to improve their lives now and in the future.

The Steering Committee

Save the Children South and Central Asia

(Eiichi Sadamatsu, Girish Godbole, Herluf G. Madsen, Linda Moffat, Ned Olney, Sultan Mahmud, and Valter Tinderholt)

Road Map for Readers

Imagine a scene... a group of girls, boys and young people of different ages sitting together, eyes bright, animated, as they discuss ideas and share their views on issues concerning them in their local communities. Working in creative ways they plan actions to raise awareness and gain adult support in taking action to further the realisation of their rights. **Consider the backdrop to the scene...** a Himalayan mountain village, a congested city, an isolated village in a desert area, a refugee camp, a village in the plains, a beach by the sea... in situations both of peace and of conflict.

In diverse settings across South and Central Asia children and young people are coming together as a positive force for social change. Empowered girls, boys and young people are raising their voices and bringing about positive changes for children and adults in their local and national communities.

Considering the scale of this region and the prevailing social norms that exclude children and young people from decision-making at all levels, these groups of empowered girls and boys may only represent a ‘drop in the ocean’. However, these are significant drops, creating ripples of change at local, national and regional levels. In demonstrating their strengths, their unity, and their hope boys and girls are touching the lives of adults surrounding them, and in the process transforming relationships between adults and children. Recognition of the benefits of listening and responding to the views of children and young people is gaining momentum. Through their efforts boys and girls are breaking the silence that has for so long fostered their marginalisation. They are challenging all forms of discrimination, inequality, abuse and exploitation, and are providing powerful illustrations of their role as active citizens.

As a guardian of children’s rights, Save the Children is actively supporting such efforts. Save the Children believes that children and young people are active citizens of both today and tomorrow. While taking their evolving capacity into consideration, girls and boys are recognised as human beings with rights to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Save the Children adopts a rights-based approach to development, developing programmes underpinned by the principles of children’s rights and human rights. Children’s participation is a principle of rights-based programming. Children are right holders who can play an active role in increasing fulfilment of their other rights to survival, protection and development.

Save the Children Alliance in South and Central Asia has focused on 'Children's Citizenship and Governance' (CCG) as a key niche area, recognising children and young people's role as active citizens as well as the benefits of rights-based approaches to development. All agencies concerned with development, good governance or social justice should include girls and boys as active partners in the development process. This publication, which consists of an Overview and three booklets, highlights the richness of experience and positive impacts from Save the Children's innovative work on children's participation and citizenship with NGO partners and Children's Organisations in the South and Central Asia region.

This Overview to the three-part "Children and Young People as Citizens: Partners for Social Change" series aims to reflect on Save the Children Alliance and its partners' experiences with children and young people's participation and citizenship in South and Central Asia and to make some suggestions for promoting and building capacity in promoting children and young people's participation and citizenship rights. The ideas in this Overview are based on the Save the Children Alliance (South and Central Asia) Children's Citizenship and Governance (CCG)¹ study and other documents. Following the introduction, the Overview explores Save the Children's vision as it relates to children and young people's participation and goes on to reflect on the meaning and value of children's participation, citizenship and governance. It then explores the arenas and levels of participation and citizenship followed by sections on identifying achievements, issues and gaps, strategic challenges, implications for Save the Children and the way forward.

¹ O' Kane, Claire, 2003. 'Children and Young People as Citizens: Partners for Social Change' (Draft). South and Central Asia: Save the Children.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ATGP	Alliance Task Group on Participation
CCG	Children's Citizenship and Governance
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
ECD	Early Childhood Development
GMC	Global Movement for Children
Save the Children	The International Save the Children Alliance
NPA	National Plan of Action
NGO	Non Government Organisations
PrepCom	Preparatory Committee Meeting
S & C Asia	South and Central Asia
UNSSOC and SSOC	United Nations Special Session on Children
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

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1. Introduction

In South and Central Asia the intellectual thought and philosophies of all religions have significantly influenced the traditional definitions of children’s rights and obligations. While some attitudes toward children and childhood provide spaces for children’s participation and citizenship, the dominant ideas and principles are contrary to recognising them as persons, and thus severely limit children’s participation and citizenship rights.

Throughout the world, the concept of children and young people² exercising their participation and citizenship and rights lacks an historical precedent and differs from general social, cultural and religious values. Most societies in the world, including those of this region, are hierarchical, authoritarian and patriarchal. The adult-child relationship is usually constructed in an asymmetrical and authoritarian manner to create an environment where children and young people are powerless. This situation occurs in families, schools, workplaces, and the wider community. Nowhere in the world, either in the South or the North, have children been accorded full participation rights.

Despite this general historical trend, opposing views have been presented. Eglantyne Jebb³, founder of Save the Children, was a woman of extraordinary vision who early in the last century proposed a Declaration on the Rights of the Child. She believed that:

...“we should claim certain Rights for the children and labour for their universal recognition, so that everybody - not merely the small number of people who are in a position to contribute to relief funds, but everybody who in any way comes into contact with children, that is to say the vast majority of mankind - may be in a position to help forward the movement”.

Kahlil Gibran⁴ in his spiritual work *The Prophet* presented children as independent beings with autonomous capabilities. He expressed this in the following words:

² This paper follows the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child’s definition of children as all people up to, and including 18 years of age. As some older children prefer to be called youth or young people, the terms children and young people are both used.

³ Eglantyne Jebb (1876-1929). Eglantyne put her unique vision into the 1923 Declaration of the Rights of the Child, a simple statement of rights to be followed by everyone dealing with children, not just the wealthy or the powerful. The Declaration was adopted and promoted by the International Save the Children Union. Within a year it had been adopted by the League of Nations and had achieved lasting international significance. The present UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is derived from Eglantyne’s original inspiration.

⁴ Kahlil Gibran (Jubran Kahlil Jubran: 1883-1931), a Lebanese-American-Arabic novelist, poet and painter, was a romantic mystic and visionary. He preached love, beauty, freedom and redemption in his work.

*"Your children are not your children
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
Which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backwards but tarrys with yesterday....."*

Following from such early pioneers, the past decade has seen significant movement and growing numbers of individuals and organisations striving towards new policies for children, and promoting children and young people's role in influencing such policy developments. A paradigm shift regarding the place and status of children's voices in society is taking place, with increasing recognition of the need to listen to children and young people, to facilitate their participation in decisions which affect them, and to build new kinds of partnerships with them.

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is one of the most important factors behind this shift, for the CRC clearly recognises the child as a holder of rights. Rather than seeing children as mere recipients of adults' care and protection, children and young people are recognised as actors in their own lives, as individuals whose views and opinions should be expressed and taken seriously. Children's participation is identified as a core principle of the CRC. While taking children's age and maturity into consideration, Article 12 of the CRC clearly establishes children's right to be involved in decisions that affect them.

Save the Children Alliance members and their partners lay great emphasis on children's participation rights (Articles 5, 12-15, 17, 23, 29 and 31) for all children, irrespective of gender, age, dis/ability, rural/urban, class, caste, ethnicity, and/or religion.

Although the CRC is thirteen years old, the concept of children having individual rights is still an alien concept despite the efforts and investment of Save the Children, governments, NGOs, UN agencies, civil society and others to promote it and to put in place systems and processes to implement children’s rights in the South and Central Asia region.

The social, political, cultural, and religious environment can be hostile to children and young people exercising their participation and citizenship rights. Even adults, particularly women, seeking to exercise these rights face difficulty in many contexts. Allowing children greater power to participate is seen as a threat to the power relations between adults and children and young people. Even where there is receptiveness in promoting children and young people’s participation, many adults and institutions lack the capacity for facilitating effective participation processes.

Evidence from reviews of Save the Children’s work in the region however shows that change is possible despite prevalent resistance to children’s participation and citizenship rights. Save the Children’s experience in South and Central Asia demonstrates how, in a variety of settings, transformation has been made in shifting child-adult relationships.

In its endeavour to promote children’s rights, the International Save the Children Alliance in the South and Central Asia Region (henceforth referred to as Save the Children) has been working towards the promotion of children and young people’s participation and citizenship rights despite the above-mentioned challenges.

Save the Children’s global values and vision are based on the CRC. The Save the Children Alliance (South and Central Asia) members have agreed that their common strength and niche⁵ is their belief in promoting ‘children-child participation-child rights’. Its Symphony 2010 – document (November 2000) describes the journey the Save the Children Alliance wants to take by 2010. A key goal is for ‘children to see Save the Children as a partner’.

Save the Children’s innovative, dynamic, and proactive work towards the realisation of children’s rights to participation also enhances fulfilment of children’s rights to non-discrimination, survival, protection and development. Practical work demonstrates that children’s citizenship leads to the development of democratic, inclusive, non-violent societies

⁵ ‘Niche’ refers to Save the Children’s efforts to promote quality children’s participation at all levels and in all contexts.

with good governance that respects the rights of all citizens. The child-rights programming approach recognises children as right holders and supports children to exercise their civil rights. Exercising their rights to information, expression and association, children are able to claim their rights, holding duty bearers accountable.

2. Save the Children’s Vision on Children’s Participation and Citizenship

The vision of what children and young people should achieved by exercising their right to participation has been expressed in many Save the Children workshops, consultations, strategic meetings, conferences, research, reviews and evaluations, and other events by children and young people, Save the Children staff and partners in the S & C Asia region. The vision can be summarised as follows:

Our Vision is a time when⁶:

Duty bearers (at all levels) are aware of their responsibilities and obligations to children and are acting upon them.

Right Holders (girls and boys from all backgrounds, regardless of age, dis/ability, ethnicity, class, caste, region, religion, sexual preference, HIV/AIDS status etc.) are empowered to raise their voices and to participate in decision-making at various levels.

Civil society is mobilised to advocate for children’s rights and is effective in influencing policy change.

The collective belief of children and young people, Save the Children and its partners is that participation and citizenship is a right of children, and is therefore valuable and legitimate in itself, whether or not some other benefit results. It is also a means that can lead to further benefit, contributing to the development of values, attitudes and abilities of children as social actors, and contributing to creating a society where children’s rights and values are respected and fulfilled.

Reflections for consideration

- Save the Children promotes children and young people’s participation and citizenship because it is their right and not as a matter of goodwill.
- Participation and citizenship experience in the present makes children active citizens of today as well as active citizens of the future.
- The concept of citizenship emphasises girls’ and boys’ rights to participate as a value in itself as well as for effective programming.
- Children and young people’s creative abilities and strengths are emphasised rather than their problems.

⁶ Vision of participants representing all Save the Children members from the region during a regional strategy meeting on Child Rights Programming and Children’s Citizenship and Governance in September 2002.

3. The Meaning and Value of Children’s Participation, Citizenship and Governance

The focus of this paper is on children’s participation as a way for girls and boys to meet, to share their views and experiences, and to take an active part in society. Through their participation, children can influence processes, decisions and policies that lead to greater realisation of their own rights.

Save the Children (South and Central Asia) Definition of Children’s Citizenship and Governance⁷

Children’s citizenship and governance is concerned with the active participation of girls, boys and young people in the familial, social, economic, political and cultural arenas. It is a step-by-step process through which they develop the skills, understanding and values to influence decision-making and outcomes at local, national and international levels in an environment that recognises them as competent social actors.

Citizenship for children and young people empowers them to exercise their rights and responsibilities alongside adults in the interest of both their peers and others. Their participation challenges existing inequalities and the root causes of poverty and positively contributes to a more just and democratic world.

Recognition is growing that people do not suddenly become active citizens overnight on reaching a certain age. Girls and boys need to learn how to become citizens through everyday experiences within their families, their communities, their schools and their nations.

Save the Children in this region promotes children and young people’s active participation in governance, here meaning the processes of decision-making and implementation. Children’s citizenship contributes to good governance, where public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources in the interest of the citizens, while guaranteeing the realisation of human rights.

Governance involves structures and systems. It is concerned with power and resources and opportunities to influence matters that affect individuals and their communities. For children and young people, governance relates to several contexts such as family, school governance, local community governance and national governance and international governance.

⁷ This definition is based on definitions developed during SC-UK Cross-Regional workshop on Citizenship, 26-27 April 2001, as well as on earlier definitions developed by SC UK OSCAR.

Increasingly, children and young people from this region are exercising their citizenship rights (with support from adults when required) to highlight issues and promote action to realise their rights. This process opens the door to harnessing children's energy, enthusiasm and insights to create a better world. Children and adults are both transformed thereby. The more individuals and organisations learn, understand and promote the conditions required for effective participation, the more power shifts towards a balance between adults and children and young people.

Why we promote children's participation

- Participation itself is Children's Right
- Participation Leads to Increased Fulfilment of other Rights
- Children and Young People as Citizens Create a Better Developed Civil Society and Democracy
- Children's Participation Enhances Child Development
- Children are Social Actors and have their Own Perspectives
- Children's Participation Increases the Effectiveness of Programmes, Improving Children's Lives



The Current Situation of Children’s Participation

- Compared to the rights to protection, survival & development, children’s participation and citizenship right is more controversial and less recognised, even though all countries in the region have signed the CRC.
- Children and young people’s participation rests on a rights-based ideology and can be challenging to organisations working from a ‘welfare model’
- The practice of children and young people’s participation and citizenship rights has now been established as a small but growing movement. This principle has, however, not yet been formalised in any legislation in South and Central Asia.
- While children and young people are increasingly making autonomous decisions amongst themselves and with their peers, in most contexts adults still define the conditions, norms and scope of children and young people’s participation.

Creating a good environment for meaningful participation

To create a good environment for meaningful participation we have learned that it is useful to:

- Explore existing practices in local culture and religion that support the idea of listening to children and young people while understanding and respecting all aspects of local culture.
- Engage, sensitise and prepare parents, teachers, elders and other community members on the values of children’s participation and citizenship.
- Encourage children and young people and adults to explore and recognise the child-friendly values of their local culture and tradition.
- Develop staff capacity to facilitate children’s participation.
- Share and build upon positive examples of children’s participation and citizenship.
- Seek agreement and support with governments through regular dialogue on children and young people’s participation.
- Build capacity of children, young people and adults at various levels to enable children and young people’s participation as well as an effective response to issues children raise.
- Organisations promoting children and young people’s participation need to work on democratic principles to empower their own workforce.
- Proactively work with civil society as a whole to promote children and young people’s participation and citizenship rights.
- Enable inclusive processes for children’s participation and children’s organisations.
- Enable regular reflection, development and use of guidelines by children, young people and adults to ensure ethical practices.
- Promote networking at different levels between organisations (children and adults) to share information and learning, and to develop common advocacy initiatives.

4. Children’s Participation and Citizenship: Arenas and Levels

Children and young people have participated in diverse geographic and institutional settings at different levels, from the personal and local through to the national, regional and global. Children’s participation in the institutions and processes of their every day reality is likely to have a deeper and more sustainable impact than participation located in more remote settings. Homes, schools, the street (for children living on the streets), workplaces (for child labourers) and children’s organisations are important focus areas for participation work. The strength and experience gained in these arenas enhances children and young people’s engagement at the level of governance and policy development.

Save the Children's experiences in children's participation and citizenship work in this region covers a broad range of activities, processes and events.

Different kinds of experiences with children's participation and citizenship in South and Central Asia

- Enabling opportunities in Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes for children to think for themselves, communicate effectively, get along with others and play an active role in families
- Children's involvement with the media as actors, journalists, producers, radio and TV presenters, film makers, photographers and artists, in addition to others
- Raising children's voices at policy-making arenas - adults listening and acting upon children's views (at local, national regional and international levels)
- Children influencing adult decision making in government planning, decision-making and law-making (at various levels)
- Children's representation in governance structures (e.g. school management, local government structures, child rights monitoring committees)
- Children as researchers (e.g. on child labour, HIV/AIDS, violence)
- Children's involvement in advocacy and public education
- Children fighting against cruelty and extreme exploitation of children (e.g. prevention of child marriage, child trafficking, child labour, sexual abuse, corporal punishment).
- Building and strengthening children's organisations, clubs, committees, unions, and parliaments
- Developing networks of children's organisations
- Children participating in conferences: UN Special Session; meetings on combatting commercial sexual exploitation of children; children's fora; child labour conferences; HIV/AIDS conferences, children's consultation related to the NPA for children
- Child participation in Save the Children and its partners' programme spiral (during research and needs assessments, design, implementation, monitoring, review and evaluations) as well as children's participation in recruitment, and developing strategic and operational plans
- Children monitoring the situation of children (rights, abuse, exploitation, including economic exploitation)
- Training of adult and child facilitators
- Children as educators (peer education: life skills, HIV/AIDS, sexuality, law/legal issues, rights)

Experience has been primarily at the community level, in the media and at various policy level engagements. These latter include State Party and NGO reporting processes to the UN CRC, end decade review, Global Movement for Children and processes leading to the UN SSOC and post UN SSOC processes, preparation of NPAs, and various consultation at provincial, country and regional levels, as well as at the international level (i.e. HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation, trafficking and so on). There has also been some experience in programme development and in emergency situations. A shortcoming is that little focus and investment has been put into Save the Children's work on participation at the family level, which is closest to the lives of children. Some experience exists at the school level but this appears to be limited. Given the potential for impact, Save the Children might need to focus its energies in this important area.

Save the Children’s experiences are of various kinds and levels of children and young people exercising their participation and citizenship rights. There have been different qualities and impacts of participation. Some involve a one-off short-term engagement (for example, in project/programme reviews, advocacy initiatives, participation in policy conferences, and consultation processes) while others are long term (for example, C-EMIS, child-friendly schools, promotion and development of children’s clubs, children’s participation in emergencies, and media initiatives). Some involve structured children’s groups and child led-organisations that continue to participate in many initiatives. While some of the engagements involve a large group of children and young people, others are limited to small groups that are more or less representative of a wider group of children and young people.

Most children and young people Save the Children works with and supports are socially or economically marginalised, and most of the work involves building children and young people’s confidence and capacities. Some brings direct benefits to children’s everyday lives and others contribute to benefits that may be realised in the long term.

5. Children’s Participation and Citizenship in Reality

This section looks at what has in reality happened as a result of Save the Children’s work in participation and citizenship in this region. It identifies and reviews some of the achievements, issues and gaps, and strategic challenges in relation to children and young people’s participation and citizenship rights.

A. What has Save the Children Achieved in the Region?

i. Experience of children and young people’s participation and citizenship

Save the Children and its partners have moved beyond rhetoric and put the CRC into action. A large body of experience has been generated, demonstrating a wide variety of structures, processes, approaches, and results of children’s participation and citizenship. An overwhelming lesson has been the capacities of children and young people to participate and exercise their citizenship rights. This work has demonstrated to society that children and young people are capable of much more than was previously thought: from a very young age onward children’s capacities are greater than generally imagined. Adults and children and young people have learnt many lessons from the experience of children’s participation and citizenship programmes. They can build upon these in the future.

ii. Capacities of marginalised children

Save the Children has focused, in most cases, on the marginalised children in its programme and projects. Its experience, therefore, has been on children and young people who are economically, socially, and geographically marginalised. This focus has demonstrated to adults and policy makers how marginalised children can exercise their participation and citizenship rights.

iii. Change of attitudes and relationships

Many adults who have been involved with Save the Children and its partners in promoting children's participation and citizenship rights have implicitly and explicitly supported the changing nature of adult-child relationships. Pools of adults (teachers, parents, NGO staff, Save the Children staff, government officials etc) in the region believe in the values of CRC and children's active participation in society. Groups of adults and children have acted on the basis of this changed belief and have taken steps to support and promote it. As a result, more children are now empowered and confident and see themselves in a new light.

**iv. Building constituencies for children's rights and participation**

Through our work on children's participation Save the Children has influenced other local, national and international agencies to promote children's participation rights and to develop networks for such work. Save the Children is seen as a pioneer in this area and is often approached to provide technical support and training.

v. Impact at the national level

The UNGASS and GMC processes in the countries in the region helped scale-up the discourse and practice of children's participation and citizenship rights in national agendas. Some government departments at various levels have recognised the value and the need to work with CYP and have taken initiatives to do so.

vi. Children’s organisations

Children’s organisations have increased many times over in the region and are now a powerful force that adults can harness for work that promotes children’s participation and citizenship. Save the Children initiated some of the children’s organisations; others were started either by children and young people themselves or by NGOs. Save the Children has helped children and young people and adults develop, strengthen and promote children’s organisations

vii. Increased facilitation capacities

Save the Children has developed the skills of its staff and partners and is equipped to promote genuine children’s participation. Evidence suggests that expertise on which to build has developed in the region in most settings of participation and citizenship work. However, this does not mean that numbers of sufficiently skilled staff are adequate. Continuous investment in capacity development of both children and young people and adults is crucial.

viii. Children’s participation in governance

Increasing focus is being given in this region to children’s participation in local governance. Such participation aims to influence decisions, thereby contributing to positive outcomes for children. In most cases, this has developed out of a longer process of empowering children and young people in community contexts (child clubs, CCVDs, Child unions). Boys and girls are actively demanding effective delivery of basic services like education, health, water and sanitation childcare services and basic infrastructure. Learning from children’s engagement in local governance is an area for Save the Children to build upon to promote it further.

ix. Documenting and sharing

Over the past five years, Save the Children has contributed to documenting good practice regarding children’s participation and citizenship rights. Beginnings have also been made to promote connections between individuals and organisations in order to share experiences, to reflect and increase skills and capacity. Principles and tools to help programme work are being developed.

x. Positive outcomes for children and young people

Children and young people place great value on meeting together, making new friends, gaining confidence, challenging discrimination and taking action on their rights. In many consultations, workshops, training programmes, meetings, gatherings and other events children and young

people have expressed their appreciation of the space provided them for talking to their peers and expressing their ideas and feelings in situations where adults listen to them. This in itself can be path-breaking and empowering, especially for marginalised young people - girls and children of certain castes and classes - living in a culture that customarily discriminates against them.

The diversity of children and young people exercising their participation and citizenship rights provides many examples of the benefits for children. The right to participation and citizenship is not only an end in itself but is also a means of enabling positive outcomes for girls and boys themselves, their peers and the wider community. Children and young people have been empowered to address rights violation and to claim their rights; their views are being taken seriously and their status increased. Participating in governance structures has a positive influence on young people's development, and provides a learning experience on the value of democracy. Increased media attention to child rights issues is yet another result.

Participation and citizenship Examples of positive outcomes for children and young people

- Child clubs are fora where children and young people can voice and discuss their concerns about the on-going conflict and they provides a space within which issues are addressed (Sri Lanka, Nepal).
- Child Brigade members have formed a partnership with a human rights organisation to start a 'monitoring cell' where Child Brigade members can access immediate, free legal assistance when children come into conflict with the law (Bangladesh).
- Children and young people are members of district level and village level adult political structures (DCWBs & VDCs in Nepal & India).
- Children and young people from child clubs participate in monthly divisional and district level child rights monitoring committees (Sri Lanka).
- Children and young people form child groups make bi-monthly presentations on their concerns (health, water, sanitation, security, etc.) to refugee camp administrators and social service staff. They thereby participate in camp governance and have an immediate positive impact for themselves and for their communities. (Kotkai Afghan refugee Camp, Pakistan).
- Children's committees in child-friendly schools are making a difference by monitoring teacher's behaviour and addressing the issue of corporal punishment in schools (Nepal).
- Children and young people are challenging existing patterns of discrimination by including girls, younger children, low caste and differently abled boys and girls in their clubs, designing an equitable representation process, and advocating against discriminatory practices (India, Nepal).
- Children and young people have been able to speak up about and protect themselves form abuse and exploitation, preventing early child marriages, and bringing police and legal action against child abusers and child traffickers (Bangladesh, Nepal).
- Children's media centres and groups have enabled children and young people's participation in radio, print and TV journalism (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan).
- Children and young people are involved in participatory review of Save the Children's projects (India). Children and young people also reviewed their participation in events leading to the UNSSOC (Pakistan, Bangladesh).

At times however, shortcomings or negative outcomes are also seen, as the examples in the box below indicate.

Examples of Negative outcomes

- Child clubs are involved in cleaning community latrines but are not in decision-making regarding sanitation and hygiene in the wider community (Nepal).
- Participation in children's clubs takes place in a box (i.e. within the club only). The children remain isolated with the wider community (Nepal, India).
- Children and young people in refugee camps were aware of sexual exploitation and abuse. Some were even victims. This issue was discussed in the Children's Forum at the camps, but the agencies concerned did not take the children seriously. This developed into a major scandal a year or so later. So while child participation was practised inside the children's forum, it had no impact outside (Bhutanese refugee camps, Nepal.)
- Children and young people are encouraged to express their views, likes and dislikes and ideas for changes. In some cases this raises false expectations without an appropriate response and follow-up.
- A tendency in participatory initiatives is for the most vocal, articulate, educated, English speaking or photogenic children to have more opportunities to participate and represent their peers. This reinforces existing patterns of discrimination. Domination by a few and the sidelining of minority views is still a challenge to overcome. Issues are raised of the 'same faces' always being seen and of 'false democracy'.

B. Issues and Gaps

The following have been identified as current issues and gaps in Save the Children's programme experience in the region. Concrete areas where Save the Children might wish to consider focusing its work to generate further experience and learning have been identified.

i. Building capacities of children and adults

Save the Children has been focusing on knowledge and skills development of adults and children and young people, but much more needs to be done. Experience shows that investment in knowledge and skills leads to change in attitudes and behaviour of both adults and children and young people. Relating to girls and boys as active participants means a shift in adults' attitudes. The participation process includes learning from children and being willing to unlearn assumptions and prejudices that cloud adults' perceptions of the young. The same is true for older children relating to younger ones or of boys relating to girls. Participation is a dynamic process in which both children and young people and adults must adapt and change. Save the Children will therefore need to provide support in facilitation skills, researching with children, participatory tools (video, photographs, theatre, radio plus others), and other key areas.

ii. Children's' participation in the programme/project spiral

This region has had limited experience of children and young people exercising their participation and citizenship rights throughout the entire spiral and as project and

programme implementation partners. The experience tends to be of participation at the stage of needs assessment, during impact assessment and evaluation, or during advocacy events. While these are important and valuable, children and young people are rarely engaged in the programme/project spiral – from situation analysis through evaluation. Further experimentation and documentation of girls and boys as stakeholders in all sectors (i.e. education, health juvenile justice, education etc.), as active participants in decision-making and as beneficiaries is required.

iii. Review, monitoring and impact evaluation of child participation and citizenship

Experiments have been undertaken with various methods and tools of children's participation in project/programme/pieces of work/review/monitoring and evaluation. Actually determining the impact of children's participation is relatively underdeveloped, however. Child participation on practices, mechanisms and structures must be monitored, along with compliance with ethical standards of child rights and child participation. The impact of child participation on adult attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of working with children, as well as structures and mechanisms in society, organisations and politics requires study. Save the Children needs to learn more systematically from the region's wealth of experience in order to document lessons, both successes and failures.

Twelve Key Gaps in Research and Evaluation

- What are the links between children's participation and socially responsible democratic citizenship?
- What is the implication for organisations when they support children's participation and citizenship, when they take children as partners?
- How does participation change adult-child relationships? Child-Child relationships? Local and national cultures of childhood?
- What is the long-term impact of children and young people's participation in public decision-making?
- What are long-term impacts at individual and societal levels of their participation in child-led organisations and movements?
- How best can a culture of inclusive participation be established across an organisation or within an area or community?
- What is the cost-benefit analysis of different participation approaches and methods?
- How have institutions changed to enable children to feel comfortable and safe taking risks in the face of the new dynamics that emerge from participatory processes?
- What are the traditional and changing socio-cultural norms and values (attitudes and behaviour, institutional practices, approaches, procedures, and mechanisms) in the cultural, institutional, political and legal arenas that facilitate and inhibit the fulfilment of children and young people's participation and citizenship rights?
- What are parents' views about young people's participation in decision-making?
- What has been the impact of children and young people's participation in the media?
- Customary practices and religious teaching in this region focuses on duty, explicitly stating the duties of the children and young people towards their parents, elders, siblings and communities. Does the children's rights approach de-emphasise young people's duties and lead to a negative social impact?

iv. Promote democratic interaction and governance in schools

Save the Children has supported some initiatives for child-friendly schools and for children’s fora in schools (formal and non-formal) to impact on governance. More investment must be made in this type of activity where knowledge and skills on citizenship and civic values are not only taught but are also practiced in the school every day. In this region, schools are invariably authoritarian. This affects how children and young people construct their understanding of authority in the larger society. Schools must provide direct experience of democratic association and deliberation through consultations on issues affecting the students. This can happen through democratic student councils and school-based clubs, and with children and young people participating in parent–teachers meetings. Taking this further would involve working with teachers, school managers, parents and educational authorities.

v. Focus on inclusive approach to children’s participation, one that includes younger children and children with disabilities

Save the Children’s experience of work in the region has focused more on older than younger children. Too often, as with membership in child clubs and young people’s fora, children and young people between 12- 18 dominate. Programmes must therefore be designed to promote participation of younger children and to ensure their adequately representation. The environment, issues, and procedures must be appropriate to the evolving capacities of younger boys and girls. In addition, greater efforts are needed to include children with physical and learning disabilities in participatory processes.



vi. Children’s participation in legal and administrative proceedings.

Concluding observations by the CRC Committee to every State in South and Central Asia have highlighted similar concerns. These include the failure to fulfil children’s participation rights and the failure to enable children to have a fair hearing in families, schools, communities and in the juvenile justice system (Articles 12-15). CRC Article 12 states that children’s opinions must be sought in all matters affecting them, including during legal and administrative proceedings. Save the Children and other institutions in this region have done very little work on children and young people’s participation in such proceedings. This is an area to be strengthened in the future.

vii. Children's participation in the family

Only a few Save the Children programmes in the region have explicitly focused on children and young people's participation in family decision-making. The family is the most important arena for the development of children's sense of social responsibility and competence to participate. Many issues affecting girls and boys are influenced by decision-making within the family, which in this region includes parents and extended family members. Although the family is a difficult area to reach as it is perceived as a 'private' arena, Save the Children should seek to further programmes and learn from working with families.

viii. Need to work extensively with the media

Mass and localised media play a significant role in shaping social norms, focusing attention on specific issues and shaping social discourse. The media is thus a powerful tool to inform adults and children about issues of importance for children and young people. Media attention can stimulate public debates on the rights, responsibilities, capabilities and views of children and young people. Media can be used to reshape the dominant view that children and young people are either dependent and in need of protection, or deviant and in need of control, to a view that recognises them as competent and resourceful citizens. Individual Save the Children organisations have been working with the media and undertaking the crucial task of promoting children's participation in the media.

Further focus on this area is required on several fronts:

- working with adult journalists to increase coverage of children and young people's issues;
- promoting adult-child journalist interaction,
- supporting child journalist and child-led media organisations,
- promoting children's voices in mainstream media,
- supporting children and young people in conducting media analysis,
- promoting networking, information, and best practice exchange, and
- supporting the development of traditional and modern media (internet, theatre, video etc.).

ix. Resources and materials on child participation.

Save the Children's work in participation and citizenship in the past five years has generated very useful materials, including papers on principles, guidelines, tools and methodology, as well as case studies and child-friendly documents. Although this material on child participation exists, much of it has a very limited (often local) circulation and is in the English language. Save the Children needs to start repackaging and disseminating these materials,

adapting them to individual country contexts and, most importantly, translating into local language. Resources urgently need to be directed for this end. An S&C Asia regional clearinghouse for both hard copies and web-based material would be useful to facilitate the flow of information and knowledge on children and young people’s participation and citizenship issues.

C. Strategic Challenges for Save the Children Alliance

Given the issues presented above, what follows are some of the strategic challenges facing Save the Children in promoting children’s participation and citizenship rights in the region.

- **Social norms**

The concept of children’s participation and citizenship is contrary to social norms, as discussed elsewhere in this paper. This presents the Save the Children Alliance with the challenge of creating a culture where children are recognised and respected as citizens.

- **Limited change for children and young people**

Save the Children needs to recognise that in practical terms only a limited number of girls and boys have been reached in its work on participation and citizenship. Children and young people, Save the Children and its partners and others have just begun to spread a culture of children’s participation and citizenship. Considerable investment in resources, practice and policy development is required to mobilising a range of agencies and actors to further this vision.

- **Adult directed**

Adults to some extent continue to define the conditions and indicative norms for the type and scope of actual participation by children and young people. Issues of power and authority are prevalent aspects of society that cannot be disregarded in this work. Children remain largely dependent on adults.

Adults have various motives for promoting children and young people’s participation and citizenship rights; there may be contradictions and tension regarding them. While such lack of clarity will continue to exist, in the South and Central Asia region has examples of autonomous initiatives by children and young people with adults providing encouragement and support where required. This type of work should be promoted through a common understanding of principles and values.

- **Adult support**

Many adults view children's participation as a threat to their control and to their concepts of 'good childhood'. Adults need to be helped to understand and change their perceptions of child-adult relationships. They must unlearn certain habitual attitudes and acquire new knowledge and skills in working with children and young people.

- **Structures and systems**

Save the Children should engage in building sustainable structures and systems to promote children's participation and citizenship. The organisation should move beyond scattered, ad hoc, and small-scale projects and activities to build sustainable models for scaling-up. Save the Children needs to work in a strategic and principled way with key allies at a range of levels.

- **Children's organisations are marginalised**

Children's organisations remain largely excluded from mainstream decision-making processes, particularly in the arenas of organisational and policy development. They are hence excluded from playing a major role in local, regional, and international exchanges and debates.

- **Ethics, inclusion and representation**

Disparities in power and status between adults and children continue in most socio-culture contexts. Concerns arise in relation to adults' power when children and young people are exercising their participation and citizenship rights. This is a particular issue in working with marginalised girls and boys. Examples of manipulation by adults are frequent. Recognising the ease with which adults (and sometimes older children) can manipulate and control, Save the Children needs to reflect on ethical questions and on inclusion and representation. Lessons can be learned from previous practise. Such learning should be developed and disseminated to staff, partners and others so as to promote ethical practices, inclusion and democratic representation.

6. Implications for Save the Children

This section discusses the institutional implications for Save the Children of promoting children and young people's participation and citizenship rights in light of the achievements, challenges and gaps discussed above. It takes into account the global and regional mandate of Save the Children's and its work in the region during the past decade.

i A global priority

Save the Children is the leading INGO supporting children’s citizenship and participation globally, and it is a high priority for the Alliance. The recent agreement by the CEO Forum to upgrade the Save the Children Alliance Task Group on Participation to a Working Group on Participation underscores this point. Children’s citizenship and participation is also one of the five Objectives the Save the Children Alliance’s five-year plan. As such, it will continue to be a priority area for Save the Children’s work in this region.

ii. Need to build on current knowledge and respond to appropriate opportunities

Save the Children has an extensive body of practical experience in the region to learn from, to share, and for use in advocacy on behalf of children. Given that children’s participation and citizenship is the Alliance’s institutional niche, requests at country and regional levels from UNICEF and governments to work in partnership to promote these rights are increasing. Save the Children must build on current knowledge, and respond to appropriate opportunities for working with government, NGOs, UNICEF and others. In some cases, the Alliance may be overwhelmed by requests for assistance from other agencies. A balance must be sought between insuring the quality of our own programmes, and assisting others.

iii Save the Children’s responsibility to ensure follow-up to the UN Special Session and the Global Movement for Children

Save the Children’s leading role in ensuring meaningful participation of children and young people in the UN Special Session on Children and Global Movement for Children (GMC) processes has been acknowledged. This region made a major contribution to this process at all levels. The central role of Save the Children in facilitating high quality participation in the Special Session itself is generally seen as the most successful element of the SSOC and GMC events.⁸ Save the Children must follow through on its obligation to continue engaging with children and young people, governments and other agencies, such as UNICEF. It needs to guarantee follow-up on children’s participation and civil society engagement in NPA developments and GMC processes.

iv Need for monitoring and evaluation to show impact and ensure good quality

As a leading INGO working on children’s participation, Save the Children needs a rigorous review and evaluation of its work to develop and scale-up quality standards. There are many

⁸ See UNICEF’s State of the World’s Children 2003 for further details.

accounts of positive and beneficial outcomes of children and young people exercising their participation and citizenship rights. However, monitoring, review and evaluation systems to assess the actual quality, impact, and sustainability of decisions made or influenced by young people are limited. Tools and systems for monitoring and evaluation need to be developed to guard against developing an uncritical attitude.

v. Impact on Save the Children institutionally

Promoting children's participation and citizenship rights has definite implications on Save the Children as an institution in terms of staff attitudes, operations and organisational development and policies. Clearly stated minimum standards, structures, an HRD system, a child protection policy, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are a must. Staff and partners need practical tools for assessment and analysis, for designing programmes and partner selection. Organisational implications will include new partnerships and networks (i.e. with children's organisations and networks), appropriate policies and procedures, increased capacities and competencies of staff, and revised organisational structures and teams. In this area Save the Children must learn rapidly from practice in the region and globally.

vi. Programme strategies for children's participation and citizenship

Debates are ongoing about the approaches Save the Children in the region is taking to promote children's participation and citizenship. Some view work to promote children's participation and citizenship rights as a crosscutting theme and an approach that all programming for children should promote. The extension of this argument, similar to arguments on gender and disability, is that integration should be promoted rather than working through sectoral programme initiatives on participation and citizenship.

Save the Children agencies and country programmes need to develop strategies at three levels.

- Children's participation and citizenship should be approached strategically (rather than on an ad hoc basis), to develop principles and practice standards and structures, and for enabling children and young people to have access to participatory space and influence. Each country and region needs to be clear on what it hopes to achieve for boys and girls through investment in this area.
- Participation and citizenship needs to be promoted as a crosscutting issue and an approach to programming. It should be integrated into all sectoral programmes, projects and pieces of work.

- Inter-sectoral linkages and learning should be promoted, for example between juvenile justice and education or HIV/AIDS.

7. Recommendations and the Way Forward

The booklet 2 of the series “Children and Young People as Citizens: Partners for Social Change” has identified eighteen key recommendations and guidelines to move towards the joint vision of children and young people, adults, and Save the Children. The preceding sections have discussed and elaborated some of these. For further details on these recommendations, please refer to the booklet 2.

18 Key Recommendations to Move Towards a Vision of Children’s Citizenship

- Adopt a rights-based approach to development. The CRC and other Human Rights principles and mechanisms can be used as tools to empower children and young people as citizens to hold duty-bearers accountable for the realisation of children’s rights.
- Identify obstacles (cultural, institutional, political, legal) to fulfilling children’s citizenship rights and develop strategies to overcome them.
- Advocate for children and young people’s active participation in families, schools, communities, local governance, policies, and programmes in all decisions that affect them.
- Work with children in the wider context engaging key adults.
- Bring a child-focus to development agencies, UN bodies, the corporate sector and academia.
- Mainstream analysis on gender, disability, non-discrimination and power in development work and collect disaggregated information concerning children and adults.
- Maintain a clear focus on ethical practice and creation of opportunities for meaningful, inclusive participation of girls and boys as active citizens.
- Develop and apply minimum quality standards on children’s participation and partnerships with adults.
- Build upon early child development work and adopt a life cycle approach enabling girls and boys participation at different ages and abilities.
- Develop and disseminate child-friendly information, tools and materials.
- Develop and strengthen children and young people’s own organisations.
- Develop and strengthen networks amongst children’s organisations at different levels.
- Develop and support children’s media initiatives.
- Review organisational policies, programmes and human resource development to ensure space and capacity to further children’s participation.
- Ensure capacity building on child rights, children’s participation and citizenship for adults, children and young people at different levels (integral to training on rights-based approaches).
- Undertake analysis of governance structures and systems (formal and informal actors, roles, responsibilities, resources, budgets) that impact on child rights issues affecting girls and boys.
- Build sustainable partnerships between adults and children (and young people) at different levels to enable children’s participation in governance.
- Develop effective systems for documenting, monitoring and evaluating the process and impact of children’s participation and citizenship initiatives.

8. Conclusions

Children's participation and citizenship is the cornerstone of Save the Children's vision. It is our niche and distinguishes Save the Children from other child-focused organisations. It provides the profile of what Save the Children is in the region and globally. Putting this into practice is difficult however, due to the pressure of contrary societal norms.

A decade of experience in the region has brought results and benefits at many levels. Children and young people's participation is becoming more accepted and extended. The existing diversity of girls and boys exercising their right to participation and citizenship provides us many examples of positive outcomes. Children and young people have not only exercised this right as an end in itself but have also thereby brought about beneficial results for themselves, their peers and the wider community. At the same time, however, the experiences have been somewhat ad hoc and scattered. The results are thus not conclusive but encouraging. There are many positive indications of movement in the right direction. We simply need to back this up with adequate evidence.

Before moving ahead, Save the Children needs to consolidate its learning in order to move ahead with a clear strategy, focus, and planned impact for children and young people, particularly at local and country levels. Stocktaking of the current situation is required for further development. We need to know what structure and systems are required, what impact we want to achieve, and what our final goals are. Save the Children and individual country programmes need to be more specific on the changes they are seeking through their promotion of children's participation and citizenship rights. Expertise has developed in certain areas, while others still require strengthening and study. Key areas of particular focus concern sustainability, ethics, inclusion and representation, influence, monitoring and impact. We should be able to confidently articulate to children and young people, partners, others and ourselves our rationale, experience, best practices and impact.

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