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Children and Young People as Citizens

PARTNERS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Highlighting Positive Impact



Save the Children

Children and Young People
as Citizens
PARTNERS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Highlighting Positive Impact

Claire O'Kane

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 third booklet of the three-part "Children and Young People as Citizens: Partners for Social Change" series opens with a summary of positive outcomes from child participation and citizenship work in the region. The richness of these experiences is shown through extensive case studies and examples describing the processes, mechanisms and lessons learned from participation at varied levels and in different sectors. Commencing with an exploration of children's expression and participation in their own organisations, the booklet then moves to the wider context of families, schools, and local governance. Children's participation in broader programming, policy and media development processes at a range of local, national, regional and global levels is also described. The next focus is on work in different sectors: education, non-discrimination, protection from exploitation and abuse, health, and emergencies. This highlights the concrete ways in which children's participation promotes fulfilment of their rights to survival protection and development, while it also enhances the overall development of local and national communities in inclusive, democratic ways.

Appendix 10 provides information on children's participation in the National Plans of Action.

Acknowledgments

The information, experiences and insights shared in this report are the result of the efforts of a multitude of minds and hearts of children, young people and adults in diverse settings across South and Central Asia and beyond. Without mentioning all of their names (or organisations), I acknowledge each for their enthusiasm and commitment to working for children’s rights and social change in very real ways in their local, national and global communities. The resilience, commitment, vision and positive actions of girls and boys living in marginalised communities across Asia continues to be my main source of inspiration for empowering work with children and young people as citizens.

In each Save the Children country office programme directors, staff and administrators have offered support, assisting me to meet with colleagues, with children and young people’s groups, and with NGO partners to explore their experiences of children’s participation and citizenship, the critical issues and their vision. In drawing the experiences and analysis together in this publication I thank every person who has taken time to bring about such experience and insight sharing.

For providing the opportunity to undertake regional work on children’s citizenship and governance I would like to acknowledge the vision and commitment of each of the Steering Committee Members: Herluf Madsen, Peter Dixon, Martin Kelsey, Girish Godbole, Keith D Leslie, Sultan Mahmud, Dewan Sohrab, Mariko Tanaka, Valter Tinderholt, Linda Moffat. The commitment and support of the Alliance Co-ordinator Archana Tamang has also been energising throughout the process.

I want to particularly acknowledge the commitment and ongoing support of Herluf Madsen, Regional Representative of Save the Children Sweden in furthering Save the Children’s regional work on Children’s Citizenship and Governance, and in providing guidance and encouragement to me in my role as CCG project co-ordinator.

An initial draft of this report was significantly improved through the involvement of the regional working group on children’s citizenship and governance including Shikha Ghildyal, Ravi Karkara, Ranjan Poudyal, Asif Munier, Y. Bhavani, Chandrika Khatiwada, Prakash Koirala and Unni Rustad¹. The professional efforts of the editor Judith Amtzis,

¹ Who met together at a regional level to work on the document in April 2003.

and the regional CCG group have all promoted a more reader-friendly production of this publication.

Ravi Karkara merits special thanks for his zeal and encouragement. Ravi has provided invaluable insights and personal support throughout my work on this project, and has played a key role in mobilising action on this publication. Shikha has also played a key role in enabling publication of this document in her role as the new CCG co-ordinator.

All of the regional working group members mentioned above have provided me with significant support, guidance and insights during my work on CCG. Additional individuals whom I wish to acknowledge in this regard include: Shaymol Chaudhery, Lena Karlsson, Anna Grauers-Fisher, Lisa Lundgren, Ruslan Ziganshin, John Parry Williams, Gyani Thapa, Nimal Pereira, Rajiv Adhikari, Els Heinjen, Emmanuelle Abrioux, Samina Sardar, Qais Anwar, Henk Van Beers and Joachim Theis. From further afield I would also like to acknowledge the support and enthusiasm of the global Child Participation Working Group.

I also want to acknowledge the significance of the ongoing support and encouragement of my family and friends in Wales.

Claire O'Kane

CCG Regional Project Co-ordinator, Save the Children (South and Central Asia)

January, 2003

Acronyms

AI	Appreciative Inquiry
CAR	Commissionerate of Afghan Refugees
CCDK	Children’s Council for Development of Kargil
CCDL	Children’s Council for Development of Ladakh
CGG	Children’s Citizenship and Governance
CCVD	Children’s Committee for Village Development
CCWB	Central Child Welfare Board
CDO	Chief District Officer
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
C-EMIS	Community Education Monitoring Information Systems
CERD	Convention on Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination
CGDC	Children Go For Development Committee
CPA	Centre for Performing Arts (Sri Lanka)
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRP	Child Rights Programming
CWC	Concerned for Working Children
CYG	Children and Young People’s Group
DCRC	Delhi Child Rights Club
DCWB	District Child Welfare Boards (Nepal)
DCWC	District Child Welfare Committees
ECD	Early Childhood Development
HRD	Human Resource Development
HREP	Human Rights Education Project
GMC	Global Movement for Children
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IEC	Information Education, and Communication
KAISHAR	Knowledge and Attitude Improvement of Sexual Health for Adolescent’s Responsibility
NGO	Non-government Organisation
NNSWA	Nepal National Social Welfare Association
NPA	National Plan of Action
NWFP	North West Frontier Province (Pakistan)

PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
PO	Programme Officer
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme
SoVAA	Social Volunteer Against AIDS
SSoC	Special Session on Children
SWC	Social Welfare Cell
TfD	Theatre for Development
TOF	Training of Facilitators
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VCDC	Village Children's Development Committee (Sri Lanka)
VDC	Village Development Committees (Nepal)
VEC	Village Education Committee
WBL	Working for Better Lives
YIP	Young India Project

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Sharing Diverse Experiences of Children's Participation and Citizenship – Highlighting Positive Impact

3.1 Introduction

Opportunities to foster children and young people's understanding, values and experience of democratic participation and active citizenship can occur in families, schools, local and national communities. Children and young people have been involved in participation activities in diverse geographic and institutional settings at different levels. These include personal and local as well as national, regional and global levels.

Children's participation in the institutions and processes of their every day reality is more likely to have a deeper and sustainable impact than participation located in remote settings. Homes, schools, the street (for children living on the streets), workplaces (for child workers) and children's organisations are all important focus areas for participation work. The strength and experience gained in these arenas enhances children and young people's engagement in 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

- Building and strengthening children's organisations (e.g. clubs, committees, unions, parliaments).
- Developing networks of children's organisations.
- Children monitoring the situation of children - exercise of rights, abuse, exploitation, including economic exploitation - and fighting against cruelty and extreme exploitation. This includes prevention of child marriage, child trafficking, child labour, sexual abuse and corporal punishment.
- Children achieving representation in governance structures, such as school management, local government structures and child rights monitoring committees
- Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes teaching children to think for themselves, communicate effectively, get along with others and play an active role in families.

- Children becoming involved in media as actors, journalists, producers, radio and TV presenters, film makers, photographers, artists and so on.
- Children participating in Save the Children and partners' programme cycle during research and needs assessments, design, implementation, monitoring, review and evaluations. Children also participating in recruitment, and the development of strategic and operational plans.
- Training of adult and child facilitators.
- Children serving as researchers (e.g. on child labour, HIV/AIDS, violence).
- Children serving as educators: peer education: life skills, HIV/AIDS, sexuality, law/legal issues, rights.
- Children being involved in advocacy and public education.
- Children's voices being raised and listened to at policy-making arenas, and adults acting upon children's views at local, national regional and international levels.
- Children influencing government decision-making in planning and legislative development at various levels.
- Children attending conferences: UN Special Session; Forum on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children; children's fora; child labour conferences; HIV/AIDS conferences, children's consultations related to the NPAs for children.

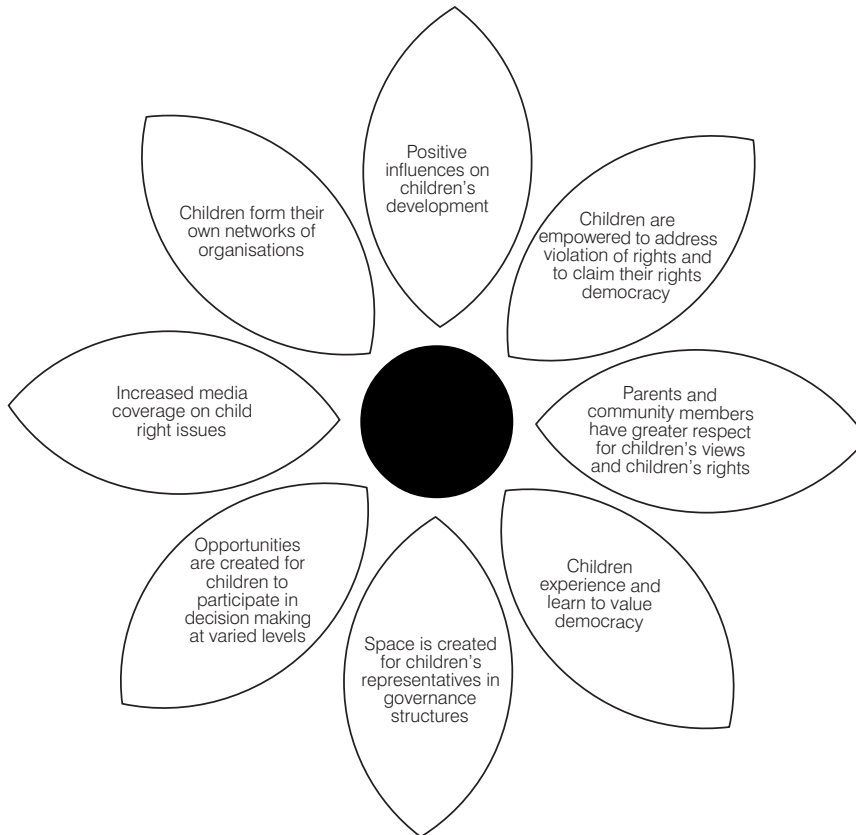
This booklet opens with a summary of positive outcomes from child participation and citizenship work in the region. The richness of these experiences is shown through several case studies and examples describing the processes, mechanisms and lessons learnt from participation at varied levels and in different sectors.

Opening with an exploration of children's expression and participation in their own organisations, the booklet then moves to the wider context of families, schools, and local governance. Children's participation in broader programming, policy and media development processes at a range of local, national, regional and global levels is examined next. Following that comes a focus on work in different sectors (e.g. education, non-discrimination, protection from exploitation and abuse, health, emergencies etc.). This highlights the concrete ways children's participation can promote fulfilment of their rights to survival, protection and development, while also enhancing the overall development of local and national communities in inclusive, democratic ways.

Map of the Region



3.2 A Summary of Positive Outcomes from Child Participation Work in the Region²



Positive influences on children's development:

- Increased self – esteem, confidence and resilience
- New friendships
- Increased enthusiasm to address issues for the benefit of their peers and community – greater sense of social responsibility
- Improved communication, negotiation and team work skills
- Improved analysis and presentation skills
- Developed more positive relationships between children and adults
- Improved educational performance

² Findings from group work by Save the Children representatives from all members across the region during regional strategy meeting on Child Rights Programming and Children's Citizenship and Governance, Nepal, September 2002.

Children are empowered to address violation of rights and to claim their rights (*in urban, rural and refugee camp context*):

- Reduction in discrimination against girls, lower caste children, children with disabilities, working children and tribal children.
- Increased school enrolment and attendance (of girls, boys, former working children, children with disabilities, tribal children etc.).
- Increased teacher attendance and quality of teaching, through monitoring and taking action with the concerned education authorities when necessary.
- Improved school facilities, including schoolbooks, school roof, electricity, drinking water.
- Persuaded local authorities to repair bridges and roads children use to improve their access to school.
- Ensured regular bus transport to get children to and from school on time.
- Developed and persuaded schools to pilot curricula for working children and tribal children.
- Protected themselves and their peers from child abuse and harassment.
- Prevented child marriage and trafficking.
- Ensured legal cases were taken against child abusers and child traffickers.
- Prevented illegal sale of alcohol in their communities.
- Increased birth registration.
- Improved health and sanitation practices.
- Improved environmental protection practices.
- Improved play and recreational facilities for girls and boys.
- Increased mobility of children (particularly girls).
- Increased awareness and information on child right issues.
- Developed indicators to monitor violations of child rights and impact of programmes.

Parents and community members have greater respect for children’s views and children’s rights:

- Increased status of children and their voices.
- Children recognised as social actors and as positive contributors to local communities and society.
- Children challenging discrimination in the family, school and community, bringing about attitude changes amongst adults.
- Changed teacher behaviour and more child-centred teaching methods.

Children experience and learn to value democracy:

- Children's values, skills and knowledge of democratic functioning grow.
- Girls and boys are empowered with knowledge of their rights and recognise the value of their participation.
- Tolerance and values of inclusion increase among children and adults.

Space is created for children's representatives in governance structures (e.g. school management, local government structures, child rights monitoring committees):

- Adults accept children's representation and views at local and district levels.
- Social changes in adult's attitude and mindset enables them fulfil their obligations.
- Adults are being held more accountable to address child right violations and to provide accessible, quality services to all children.
- Increased commitment among adults to work with and for children.
- Children are providing practical, innovative and inclusive solutions to issues affecting them and their peers in schools, local communities, districts and nations.
- Linkages established and constituencies build up networking for child rights.
- Other development and relief agencies recognise the benefits of working in a participatory and empowering way with girls, boys, young people and adults.

Opportunities created for children to participate in planning / decision making / reporting / law amendments of the Governments (at varied levels):

- Children's express their own perspectives, their understanding of issues, problems, solutions and priorities, which often differ from those of adults.
- Government agencies at different levels prioritise children's issues, and allocate budget.
- State level acceptance of children participation in policy dialogue.

Increased media coverage on child rights issues:

- Children as effective journalists, actors, and producers raising awareness and mobilising action on child rights issues.
- Mainstream media are mobilised to write on child right issues.

Children have formed their own networks of children's groups/ organisations:

- Children learn from each other and united have increased bargaining power for advocacy on their issues.

- Exchange of learning and organisational development between children’s groups and children’s media initiatives.

3.3 Children’s Participation at Different Levels (Local, National, Regional and Global)



Children and young people can be enabled to participate in a wide variety of arenas at different levels. The following sections contain descriptions and case studies illustrating diverse ways children and young people’s participation is being facilitated in local community contexts, along with broader programming, media and policy developments.

Children’s Participation in the Local Community

“A nation is democratic to the extent that its citizens are involved, particularly at the community level.”
(Roger Hart, 1992)

Across the region are rich examples of children and young people becoming empowered to participate in matters concerning them. These are found in local communities in diverse rural, urban, desert, hill and refugee camp settings. As integral members of their communities they desire recognition and inclusion as social actors in community development and local democratic initiatives.

Strategies for empowering children and young people in communities vary. This section incorporates and illustrates many models, strategies and approaches to children’s participation in their own groups and organisations, and in families, schools and local governance. Sub-sections highlight key learnings and outcomes. Some NGOs and Save the Children members have developed and applied ‘models’ for children’s participation in community contexts. However, in scaling up work on children’s participation and citizenship the adoption of key principles for good practice is proving to be more meaningful than applying ‘models’ or ‘blue-prints’ for practice³.

³ See Booklet 2, Appendices 4 and 7.

Children speaking out and organising themselves

Children and young people have expressed great value in having space to meet together, to share their views and discuss ideas. Simply bringing girls and boys together in one place provides significant opportunities for children and young people to make new friends and to feel that they are human beings whose views and experiences should be valued. The opportunity to share their opinions increases their awareness and understanding of the differences among them and lead to a positive change in attitudes and action to challenge discrimination and to further action on their rights.

"I wish that this consultation could continue a lifetime, so I could learn more about children's rights."

(Boy in a children's consultation in Afghanistan)

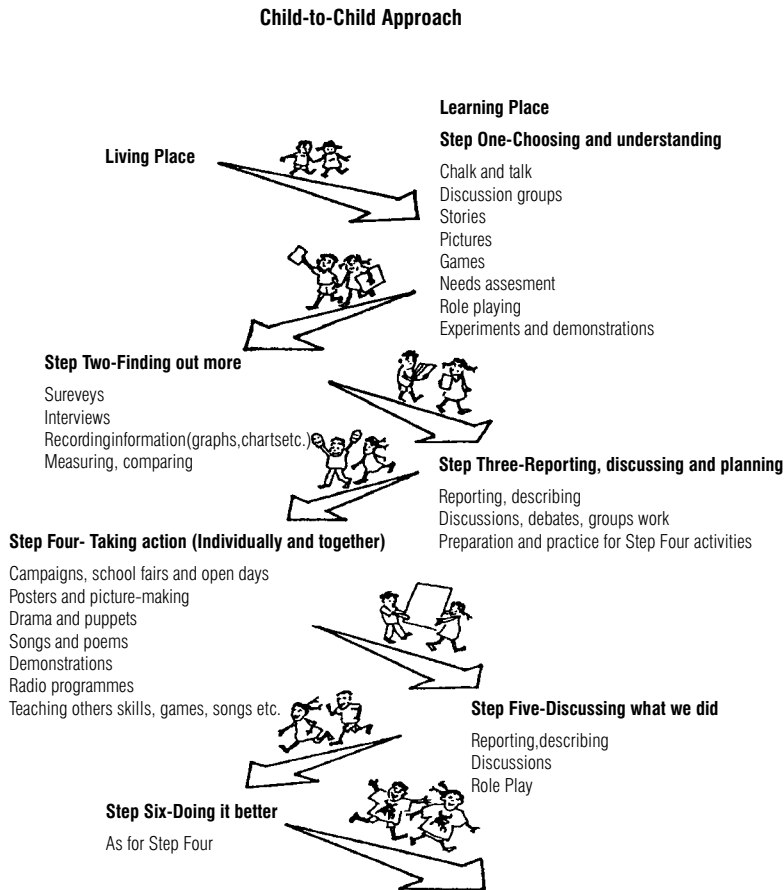
"Through our Club we are able to mix with children from other cultures and religions. We are uniting without religious discrimination or gender discrimination."

(Girl and boy Child Club members, Sri Lanka)

More and more, organisations like Save the Children and their NGO partners are supporting girls and boys to develop their own groups or organisations as a means to further realise their citizenship rights. Through their own organisations space is sustained for girls, boys and young people to interact, share experiences, analyse issues, explore solutions, prioritise actions and gain collective bargaining power to influence issues affecting them in their local communities.



How children's organisations are called -- clubs, unions, groups, committees -- varies throughout the region, as does the strategy for developing them. However, they are largely similar in their aims. Children and young people are seeking to challenge discrimination, to improve their local schools and communities and to increase fulfilment of their rights.



Form: Child-to-Child : A Resource Book Part#1 Implementing the child-to-child approach
 Edited by Donna Bailey, High Hawes of Grazyna Bonati
 Published by Child-to-Child Trust.

The Child-to-Child Approach was introduced and used in many countries in the region as a way for children to explore issues in their homes, schools and communities. Much early child-to-child work focused on health education, using children to carry information. The approach now engages children and young people as social actors and encourages them to explore and act upon broader child right issues through interactive participatory processes. In many places children who have been involved in child-to-child work have developed their own Child Clubs or children’s organisations. This promotes more sustainable developments and linkages to adult decision-making structures.

Child-to-Child Groups Among Afghani Children

Child-to-Child Group Action in Kabul, Afghanistan

In Afghanistan SCUS has supported children to form child-to-child groups to identify their concerns and work with their friends, families and community to bring solutions. For example, in a community in Kabul where children worried about the dangers of open wells, parents organised committees to make sure the wells are covered. Now 600 out of some 900 open wells have been covered. In another area children identified road safety as their priority issue. They mobilised the local Scout association to establish a roster to help children cross the road at high-risk times at a particularly busy corner. Following meetings between the children and the local municipality regarding their road safety concerns, the municipality helped build a pavement so children can stand at the side of the road before crossing. This is not macro development but it is change; change in ways that affect the daily lives of children and change bought by children themselves.

Save the Children Sweden and US have encouraged Child-to-Child methods in refugee camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan to promote information sharing among children and adults on health, nutrition and landmine issues. The formation of children's groups also leads to children's ongoing participation in child protection and child right concerns.

Child-to-Child Groups in Afghani Refugee Camps, Pakistan⁴

Since 1995 Save the Children Sweden and the Commissionerate of Afghani Refugees (CAR) have been helping girls and boys in refugee camps in the North West Frontier Province form Child-to-Child groups. Through these groups children have learned about their rights, health, disability, social and community issues. They have begun to see themselves as protectors of their rights. Children have identified problems affecting them and their community and have moved to address them. Children became monitors of child rights in their schools and communities, promoting the right to education by visiting families whose children were not going to school.

"Before this group was started there was no education for girls, now there is a girl's school. We used not to eat together with the girls and now we do. Girls were not allowed to play sports, but now this has changed. We have motivated street children to go to school. We have spread messages to drug addicts. Children with special needs are coming to school. We know about mine awareness. There used to be big disputes but we met with the families and helped them understand each other. We are the new generation and we must rebuild Afghanistan."

*(Child-to-Child group, Islami Khidmatgar, Ghandi Khan Khel Camp,
NWFP, Pakistan)*

⁴ From Save the Children Sweden (2002). Mobilisation for Self Help and Child Rights: Lessons Learned in Afghan Refugee Camps 1983-2002.

Child-to-Child Approach by Save the Children US, Bangladesh

Save the Children US has been working with a Child-to-Child approach in rural areas of Bangladesh since 1994. 6500 girls and boys between 6-12 have joined together in groups of 20 to form Child-to-Child groups. Many of these children do not go to school. School going adolescents facilitate the Child-to-Child groups. This approach helped young adults learn from and work with children and communities. They came to understand problems affecting children and their communities, including the reasons children were not attending school.

Through the Child-to-Child approach girls and boys and young people learn about their communities in active and meaningful ways. Collaboration between children, family members and community members is increased, promoting the development of children and their communities. Motivated through their engagement many children have returned to school. Children are also using creative methods, like posters, rallies, drama and house-to-house visits, to raise awareness and change practices on various health and social issues with adults in the community.

‘Shishu Parishad’ (Children’s Councils) in Bangladesh

In Tangail, a rural district of Bangladesh, girls and boys aged 6-14 years have been encouraged to form Shishu Parishads or Children’s Councils. This initiative grew out of experimental child participation work supported by Save the Children Australia and its NGO partners⁵ since 1995. There are currently 700 Shishu Parishads for boys and 700 for girls reaching out to 42,000 children. Save the Children Australia and their partners also support the formation of adolescents’ groups so the young people can continue to play an active role in the development of their community and society.

These Children's Councils give opportunities to demonstrate their capacity to plan, organise and implement activities, to access information and to express their needs. They have been effective in achieving genuine advances for Bangladeshi children accessing their rights.

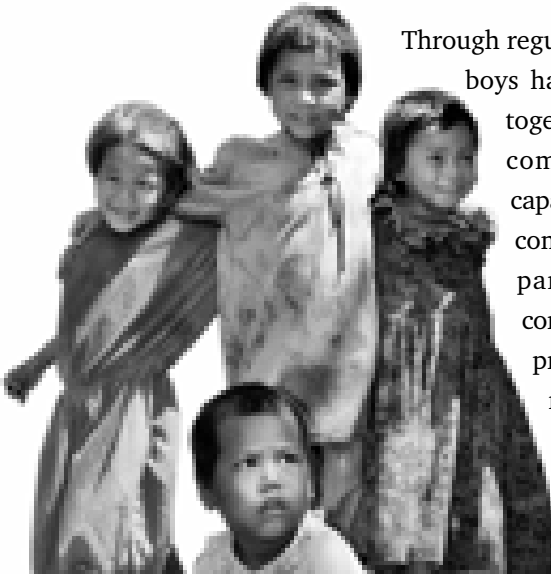
Involvement in Children's Councils enhances children’s confidence, makes them aware of their rights and develops skills necessary to access these rights. This leads to greater participation in family, institutions and community life, increasing their sense of social responsibility and civic duty, qualities essential to future citizenship and leadership roles.

⁵ Family and Children Welfare Centre (FCWC), Forum for Rehabilitation and Integrated Development Approach by Youth (FRIDAY), Gram Unnayan Prochesta (GUP), Jagoroni Jubo Sangha (JJS), Polli Kollyan Songstha (PKS), Rural Economic Development Organisation (REDO), Society for Social Services (SSS), Mohila Unnayan Protishan (UPAMA).

Children Show Adults How to Run Fair Election Processes

Each Children's Council has five office bearers and one chairperson. The Councils have between 20 and 39 members. When more children at the local village level want to become members, another Council will need to be established. Approximately 10% of the members are working children and do not go to school, but most attend school and do agricultural work at home.

When local Council elections for adults took place, Children's Councils protested against the practice of buying votes. The Children's Councils organised shadow elections to show how to conduct elections without vote rigging. They showed adults how to vote, in the process gaining experience and understanding of a democratic election process. Elected members from the village level girls and boys' Shishu Parishads come together at higher level Councils at the ward, union and upzila (district) level.



Through regular meetings of their Shishu Parishad girls and boys have accessed information, and have worked together to address child right issues in their local communities. Members have benefited from capacity building opportunities (e.g. in child rights, communication and negotiation skills) from NGO partners. They are supported to meet with concerned adults on issues that affect them. Some priority issues discussed during Shishu Parishad meetings have included early child marriage, child labour, poverty, lack of access to education (especially for girls), harassment of girls, child trafficking, lack of birth registration and lack of play equipment.

A Shishu Parishad Takes Action on Early Child Marriage

A field visit in Tangail included two villages where children, mostly girls, from different Shishu Parishads had developed dramas concerning child marriage. Overcoming traditional barriers, the girls' groups in the first village confidently presented their drama to a crowd of about 200, including some male village elders. The play highlighted the negative impact of early child marriage, and the range of actions Shishu Parishad members were taking to end this practice.

In the second village another group of girls and one boy presented a drama that revealed a true story of a 14-year-old girl from the village who was married and then died after a miscarriage. She had been married at 13 years of age. Becoming pregnant, she had health problems during her pregnancy but her in-laws prevented her from seeing a doctor. The Shishu Parishad members had earlier involved media journalists in covering the case, so that ETV, a mainstream Bangladesh television company, broadcast the story.

The children in this village had undertaken a survey of early child marriages in their village. They found that 65 children under 18 years old had been married during the past year. A nine-year-old girl was the youngest, with the majority being 13 or 14 years old. The children have shared their results with adults and have engaged in discussions on the negative impact of early child marriage. They sought support from local NGOs and Save the Children Australia to bring together religious and community leaders and other influential people to form a committee against child marriage. Members of the upzila level Shishu Parishad knew of five cases where the children had succeeded in preventing early child marriage. Child journalists also wrote an article about this in their newsletter.

Child Brigade, Bangladesh

Child Brigade is an organisation for working street children established in Dhaka in 1995 as an experimental project of Save the Children Sweden. Today Child Brigade is an established, well-known organisation its own right. Its motto is “Be Together and Organised”. By uniting together the children strengthen their capacity to survive. The goal of Child Brigade is to find ways and means for better living conditions for all children who are left behind in the streets. The children of Child Brigade seek to participate at all levels on issues affecting them

Any street child between 10 and 16 years old who is willing to follow the group’s rules and regulations can become a member. A core group elected by the wider membership is responsible to carry out the Brigade’s activities. However, members from the street based groups also participate in some organisational activities. Members have opportunities for training and personal development, education, health care, space to leave their belongings, and some income generation activities.

Child Brigade has a street and social networking program that raises awareness among street children through a group formation process. Child Brigade core group members currently reach out to about 400 street and working children at six contact points in the city. Through drama and their own literacy kit, ‘Babloo’, they involve children in discussions on issues affecting them, their rights and literacy and numeracy. Child Brigade has also published its own book -- ‘Amra’-- based on the children’s observations of the world around them, and a series of posters highlighting the problems facing children.

Child Brigade’s Linkages With Other Children, NGOs and Their Human Rights Partnership

Child Brigade members have made linkages with a many other children’s groups, NGOs, INGOs, media professionals and with human rights activists. Some Child Brigade members played an active role in discussions and actions concerning the Special Session process in Bangladesh, together with a wide forum of children from NGOs and children’s organisations. During the past year Child Brigade has joined with Adhikar, an adult human rights organisation that includes lawyers, and with sensitised journalists, to start a ‘Monitoring Cell’. Through this Cell Brigade members can obtain immediate, free, legal assistance when children come into conflict with the law and/or face abusive situations. The voluntary co-operation of the journalists enables them to sensitise the wider public about abuse and exploitation of children.

Children’s Congress, Bangladesh

Children’s Congress is another children’s organisation in Bangladesh that brings together child representatives from different organisations. Resource Bangladesh, an NGO has played a key role in assisting the Children’s Congress, which is supported by Save the Children Denmark.

Children’s Congress, Dhaka

The Children’s Congress in Dhaka started in 1996 and consists of approximately 100 child representatives from 12 different NGOs. An election process developed in 1997 allows the children to elect an 11-member executive committee for a 2-year term. The elected members have delegated responsibilities and meet once a month. A cultural drama group involves additional children. The Children’s Congress was formed to promote children’s participation in issues affecting them in their communities and organisations, and to increase awareness of children’s rights. Action programs the Congress has organised include rallies against lead pollution; a press conference on free treatment for children in hospitals; dramas on child trafficking, child abuse, HIV and child marriage; and participation in several seminars and workshops on child labour and the sexual exploitation of children. During Child Rights week in 1998 representatives of the Congress met with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

Children Organise in Central Asia

Action by a Child-to-Child Group, Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia

Prior to participating in a regional Children’s Conference on the Aral Sea in Central Asia, children in different locations explored ecological issues affecting them and developed local action plans. Children involved in child-to-child work in Kyrgyzstan decided to make a video film of their area. After shooting their video they were surprised to see how dirty the city looked, with piles of garbage in the streets and leftover food in the markets. In their regular meetings with other children they discussed the problem of rubbish and explored possible solutions.

During the summer holidays children made house-to-house visits asking people to join their team to clean the area. They observed the local garbage containers and discovered that it was often young children who took rubbish to the containers. In many housing areas the main garbage containers were far away and too high for these children to reach so they tended to drop the rubbish nearer their blocks of flats. The Child-to-Child (CTC) project children visited the local municipality and suggested installing containers nearer to the main housing areas. They also organised meetings with younger children. CTC members developed a drama about how to use the smaller rubbish containers. At the same time they shared messages about personal hygiene. This project succeeded because children saw the direct benefits of their suggestions.

Child Clubs in India

Several different organisations in urban and rural India are assisting children to form Child Clubs in village, street, and school settings⁶. Many of these Clubs use the CRC as a tool to further awareness and action on their issues.

The Delhi Child Rights Club, India

Child workers from 10 NGOs established the Delhi Child Rights Club (DCRC) in May 1999 (with facilitation support from Butterflies). Children from 14 NGOs are currently Club members. Their membership raises their awareness and enables them to find ways to take action to promote their rights. The children are working together to create a child-safe and friendly city. They envision a city where children's rights to respect, opportunities, growth, development and protection are ensured. Moreover, the Club seeks recognition as a forum of children who should be consulted whenever city policies or decisions are being made that affect them.

The DCRC actions have included: a campaign with political parties to include their priority issues in political party manifestos during the 2000 election campaign; organisation of CRC Anniversary awareness programmes with officials and children on issues relating to education and child labour; a children's media event on international broadcasting day in 2001, and an action research community programme on 'adults abuse of alcohol and harassment of children'. Through their Club the children have become peer educators on child rights and are powerful advocates for change.

"We will go to all organisations to spread the news of Child Rights Club so that all children may be made aware of their rights"

Child Clubs and Bal Sanghas in Andhra Pradesh Supported by Young India Project (YIP)

YIP has a long history of supporting the formation and development of agricultural wage labourers unions in Southern Andhra Pradesh. Their work with children is more recent. Since 1999 YIP has helped village children in two mandals in rural Andhra Pradesh form their own Child Clubs and Bal Sanghas (Children's Unions). The Clubs and Sanghas enable the children to discuss issues they identify; break caste, religion and other barriers; and create awareness among children, parents, teachers, government officials about child rights and child rights violations.

Distinctions are made between Club and Sangha activities. All village children under 18 are encouraged to participate in the Club, in games, sports and cultural activities. Children between 12-16 are encouraged to be part of the Sangha to discuss and take action on issues concerning them.

To date YIP has effectively promoted the formation of Child Clubs in 40 villages, and are working toward forming Sanghas in at least 10 of them. In the 40 villages most children regularly participate in games and other Club activities. A smaller group of girls and boys who are elected are active in organising regular monthly Children's Sangha meetings to discuss and address their issues.

The Bal Sanghas have been successful to varying degrees in taking up and addressing various issues. For example children have organised rallies and other activities against sexual abuse and harassment; have presented petitions to the depot manager to secure bus transport for school; have re-enrolled drop-outs in school; developed wall-slogans and dramas on HIV/AIDS; cleaned the village water tanks; planted trees and taken action to ensure teachers' attendance in schools.

⁶ For examples of Child Clubs in school settings see section 3.3, Box: Promoting Child Rights and Children's Participation in Schools, Divya Disha, Hyderabad, India.

Children's Committees for Village Development, Northern India

Ladakh and Kashmir are high altitude and conflict affected mountainous regions of Northern India where since 1997 Save the Children UK has been supporting children to form their own Children's Committees for Village Development (CCVDs). The CCVD initiative was undertaken as a strategy to mobilise children as responsible citizens in their local communities and as active participants in the development process, while also promoting their rights.

Ladakh today has 77 CCVDs: 38 in Leh district and 39 in Kargil district. Most are in rural areas and are supported through a partnership between Save the Children and local NGOs. The CCVDs are a way to change social structures to encourage child participation, to give it a higher profile and value within the community. It is not simply about groups of children, but about connecting those children with other parts of the community in new and more effective ways. CCVD members have participated in 'Village Education Committee' (VEC) meetings, district level education meetings and UNGASS district, regional and national level meetings.

CCVD Membership

All children in the village can become CCVD members. There are two general bodies: 1) for 10-18 year-olds and 2) for 5-10 year-olds. The CCVD's structure includes seven elected positions, including a: President, Secretary and Treasurer. In some villages, children have also appointed a Vice- President, Secretary and Treasurer for sharing responsibilities and commitments. This leads to increased involvement of girls and boys and increased sustainability. In most cases verbal nominations are made for the posts followed by secret ballot voting (with two adults as observers). Two seats are allocated for boys over 10, two for girls over 10, one for a boy aged 5-10, one for a girl aged 5-10 and one for a non-school going child.

Many of the priority issues addressed by the CCVDs have related to access to quality education for girls and boys from all income levels. Children have played an active role in: monitoring teacher attendance; motivating parents to send their children to school and preventing school drop-outs (especially girls); organising winter tuition; collecting donations for school books for poorer children; and establishing libraries.



The CCVD in Skambo Village⁷

Skambo village is on a hilltop in a remote area, overlooking a valley. The children have their own CCVD office, in a room in the house of the CCVD President. The office is decorated with maps, educational posters and the CCVD plans. The CCVD structure in Skambo includes one president, three vice-presidents, two secretaries, and two cashiers. The children explain that if one officer is absent others can easily fill in to ensure that activities continue. Multiple officers also ensure diversity in participants if gender is balanced. Some of the CCVD Skambo members have participated in training with the local NGO. This has given them confidence to speak with teachers and officials. Gender disparity in attendance was a problem with this training, however, as few girls had been included.

The Skambo CCVD has worked on environmental clean up; raising awareness of health issues and monitoring teacher attendance. Its file reveals a high level of organisation and dedication to the CCVD process. One letter documents the group's complaint to the Chief Education Officer about their teachers' attendance. This letter stood out as it was based on research the children conducted, using a chart that recorded systematic daily observations of different teachers' attendance.

In advising other communities interested in starting a CCVD the children noted that parents should be sensitised and educated first. This guarantees more support for children to participate from parents and community members. Other children suggested having more girl members on the executive committee to reduce gender disparity.

The CCVD in Lamayaru Village

Lamayaru village sits on the side of a mountain, one of Ladakh oldest monasteries perching magnificently above it. The CCVD was established in 1997, and has a membership of over 100 children between 5 and 18 years old. The children have their own CCVD office equipped with posters and charts relating to their activities. These have included organising winter tuition and adult education classes with funds gathered by children through drama performances; drama performances on HIV, domestic child labour, education; cleaning the village area and repairing the stupa; organising a rally on environmental issues; campaigns against alcohol and tobacco; and organising CRC training for CCVD members.

The children like their CCVD because they get better education. They have attended some training programmes and they feel more encouragement and confidence. Adults spoke up about the benefits of listening to children:

“Children are doing quite good social development work in the village, they are developing good habits and respecting their elders. Children are participating very well and enthusiastically in adult activities.” (Village man)

“The children are raising funds through organising dramas and in collaboration with the women's and adults groups they have organised winter tuition from the funds gained. These are very good activities.” (Village Elder)

⁷ From: Fewkes, J. H., and Bhat, M. S. (2002). Our Voices.... Are you Listening? Children's Committee for Village Development. Save the Children UK, India.

Although the process of forming children's committees and linking them to adult structures in urban settings is less developed in Ladakh and Kashmir, "Children Go For Development Committees" CGDCs are being supported. These enable urban, working children to organise and to meet with adult authorities on issues affecting them.

A Children's Council for Development of Ladakh (CCDL) and a Children's Council for Development of Kargil (CCDK) have been established with elected members. These are creating stronger links between children and government officials. Through the Councils children can present their issues and have them addressed more effectively by adults at the district level.

Children's Unions in India

In urban and rural village communities marginalised children (e.g. working children, tribal children, children with disabilities) have been supported to form their own unions. These unions give children the chance to meet together regularly, to discuss and share information that concerns their lives, to analyse various social and political events and decisions, and to work together towards collective action.

Work on child labour issues can also lead to the development of children's government organisations.

Bal Sanghas (Children's Unions) supported by AKSSUS and SOVA in Orissa

Two NGO partners of Save the Children UK, AKSUS and SOVA, are supporting tribal children to organise themselves into Bal Sanghas in rural areas of Orissa.

AKSSUS works with tribal children in Bissam Cuttack block, Rayagada District. Originally focusing on the reproductive rights of tribal adolescent girls, since September 2001 they initiated a new project called "Balavikas". Its objectives are the enrolment and retention of tribal children in formal schools, the empowerment of women and adolescents, and enhancing community involvement in school management. A strategic alliance has also been formed between AKSUS, CARE and Save the Children linking adolescent girls' groups as village change agents with the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Service) programme.

The educational challenge facing the tribal villages is quite enormous. Male literacy is only 6%, as compared to the District average of 40%, and is even lower for women. Many villages lack schools, and parents are reluctant to send children to distant schools, unless there are residential facilities. Many families are locked into bonded labour. Furthermore, people speak different tribal languages.

AKSSUS has met this challenge by forming Bal Sanghas, working through adolescent girls' groups, Young Farmers' Clubs, Women's Groups and SHGs. Children from the Bal Sanghas are represented on the Village Education Committees. The Bal

Sanghas double as motivational centres supported by AKSSUS animators, who also work with parents to promote interest in education. AKSSUS has also established a Regional Committee, bringing the NGO together with a group of teachers.

SOVA is another NGO that works with tribal children in villages that were formed about 15 years ago following displacement caused by a dam in Koraput District. The organisation enables the children to meet together in motivational centres. Since 2001 it has encouraged the girls and boys to form Bal Sanghas. Structured learning takes place in the motivational centres, and more open discussions are held during the children’s union meetings. The animator supports both processes.

SOVA currently supports 14 Bal Sanghas, whose elected representatives have also met to form a district federation with meetings every three months. Each Bal Sangha has analysed priorities for village development and shares its analysis and action ideas at the Federation meetings. Priority issues include schools, water, pre-school centres (anganwadi), health facilities, distance to forests, and meeting halls. Children have discussed the discrimination they have suffered when trying to enter mainstream schools.

The Federation is taking issues to key government functionaries. For example, in one village the children went to the District Magistrate to demand a school, which was duly promised. Meetings were also held between the children’s representatives and the Block Development Officer (BDO). Structures for children’s participation at the village and district level with access to decision-makers are being created and sustained.

The SOVA team has been on a great learning curve, and was energised by children’s immense potential and by the changing relations between adults and children. One of SOVA staff members referred to a meeting of children with a BDO, who was told *“when you are talking, we will listen to you with respect. When we are talking, we want you to listen to us without interrupting.”*

Butterflies Bal Sabha (Children’s Council) and Bal Mazdoor Union (Child Workers Union) Delhi

The Butterflies Programme of Street and Working Children has been working in Delhi since 1988. Through a team of street educators they are in contact with approximately 700 children at nine contact points in areas on the streets of Delhi where street and working children concentrate. Butterflies believes in the principles of democracy and community participation in decision making. The Bal Sabha is the Butterflies’ supreme body, and its guiding force and mechanism. Every fortnight, children of each contact point meet to discuss their issues, critique on-going activities, plan future activities, etc. Once a month, representatives from each contact point meet for the Bal Sabha. The children elect a chairperson and a minute taker. Every member is encouraged to share any agenda issues, and each outlined point is discussed. Key decisions are recorded. Frequently discussed issues include police harassment, non-payment of wages, need for better jobs, wages, education, saving schemes, problems of gambling and drugs, as well as planning picnics and outings.

The Bal Sabha provides a concrete mechanism for children’s collective voice to be heard and for children to build upon their own ideas and initiatives. Based on ideas from the Bal Sabha children started a Butterflies Restaurant in 1989. This serves as a training venture and provides subsidised meals to other street children. They also initiated a Child Workers Union (Bal Mazdoor Union) in 1991. Since 1995 their media group – ‘Bal Mazdoor ki Awaz’ (Child Worker’s Voice) –has been producing a regular wall newspaper. In 2000 a Children’s Health Cooperative was started.

The Bal Mazdoor Union: This child workers union gives children the strength of unity, increasing their bargaining power. The Union sees itself as a platform of and for children who are denied access to their basic rights. It is concerned about situations of abuse, exploitation and/or denial of basic fundamental rights. These include the right to a childhood, education, recreation, leisure, shelter and health care, the right to respect and opportunities to participate in policies and programmes affecting them. Through their Union the children also seek to mobilise public opinion to redress the conditions and pressures that force them to work, including their families' poverty and unemployment.

Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayat (Children's Government), Karnataka, Southern India

Concerned for Working Children (CWC), an NGO, has been working on child labour issues in collaboration with working children in rural and urban areas of Karnataka State in South India for the past 15 years. CWC argues against simplistic for or against attitudes towards child work and stresses the need to make working children and their predicament visible, to explore the factors underlying the problem. It wants to give children (and through them, their families) a political space to assert their rights. CWC supported the formation of Bhima Sangha, a union of working children in 1989 with the objective of providing a platform for working children to engage in a dialogue with each other, as well as society, and most importantly to assert a collective and visible identity as workers.

The Toofan programme was launched in 1995 to consolidate as well as to intensify CWC's strategy. The objective was to evolve a child-centred development process for rural areas through a broad-based local consensus on strategies to revive the rural economy, introduce an appropriate education programme, and empower working children, families, and communities. Toofan was launched in eight Panchayats across four districts of Karnataka. The goals were to develop new support structures where necessary and to reinforce existing structures (Panchayats, formal schools) to create child labour free and child-friendly Panchayats.

The Makkala Panchayat (Children's Government) is one of the newly introduced support structures. Children elect their own representatives (with reservations for girls, working children, school children, disabled children) to form their own Makkala Panchayat. The Panchayat is positioned to interface between children and adult local self-government structures. Elected members participate in highly structured meetings at the adult Panchayat level. The children also select an influential and supportive adults as their 'Makalala Mitra' a 'friend of children' who assists in advocating and supporting children to raise issues affecting them and creates a nurturing environment for children.

CWC also helps form Village and Taluk level Task Forces consisting of elected members of the village council, local government officials, elected child representatives, family representatives, employers of child workers and a CWC representative. The District Minister chairs the Taluk level Task Force. This creates a tripartite body to address child labour issues comprised of: 1) government officials and elected Panchayat members; 2) children, NGOs working with children and communities; and 3) employers of working children.

The Makkala Mitra plays a supportive role in ensuring that children's voices are heard in the Panchayat and Task Force. The programme aims to ensure that Panchayats are child labour free⁸ and that they are child rights friendly.

⁸ Child labour-free means that no children perform labour that is detrimental to their normal growth and development, that no children migrate from the Panchayat for employment, and that all children in the Panchayat receive an education that is appropriate and compatible to the formal system.

Through the Makkala Panchayats and Bhima Sangha children have identified several problems and issues related to inadequate services and infrastructure in their areas. They have lobbied powerfully with local Panchayats and have joined hands with them to address those problems. For instance, Extension Schools have been set up in Keradi, Bellary and Alur. For this they identified the number of children requiring Extension Schools and the most suitable locations. They have conducted interviews and identified activists to manage the schools. Since the schools were established, they have been actively involved in monitoring them. In Belve and in Alur, they have managed to mobilise their Panchayats to construct footbridges and have had water taps installed in locations chosen on the basis of their consultations within the community.

After the first Makkala Panchayat elections, the members and Bhima Sangha (working children's union) perceived a need for information on all children up to 18 years old. Children were trained to conduct a door-to-door survey that provided statistical information on all the children in Toofan panchayats. Children have used this information to plan their strategies and lobby for specific interventions in their Panchayat, whether related to education, working children, health related issues or infrastructure needs such as footbridges, schools, anganwadi etc. The Panchayat is also using this data; the simple fact that children have created 'knowledge' has boosted the image of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayat. The children have also developed their own definitions of work they can do and cannot do, which they then use to monitor and sustain the child-labour-free situation.

Children's Parliaments in India:

In addition to the Makkala Panchayat in Karnataka, organisations in Northern India including SWRC, SMTA and CREATE have also encouraged children to form Children's Parliaments.

Tilonia Children's Parliament, Rajasthan

SWRC, working since 1972 in Tilonia, Rajasthan, is popularly known as 'the Barefoot College'. The strategy for SWRC's community work emphasises the non-negotiable values of Partnership, Equality, Simple Lifestyle, Self-reliance and Democracy. Among SWRC's many initiatives is a system of night schools uniquely designed to address the needs and schedule of rural working children. The curriculum of these schools is specifically adapted to their rural surroundings and incorporates innovative ideas about student-teacher relations, teaching methods and the education of girls. As part of the night schools, girls and boys in Tilonia were supported to form their own 'Bal Sansad' (Children's Parliament) in 1992.

The Children's Parliament was initially launched to teach children about democratic systems, the electoral process and the functioning of a government. All the extension schools run by SWRC were converted into constituencies. Two parties, 'Ujala' (light) and 'Gawaal' (shepherd) were formed by the students to contest the elections. Child representatives campaigned for votes and a 16 member parliament was elected for a two-year term. The Parliament is an opportunity to harness children's enthusiasm in collectively running their schools, and it plays a role in managing the 50 night schools. The Executive Director of SWRC acts as the President of the Government and meets with the Child Ministers regularly to make important administrative decisions.

Children experience the democratic process and work together curriculum to manage the school, while also engaging themselves in other development issues. Following from the Tilonia Children's Parliament, nine other Indian states have seen the initiation of Children's Parliaments.

Bal Panchayat in Uttaranchal supported by Society of Motivational Training and Action (SMTA)

SMTA established 'Apna Schools' (Our Schools) in a hilly area of Uttaranchal, Northern India. In 1994 SMTA supported primary school girls and boys between 6-14 years to form a Bal Panchayat. Currently, 103 Bal Panchayats are running in six blocks of Uttaranchal with around 3,000 members. Children in each village panchayat elect their own office bearers of the Bal Panchayat by secret ballot yearly. A minimum of 50% of the seats are reserved for girls. The children hold regular meetings in their villages. The main aims of Bal Panchayats are to make primary education available for all the children, especially girls, and to work towards community development. Bal Panchayat members develop partnerships with Village School Committee to ensure monitoring and action on school related issues.

Bal Panchayat in Feroziabad supported by CREATE

Motivated by actual adults Panchayat elections in Uttar Pradesh, CREATE, an organisation in Feroziabad, began experimenting with forming co-operatives of children working in the glass industry. CREATE has supported children in villages in three Panchayats to form Bal Panchayats. In urban areas the children have been encouraged to form 10 Child Clubs.

In the Bal Panchayat children elect a “Bal Pradhan” (Children's President) and a Vice-Pradhan (Vice-president) who are assisted by the following sub-committees: a) education b) Health c) Sanitation d) Local Self Governance. Although adults are generally very co-operative during the children's elections and are happy to see the children doing something useful, strategic efforts are needed to promote meetings between the children and the adult Pradhan and MLA. This would serve to gain their co-operation and active support to create linkages between the Bal Panchayat and adult decision-making and governance structures.

Bal Panchayat in 45 Villages in Maharashtra State, India

Paryay, a partner NGO of Save the Children Canada, started work in 1998 with a project covering 5 villages focussing on working children who were out of school. With basic literacy skills provided through non- formal education it succeeded in curtailing drop out rates and enrolling children back into school, thus reducing child labour at a village level. The project was expanded to cover 15 villages and by the year 2000, most of the children in the age group of 6-14 years were attending regular full day school in their respective villages.

The concept of Bal Panchayat was initiated in one of the Non-Formal Education Classes. Presently, Bal Panchayats are operative in 45 villages (Tuljapur Block, Osmanabad District, Maharashtra) creating opportunity for participation to all girls and boys aged of 6-14 years. The project is based on a three level strategy:

- Creating platform for child participation in the form of Bal Panchayat (who hold weekly meetings)
- Building capacities of children and project staff as child facilitators (on child rights, concept and formation of Bal Panchayat, leadership, art and crafts, sports)
- Giving freedom to children to put the rights of children into practice.

Programme activities implemented by the Bal Panchayat include: organisation of recreational activities, managing their own libraries, and creating a Child Rights Watch Cell to address issues affecting them. The issues dealt with so far include: Right to education, Prevention of child labour, provision of basic services to children, alcoholism and gambling practices among adults. The Bal Panchayat has also developed supportive linkages with Community Based Organisations, self help groups of women and youth groups. Various stakeholders (teachers, school administrators, village panchayat elders) have appreciated the work of the Bal Panchayat, and children have learnt about democracy in practice and governance. Child representatives have also had chances to participate in district and state level Public Hearings, national and regional level consultations on HIV/ AIDS, and exposure visits to children's committees in other parts of the country.

A Few initiatives by Bal Panchayats from different villages

Dhanegoan - organises daily physical exercise yoga sessions for children, and has arranged a study room facility for 40-50 children for self study.

Vadgaon - distributed educational material to children from poor families.

Bornadwadi- identified children who had dropped out of school, through home visits convinced their parents and enrolled them back to school. Through a kitty bank the members made regular collections and used their savings to buy educational material at the beginning of new academic year.

Gandhora- with help of self help group approached the local shop selling illicit liquor, children successfully prohibited the shop owner to brew and sell liquor in the village.

Korewadi - Girl committee members approached Depot Manager of State Transport Service Department and requested a new bus service to ensure their school attendance in a nearby village. The department responded positively. A new bus service was started and is being used by children for attending school, as well as by villagers.

Devsinga- Children collected donations from villagers and handed over the amount to village panchayat for repairing and maintenance of streetlights in village.

Child Clubs in Nepal

Child Clubs have developed in Nepal over the past decade as an expression of and a promise for the advancement of democracy and children’s rights. Approximately 3000 Child Clubs are operating in diverse settings: hill communities, rural plains, and urban areas.

Chandhra Surya Child Club, Chitwan⁹

The village of Namuna Gaun is a settlement of people rehabilitated by Save the Children Norway after flooding in 1993. The community of 40 families includes a mix of ethnicities and castes. Membership in Chandhra Surya Child Club reflects this diversity. The Club includes 15 girls and 25 boys between 6 and 16 years of age. The sense of community and unity here is quite strong since all were involved in re-building their community.

The children and their activities are part of a larger community development scheme. They are highly involved in community development and adults are very interested in the Children’s Club. The children monitor and inspect the cleanliness of homes and toilets. Their activities include financially sponsoring a few children to go to local schools, running various competitions and drawing programmes, and performing dramas.

The Child Club uses a room in the community development building. Club activities and games are held for one hour every afternoon and all day on Saturdays. The Club has a money/fund box, photos, rules and a diagram of the Club structure. All members, even the youngest, rotate responsibility for cutting the grass and weeding around the clubroom. The previous chairperson, a 15-year-old girl recently resigned to begin teaching non-formal education classes to community women. She continues to serve as an informal advisor to the group, as do the two former local staff of Save the Children Norway.

⁹ From Rajbhandary, J., Hart, R. and Khatiwada, C. (1999). The Children’s Clubs of Nepal: A Democratic Experiment. Save the Children.

Bhowani Child Club, Eastern Nepal

Bhowani Child Club started in 1997 with support from a local organisation and Save the Children US. The Club has approximately 80 members: 50 boys and 30 girls aged 8-18 years old. The girls face more discrimination and thus have been less encouraged by parents to become club members. The children meet at least once a month, sometimes more often. They maintain a registration book, a book of minutes and a visitor's book. The Club members pay a Rs2 membership fee per month. They raised additional funds from the local community to build a Child Club building (constructed in the local style). The children have also established a children's library inside their club.

The children felt that they had gained considerably from being part of their Child Club:

- they had gained lots of information about their rights,
- through drama, speeches and other programmes they raised awareness of child rights in their village.
- they had raised various issues such as school enrolment, birth registration, child abuse, child marriage and trafficking, health and sanitation (e.g. vaccinations, diarrhoea).

The children felt that their Child Club had brought about much change locally. The children learned that they had their own views and they were increasingly recognised within the family and village as people with opinions and suggestions. The club members had helped establish a Village Development Committee (VDC) level network of Child Clubs that met together once a month so in recent years they had been able to share their experiences with children from other child clubs.

The children were also anxious to develop better relations with higher officials in the VDC so that child rights concerns could be addressed in a serious manner. The children felt that the VDC and district levels officials did not yet take children or Child Clubs seriously. They were keen to find solutions to the challenges that they face and to build meaningful partnerships with the adult authorities at higher levels. They children felt that further training on communication (drama, speeches etc) would help them be taken more seriously by adults. They were also seeking funds so they could go on 'tours' to visit, share and learn from experiences of other Child Clubs in the country and region.

In 1998, SCN and SC US supported a participatory study to assess the situation of Child Clubs in Nepal. Prompted by the study's recommendations, and recognising the advantages listening to children's voices bring to children and their communities, several NGOs pooled their resources to promote child club programming. As a result a Consortium of Child Clubs was established in 1999.



The Consortium of Organisations Working For Child Clubs, Nepal

In 1999 10 founding members established the Consortium of Organisations Working for Child Clubs. By September 2002 the Consortium had 28 full and 4 observer members supporting 1868 of the approximately 3000 Child Clubs in Nepal.

The Consortium of Child Clubs endeavours to further the children’s movement in Nepal and to establish children’s citizenship rights. Significant developments in recent years have been the establishment of district level Child Club networks and the forming of stronger partnerships with Village Development Committees and District Child Welfare Boards/Committees. This has facilitated increasing children’s influence in village development and local governance decision-making on issues concerning children. In Surkhet the DCWB now includes child representatives and in Siraha the Child Club Network is seeking official registration in the VDC.

Organisations supporting Child Clubs are working together to increase the effectiveness of their advocacy, and to upgrade the quality of support they can offer. The Consortium has been dealing with the following issues:-

- Establishing a code of conduct among key stakeholders working with Child Clubs;
- Facilitating the network of Child Clubs supported by different organisations;
- Bringing synergy to the efforts of members;
- Providing the means to bring together resources into the Child Club support cell;
- Providing a platform for lobbying government;
- Bringing economies of scale in developing and delivering staff training for members; and
- Providing a focal point for donor input and technical assistance to Child Clubs.

An adult co-ordinator manages the Consortium with funding from Save the Children. In the past year a 15-member children’s advisory board has begun functioning. The 15 children, who include girls, boys, and children with disabilities from Child Clubs in each region of Nepal, meet twice a year. They initially provide inputs to the Consortium’s annual work plan. Later they meet to review and evaluate one year’s program and to provide inputs for the next year’s work plan. Efforts to develop child facilitators (to supplement the adult facilitators) are also ongoing.

Children’s Para Development Committees, Thar Desert, Pakistan

TRDP (Thardeep Rural Development Programme) started as a Save the Children UK relief project in the Thar desert in 1987, and was then established as an independent organisation. Working in an integrated manner with men, women and children the TRDP programme mobilises the community through organising them in village or para development committees. Working in 560 villages in one district, TRDP’s goal is to facilitate a community managed process contributing towards the development of sustainable livelihood in Thar.

PRA activities with children in village areas between 1994 and 1997 inspired the organisation to work directly with children and to provide opportunities for their participation. The Programme recognised that children’s perspectives differed from those of adults, raising sensitive issues of discrimination among, child abuse, and children dropping out of school. TRDP saw that children could contribute to decision-making processes in different fields, such as health, environment, education. Helping children organise was identified as one way of instilling good ethics and behaviour in children, enabling them to play an active role in society.

Children request the right to be recognised as social actors in village decision-making

In one village in Chelhar a VDO (Village Development Organisation) was being formed with representatives from the men and women's 'para development committees' (PDCs). The children were upset at being left out. They spoke up and explained that their representatives should also be included, highlighting the importance of the process: *"We do not expect you to always respond to our demands, but we do expect you to listen to us. We should have been involved in this process."*

Fifty-three children's 'para development committees', with 1184 members, currently exist in Thar Desert. Most are boys' organisations, some are mixed and a few are for girls. Committee members include working children (e.g. working in the carpet industry, or as shepherds) and school-going children. The children's organisations have the same structure as the adult (PDCs) with an appointed President, General Secretary and Treasurer, along with general members. Most groups have between 10-20 members.

Most of the children's PDCs were started by the children themselves, having observed the adult committees and/or seeing or hearing about other local children's organisations. When children decide to form an organisation, TRDP facilitates the process. The children are given a record keeping book for a) registration and savings; b) meeting minutes. Adults provide support in record-keeping, as well as guidance and conflict-resolution when needed.

The children meet monthly, contribute savings and organise exposure visits. Agenda issues discussed during the meetings include savings, planning visits, water and food issues relating to drought, recreation, information sharing, developing dramas and tableaux (on child labour, education, impact of drought, immunisation), and kitchen gardening.

Boys' Para Development Committee (Roshan Bagasan Tanzeem), Ramsinghani Village

The boys formed their PDC in August 1999, after seeing the adult PDC. They wanted to start a Committee to have their own savings plan, meetings and activities, and to improve themselves and their community. The group has 15 members, who meet on the 15th of every month and contribute savings. A member can take a loan of up to Rs. 500, which must be repaid within 12 months. Through their PDC the boys have increased access to educational opportunities, discussed water issues and food requirements during drought. Loans have been used to buy schoolbooks. They like their organisation since they have been able to organise exposure visits, participate in children's conferences and interact with new people.

TRDP has found it harder to facilitate the formation of girls’ PDCs. The reasons for the difference between organising girls and boys include *resistance from parents due to socio-cultural restrictions* on girls leaving the home and speaking up; *time constraints* as girls have more household work, particularly if they must travel distances to collect water, and thus less free time to organise themselves and to conduct meetings; and *socialisation* since the girls themselves are not used to speaking up. TRDP has observed more willingness among low caste working class families to allow their daughters to meet together. Also, girls are more likely to be organised in villages where women have formed their own PDCs, as these provide strong role-models.

Girl’s Para Development Committee, Suram Village, Pakistan

‘We saw the women meeting and we thought we could start our own organisation’.

This girls’ PDC in a remote Thar Desert village has been running since 1999. The girls hold monthly meetings, collect savings and agree to co-operate with each other. Difficulties they face in their village which have been discussed include water, education and health issues. Women’s organisations have assisted the girls to enhance their savings when the girls used their savings to pay school fees and buy schoolbooks. All the girls in their groups were going to school, a significant factor in a region where only 30% of girls are enrolled.

Child Clubs of Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka Save the Children began promoting children’s participation in their programmes in the mid 1990s through child participatory research. Save the Children UK, Norway and their partner organisations began supporting children to develop their own Child Clubs in 1999. Almost every district of Sri Lanka has Child Clubs. In some areas these Clubs have played a key role in bringing together girls and boys from different religions and ethnic groups. This breaks down discrimination and ethnic tensions, and promotes peace and community development.

In recent years Save the Children and local NGO partners have actively supported children and young people to strengthen linkages between their Child Clubs and adult decision-making structures, thus enhancing opportunities for children’s participation in governance in Sri Lanka. In particular the Child Clubs are forming linkages with the Village Development Committees and the Divisional Child Rights Monitoring Committees, and in some districts with the District Child Rights Monitoring Committees.

Child Clubs in Mannar District, Sri Lanka: Enhancing Community Integration

Ethnic conflict in 2000 displaced many families in Mannar to refugee camps. Conflicts flared among people of the local communities. Save the Children began supporting community children to meet together in Child Clubs as a strategy to enhance community integration. Initially eight Child Clubs were started, with another five added the following year at the children's request. Twelve more Clubs were started in 2002 with support of other local organisation partners.

The initial phases of developing the Child Clubs presented challenges. A general lack of support from parents was an obstacle to the children's participation and the children had no meeting place. The children struggled to find time to meet for Club activities while attending school and extra tuition classes, and wanting some free time to play. In addition, cultural barriers made it difficult for the children to encourage parents to let their daughters attend the Child Clubs.

Over time, however, experience and understanding have considerably increased the children's participation. The children have managed to overcome or minimise many of the initial challenges. Girls and boys from different ethnic groups regularly meet in their Clubs and have achieved some positive outcomes. Club members have learned about child rights, have gained new skills (e.g. presentation, negotiation) and recognition of their skills. They have learned how children can participate in resolving family and community problems. They value collective thinking and working together, rather than acting as individuals.

Save the Children and local partners have supported children in identifying and analysing problems and finding solutions, such as a campaign to reduce alcohol use by parents. Child representatives have raised issues and solutions at local community, divisional and district levels. Child Club members have participated in a national level Children's Parliament where they could raise policy issues affecting them inside and outside of the family, in communities and society. Club members have also started developing their own networks and have been given opportunities that increase their access to new technologies, training and information. The children and young people have also started building a small fund with local contributions.

Children's Participation in the Family

"Every parent and every child should understand one another"

"Parents should listen to all family members' views and help to find a compromise"

(Girls and boys, Kyrgyzstan)

"Parents should be made aware of child rights. We need parents to understand it is good for children to raise their voice and accept their responsibilities."

(Boy, Sri Lanka)

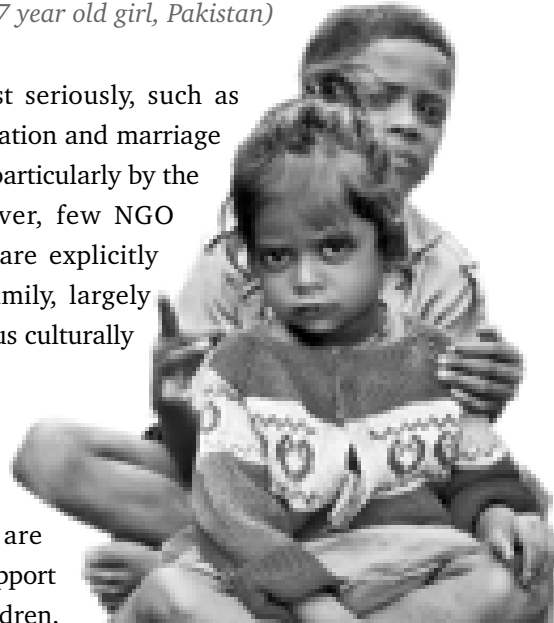
Marginalised children across South and Central Asia commonly participate in everyday household tasks, sometimes making significant contributions to the family income. Nevertheless, children's participation in family decision-making is possibly the least developed area of child participation (Ennew, 2002).

*“I am soon going to be married to a person I have never seen. I feel very unhappy.
Girls are also human beings and should be consulted in matters of marriage.”*

(17 year old girl, Pakistan)

Many of the issues affecting girls and boys the most seriously, such as education, work, play, protection from abuse, discrimination and marriage are greatly influenced by family level decision-making, particularly by the children’s parents and other family elders. However, few NGO programmes, including those of Save the Children, are explicitly designed to further children’s participation in the family, largely because families are still seen as ‘private’ arenas, and thus culturally inappropriate for intervention by outsiders.

International human rights law, including the CRC upholds the rights of parents and also emphasises their duties. Family care for and protection of children are universal expectations. The State also has the duty to support parents in their role of providing for and protecting children.



CRC Articles relevant to key role of parents as primary care-takers

Article 5: Parental care and children’s evolving capacity

The State must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents and the extended family to provide guidance for the child which is appropriate to his or her evolving capacities.

Article 9: Prevent separation from parents

The child has the right to live with his or her parents unless this is deemed to be incompatible with the child’s best interests. The child also has the right to maintain contact with both parents if separated from one or both.

Article 18: Parental responsibilities

Parents have joint primary responsibility for raising the child, and the State shall support them in this. The State shall provide appropriate assistance to parents in child-raising.

Increased programming focus on girls and boy’s role in family decision-making is crucial if children are to learn the necessary skills for meaningful participation in the wider society. It will also enhance communication between different generations within the family so that the rights of all family members are respected.

"My mother believes that girls make wrong decisions and so she doesn't listen to me."

(Girl, Afghanistan)

"I could not talk in front of my father because I am afraid of him."

(Street refugee child, Pakistan)

Giving girls and boys space to voice their views and influence decision-making within the family will likely increase non-discriminatory and empowering practices. This should facilitate more girls and boys attending school, studying, and playing, while also making positive contributions to the household and care of all family members.

Children's participation in 'alternative families' should also be recognised. For example street children who are living without their families often create substitute families with their peers. Street boys frequently refer to their friends as 'brothers'. They share roles and responsibilities, taking care of one another when healthy and when ill. Street children live much of their lives in peer groups, largely without adult supervision, and thus have been described as 'out of place'¹⁰ Historically street children have been pioneers in highlighting children's potential to actively participate in decisions about their lives. At the same time, children's lack of voice in family decision-making continues to be a factor that contributes to their decision to run-away from home.

Although few programmes have explicitly focused on promoting children's participation in family decision-making, listening to children in the family context has increased as a result of children's participation in other contexts¹¹. As parents recognise their children's capacity and the benefits of listening to their suggestions and ideas, opportunities for consulting children and involving them in family decision-making processes tend to grow. Seeking parental support for boys and girls' participation in other arenas like children's organisations and community structures has proven to be part of a successful strategy for promoting meaningful children's participation in different settings.

¹⁰ see Connolly and Ennew, 1996

¹¹ As described in Booklet 2.

“Before we had a Child Club I had no confidence to express myself and people in my family didn’t expect me to have a view. However, since I’ve been part of the club I feel like I am a human being with have views to contribute and I feel confident in doing so.”

(Boy, member of Child Club, Nepal)

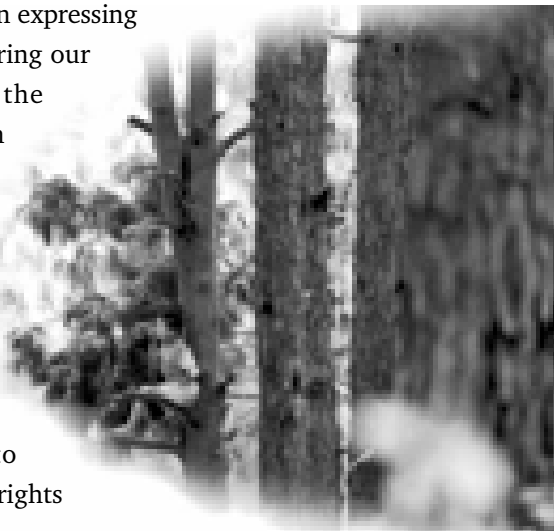
Early Years

The ways in which children are encouraged or discouraged to participate in their families and communities is significant. Caroline Arnold (2002) has described the importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes in efforts to promote the realisation of children’s rights, including their participation rights.

Early Child Development (ECD) programmes focus on children from birth to the age of eight years:

- ensuring children grow up healthy, well-nourished, protected from harm, with a sense of self-worth and identity, enthusiasm and opportunities for learning.
- enabling opportunities for children to learn to think for themselves, communicate effectively, get on with others, and play an active role in their families.
- influencing the contexts in which children are growing up to be supportive of children’s overall development (e.g. lobbying for change in specific laws or increased budget allocations for programmes for young children).

Our sense of who we are, and our confidence and skills in expressing ourselves and negotiating our rights are established during our earliest interactions. Tiny day-to-day events lay the foundations of participation. Research within the region highlights the positive impact of investing in children’s early years in terms of educational gains, health status and economic productivity (see Arnold, 2002). For most children the family, in all its permutations, is most closely involved in the day-to-day management and defence of children’s rights. The younger the child, the more this is the case.¹² Thus, it is crucial to bring different family members into consultations and dialogue concerning the children’s rights and internalising the core principles of the CRC.



¹² Save the Children and UNICEF (2000). ‘Bringing up Children in a Changing World: Who’s Right ? Whose Rights ?’: Conversations with Families in Nepal.

The Impact of Early Childhood Development Programmes in Nepal¹³

A study conducted in Siraha, one of Nepal's poorest districts, demonstrates the significant support ECD can provide children in their transition to school: the likelihood of entering school, doing well, and continuing. A sample of 261 children who had been enrolled in community-based ECD centres and are now in 20 different primary schools were compared with a group who had not participated in an ECD programme. In class one, almost equal numbers of ECD boys and girls were enrolled, as opposed to a ratio of 61/39 (boy/girl) for non-ECD children. In class two, the ECD group ratio changes to 54/46, and the non-ECD ratio to 66/34, nearly two boys for every girl. The children who participated in ECD programmes also have markedly better passing rates than 'non-ECD' children.

The qualitative component of the research highlights additional subtle findings that may be of great long-term significance. One key finding is that parents whose children have been in ECD programmes are much more inclined to engage with, and even challenge, their children's schools — an unanticipated yet highly significant outcome. For example one illiterate dalit (untouchable) family had a daughter who had successfully passed her Grade 1 exam but was not promoted to Grade 2 the next year. The teacher had no idea which child was where! The ECD facilitator who has remained close to all her 'graduates' heard what had happened and talked with the family. They went to the school and insisted that the child be put in the appropriate class. This initiative represents a huge step for a dalit family — whose own rights are so routinely denied - to take action on behalf of their child.

Another striking finding was the level of commitment from communities to providing a good start for their children. Parents who two years ago complained that their children 'only played' in the centres and had no respect for child-centred teaching methods are now making the comparisons with Grade 1 methods. They are convinced that their children learned much more in the centres and are inclined to discuss this with the school. These findings demonstrate a clear shift in terms of families' engagement with their children's rights.

Children's Participation in Schools

Schools can provide a significant 'space' to encourage girls and boys to work together with their peer group, their teachers and the wider community to become productive and respected citizens. The education system can provide considerable scope for increasing children's knowledge, skills and values as active citizens as they become involve in making choices about the curricula, teaching methods, teacher-pupil relations, peer-to-peer interaction, school management, and school- local community interactions.

CRC Article 29 (Education for Responsible Life) highlights the role of education in developing children as responsible citizens. Although the formal education system's emphasis on discipline often raises a barrier against experiments to develop democratic school systems, the region does have some interesting examples of Child Friendly Schools and encouraging children's participation in the school system. Organisations are forming partnerships with

¹³ From: Arnold, C. (2002). Are younger children being sidelined in the Child Rights Movement? The importance of ECD programmes to Ensuring Children's Rights. Monitor, Vol.15, p.13-18.

school authorities to increase opportunities for debate and action on child rights issues among pupils within and between schools. Children are also being included as active stakeholders in C-EMIS (Community Education Monitoring Information Systems). Moreover, as other sections of this report show, children who organise themselves at local community and national levels frequently draw the attention of policy makers, education administrators, teachers and parents to education issues that need to be addressed at different levels.

Both Save the Children US and Japan have programme examples of initiatives to develop Child Friendly Schools in Nepal. Furthermore, Save the Children UK, Norway and US have all encouraged linkages between the Child Clubs in Nepal and school management so that attention will be paid to issues affecting the children’s education.

Child Friendly School Initiative Implementation Process by Save the Children US, Nepal

A Child Friendly School Initiative in 13 primary schools was initiated as a pilot program in Nepal’s Kanchanpur district in collaboration with the District Education Office and the Nepal National Social Welfare Association (NNSWA) in late 1999. Following CRC Articles 28 and 29 the programme aims to increase quality access of primary education and enhance child-centred friendly learning environments at home, school and in the community.

In January, 2000, a district level child-friendly school initiative workshop was conducted in Kanchanpur district to develop a common understanding of the initiative and to collectively design the district level child-friendly school initiative programme document. Workshop participants included headmasters, teachers, the District Education Officer, Joint Secretary and Teacher Training Officers of the Department of Education, as well as NGO and Save the Children US programme staff. The key NGO implementing partner NNSWA conducted community level meetings in the surrounding villages primary schools.

Objectives of Child-Friendly Schools:

- To provide opportunities for positive experiences for all children in pre-primary and primary schools through a safe, secure and healthy environment for children’s psychosocial well being, self-esteem and confidence.
- To promote equality, respect, non-discrimination and the rights of all children in pre-primary and primary education, to increase children’s participation in planning and school management, and to promote the rights and responsibilities of children in school.
- To impart capacity building to primary school teachers to apply the joyful, life-relevant, activity-based and participatory primary teaching/learning process in schools.
- To strengthen and enhance support by parents, communities, school management committees and teachers to plan, manage, and create a safe, healthy and conducive learning for life environment in schools.



In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Central Asia, Save the Children and partners have worked with teachers, school principals and teacher training institutes to further opportunities to organise Child Clubs and to promote children's participation in school management. In Tajikistan a partnership between the education authorities and Save the Children UK has brought about a focus on child rights, children's participation and participatory teaching-learning styles as integral to mainstream teacher-training programmes. Furthermore, advocacy work by Save the Children Norway in Nepal has furthered efforts to include of child rights in the curricula.

'Children-to-Children' School Based Programme in Osh, Kyrgyzstan

Following a workshop on the CRC organised by Save the Children UK with school principals from local Government schools in 1998, more opportunities to further knowledge and action on child rights by children in the schools were explored. Child-to-child methodology was used. Child leaders met once month to prepare sessions about child rights theory and practice, which they then facilitated with other children. Ninety members aged 10-16 years were part of this programme.

Building on these developments, another organisation (SORAS) also encouraged school principals to allow children to form school based groups and to have some power in school governance. Children in over 10 schools have formed school groups. The groups give the children greater freedom of expression, access to information on issues affecting them, knowledge of the CRC, as well as opportunities to analyse news and information concerning current affairs; to resolve conflicts in the school; and to plan programmes to support more marginalised children.

The children made the following suggestions to improve their school participation initiative:

- regular meetings and exchanges between children's groups at district and city levels to exchange news, share our experiences about problems and how to solve them, and to learn about other countries;
- seminars and training on child rights, citizenship and the development of civil society, self-governing policies and legislation, technical skills (e.g. internet access and working as reporters), anti-bullying, facilitation and how to conduct training programmes; and
- financial support for our projects on child rights.

School-based Child Clubs in a rural and an urban province of Tajikistan

“After starting this Child Club we had the possibility to learn about rights. Before we had no idea. We have a chance to meet together and can now talk to community members about our rights.” (children, Child Club, Khatlon)

Since May 2001 Save the Children UK have helping establish Child Clubs in six schools in both the Khatlon (rural) and Dushanbe (urban) provinces of Tajikistan. This is a pilot project to teach children about the democratic process and how to address issues affecting them in their school and local community. When they enter a school, Save the Children UK staff identify an interested adult who will support the process of forming a Child Club. This teacher then brings together 25 children who are interested in being members of a Club. Training on child rights, facilitation, life skills and disability are provided to the adult supporter and to the club members. Basic office materials are also provided to help members organise their own action programmes. Programmes the children have taken up include: awareness raising on child rights, public health, drug abuse, and ecological problems; community clean-up, solving community water problems; organising cultural and sports events; and exploring issues concerning non-school attendance and school quality.

Teachers’ attitudes towards the children have improved due to their efforts. However, while the children are addressing issues affecting them in their local community through their school-based child clubs, interaction between the school management system and the child clubs has not yet begun. Child club members still have little power to influence issues relating to school governance. The students are also aware of working children in their communities who are not attending school. They are interested in developing mechanisms so they can include such working children as well as more children with disabilities in their Clubs. They want to find ways to address their issues (e.g. re-enrolment in school). The Child Club members have also visited some neighbouring schools to encourage them to form Child Clubs.

Exchange visits between Child Club members from the rural and the urban setting are also being facilitated to enable experience sharing, joint advocacy on important issues for children and the development of a national level Children’s Forum. Child representatives from both rural and urban Child Clubs also had opportunities to participate in UN Special Session processes and the Global Movement for Children. Furthermore, the children are still involved in opportunities to influence the National Plan of Action, particularly regarding issues of education, health, violence and the environment.

Pakistan has seen interesting participatory initiatives in which children have identified the characteristics of a ‘good teacher’ and a ‘good school’. In the non-formal education sector an NGO, KHOJ, has developed participatory methodology (e.g. role play, art, picture cards) for involving children in developing their school according to their own ideas. Children’s perceptions/ideas were elicited and influenced programme development regarding what is a good teacher, what makes a good classroom set-up/environment, and what content is most useful for them. Essentially, the role of a teacher was seen as a facilitator of learning activities, to encourage ‘learning from life’. The school management also made efforts to elicit children’s views, so they can influence management decisions. Moreover, the school encouraged the children to interact and address their issues at home and in their local communities. For example the children met municipal corporation officials to promote better implementation of waste management. Children have been able to influence their parents’ decisions on community issues, as well as school management and gender issues.



In the formal education sector Save the Children and NGO partners in Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Central Asia have also helped children play an active role in C-EMIS (Community Education Monitoring Information Systems) demonstrating their skills of information collection, analysis and critical thinking. Children have worked with adults on community-based committees to guarantee the enrolment of all village children in schools and to monitor school attendance of both pupils and teachers.

Children's Participation in C-EMIS Sri Lanka

In Kinniya, Sri Lanka children have been involved in C-EMIS as members of village committees. Their role is in collecting and analysing information and acting upon action plans based on the analysis. Through the C-EMIS system education issues are addressed locally, with analysis also being conducted at local levels. For example, the children and adults in one school discovered that girls were dropping out because no women teachers were employed. This concern was taken up with the Education Department and a woman teacher was hired.

Schools provide an opportune forum to inform large numbers of children of their rights and to involve them in genuinely internalising human rights principles. The Human Rights Education Project (HREP) in Pakistan, Working for Better Lives in Bangladesh, and Divya Disha in India are all NGOs that began their work with elite children and young people. However they now engage with both elite and marginalised groups of children, making attempts to bring the two groups together.

Human Rights Education Project (HREP), Pakistan

HREP has been working in schools in Karachi since 1995 with the goal of contributing to the development of a caring, tolerant, humane society that is also socially economically and politically stable by providing children socially relevant schooling.

HREP is in contact with 600 schools. Its work has three strands:

- 1) Academic: work on policy issues at government level to address issues such as quality of education and curriculum.
- 2) Children Campaigns on human right issues, such tolerance and peace, are run throughout the academic year. The campaigns use creative art, multi-media, poetry, mime, drama, writing, discussions and debates, and include lessons plans for teachers.
- 3) Publications: a range of publications has been produced on child rights, conflict-resolution and tolerance, in addition to teacher's manuals. Children and young people are also engaged in putting together their own quarterly magazine.

HREP has also facilitated the development of a "Right On!" network which school children can join by forming their own school based 'Right On' clubs to raise child rights issues. They have found that there is no tradition of becoming a 'member' of an organisation, however. Visually attractive posters on the "Right On" network have been distributed.

In its campaign for peace, HREP collected 2.5 million pledges from children for peace. A recent campaign called “Count me In” was designed to counter apathy. Children are encouraged to write three things they like about their lives, three they don’t like, and three to five things they can do to improve their situation. The suggestions were all sent to HREP and a compilation will be made. Each participating child also received a piece of canvas on which to draw or write a contribution to be sewn into a huge ‘Quilt of Hope’ to be displayed in strategic places.

Working for Better Lives (WBL), Bangladesh¹⁴

Since 1995 WBL has been organising debates in schools in Bangladesh with children from grade 6-10. Each participating school signs a memorandum or partnership with WBL. Between 50 to 150 children form a debating Club with one teacher appointed as a contact person. WBL staff members the schools monthly to hold group discussions on issues that children identified. These discussions are to prepare for debates on the same topic. Children in some schools, with support from their teachers and WBL, have organised Round Table discussions with parents, teachers and neighbours on issues of child rights, drugs, environment and terrorism.

Any child can participate in the activities. Children can volunteer to be ‘Young Change Agents,’ informing their peers about the debate topics. WBL also produces a bi-monthly newsletter that is entirely written by children. This is the first school-based newspaper in Bangladesh. Children receive the newsletter for free when they become WBL members. The newsletter costs 2 Taka (about 6 cents) for non-members.

One Save the Children colleague was able to observe preparations for a debate during a visit to a secondary school for boys and girls. The debate topics included:

1. Does co-education enhance respectful relations between boys and girls?
2. What could be your role in helping poor children?
3. What is the negative impact of corporal punishment?
4. In families girls are discriminated against. What is your view?
5. Describe a terrorist.

The discussions took place after school hours with about 60 boys and girls present. They were divided into five mixed groups (to discuss the one of the topics). Each group appointed a secretary and a reporter. The children appeared to be enthusiastic and the discussions were lively, focusing on describing the issue and suggestions to deal with it. Outcomes of the discussions were presented in a plenary session. During the preparations it was observed that older boys tended to lead the discussions and take charge of writing on the flip charts. However, the plenary presentations and discussions were lively and included more involvement by girls.

WBL staff noted that these discussions and debates introduce children to society’s problems, as well as to their own issues, and they learn to advocate for themselves. The headmaster has noted positive changes in children since the introduction of the debates. Students and adults have begun jointly discussing social problems and ways they serve to address them. Both WBL and the school administration try to follow up on suggestions children make during discussions and debates. They often find they must involve the children’s parents or families to create change.

Since reaching out to street children and promoting some interactions between school-going and street children, WBL noted that school children generally lack opportunities to express their own views. Comparing street children and school children, street children tend to be more developed in thinking and imagination.

¹⁴ Adapted from case study written by Henk van Beers in a Save the Children report on child participation in Bangladesh.

Promoting Child Rights and Children’s Participation in Schools, Divya Disha, Hyderabad, India

Divya Disha has been running a CRC programme in schools since 1999. The complementary components of the programme are Awareness Raising and Facilitating Children’s Participation at the School level and at the Policy level. Awareness of Child Rights is raised through assembly presentations, teachers’ orientation programmes, parents’ meetings, and teacher training institutes.

Facilitating children’s participation at the school level included:

- Introducing a CRC Charter
- Organising ‘Open House’ discussions
- Starting Child Rights Club in High Schools for pupils of Class 7 and above
- Establishing ‘Child Rights Committees’ with representation of parents, teachers, students, principals that meet every one or two months.
- Having a ‘Suggestion Box’ in schools, which should also be read by the School Inspectors.

The ‘CRC Charter’ was formulated in 2000 and has been signed by 30 schools. It was developed by a principal and representative teachers, parents and students.

Facilitating Children’s Participation at the Policy Level has involved:

- A Student’s resource team of 15-20 students elected from Child Clubs who meet with government officials.
- A Child Rights Cell that includes children.
- Training of School Inspectors.
- Consultation with schoolchildren on the syllabus.

The first two years of the CRC programme in schools were spent largely on demonstrating the benefits of children’s participation, but Divya Disha is now focusing on policy issues in collaboration with the Women and Child Welfare Department so that efforts on children’s participation can be systematised.

“Earlier no-one was willing to see children as partners. We faced resistance during our first year of working with the Commissioner of Education. Now he has agreed to have a ‘Cell’ in the Commissionerate, and children will be included in the committee... We have strategically kept the Commissioner of Education informed about the processes that have been taking place with the children and their Child Rights Clubs over the past year.”

(Director of Divya Disha, India)

Children’s Participation in Local Governance

Adopting rights-based approaches to programming, emphasising accountability, participation and the fulfilment of human rights endorses efforts to strengthen processes, systems and institutions for good governance.

Work relating to children’s participation in the region shows a growing focus on enabling children’s participation in governance, in the decision-making processes of schools, organisations and local governance. In addition efforts to have children and young people monitor and influence decision-making processes at national and international levels are also being furthered.

Governance generally involves structures and systems and the process whereby public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources and guarantee the realisation of human rights. Partnership approaches to development co-operation enhance efforts towards good governance.

The mobilisation and organisation of children’s groups has increased their negotiation and bargaining powers with district administrations. Through the power base of their organisations, children and young people are actively demanding effective delivery of basic services like education, health, water and sanitation, integrated child care services and basic infrastructure (e.g. electricity, bus services). Furthermore, children have been negotiating for representational space in local governance structures (e.g. Panchayat Raj Institutions in India, DCWBs in Nepal) and in Village Education Committees. Through children and young people’s pro-active and informed efforts, adults in local governance are increasingly acknowledging children’s capacity to contribute to local development processes. Moreover, many children are succeeding in mobilizing action and delivery of services where adults have failed in the past.

‘We have been able to influence our local governments and are involved in planning for our villages. Now we have found solutions that did not seem possible before we had our own organisation and link structures’.

(Nagaraj Kolkere, Founder President Bhima Sangha, 1996)

Developmental processes and negotiations have brought forth concrete examples in different parts of South and Central Asia of how adults in positions of power are being convinced to provide structural space for children and young people’s representatives to raise issues and to influence and monitor decision-making, resource allocation and action on issues relating to the fulfilment of their rights.

In most cases children’s participation in governance has developed out of a longer process of empowering children and young people in community contexts, for example through Child Clubs, CCVDs or children’s unions. Efforts to involve children and young people in governance are furthered when more strategic attempts are made to work with adults and adult institutions, to provide political space for children to be heard. Enabling children’s participation in governance requires that adults be willing to yield some of the power, to create space in their structures and to relate to children and young people in new ways through which they take children and young people’s views seriously.

In India the Panchayati Raj system supports decentralised local government. Thus, organisations working for children’s empowerment are supporting linkages between children’s organisations and the local government Panchayati Raj system.

Children’s Representation in the Panchayat Raj System, Andhra Pradesh, India

In 2001 the Government of Andhra Pradesh delegated more powers to panchayats as part of the decentralisation process. Children, supported by the local NGO YIP took the opportunity to negotiate with panchayats to acquire representational space for children within them. They selected education and health committees, which related to the development and survival rights of children and attempted to get representational rights for at least two children (1 girl & 1 boy).

On an experimental basis YIP selected two panchayats from each mandal to develop Children’s Parliaments to support children’s representation in the adult panchayat committees. In both of these panchayats, the adults have consented to representation of children. Adult union leaders are also supporting the process. However, such negotiation efforts must continue before the reality of children’s genuine representation is realised.

Children’s Participation in Local Governance, Karnataka, India¹⁵ :

CWC’s ‘Makkala Toofan¹⁶’ (Children’s Typhoon) programme in Karnataka State seeks to create systemic changes that will formalise political space for children (introduced on p.82). The Makkala Panchayat (Children’s Government) is positioned to interface between children and adult local self-government structures, with elected members participating in highly structured meetings at the adult panchayat level. CWC also works to form Village level and Taluk (higher level) Task Forces. The Village Task force is comprised of elected members of the village council, local government officials, elected child representatives, family representatives, employers of child workers and a CWC representative. The Taluk level Task Force is chaired by the District Minister and is composed of 1) government officials and elected panchayat members; 2) children, NGOs working with children and communities; and 3) employers of working children. This creates a tripartite body to address child labour issues.

The ‘Makalala Mitra’ (‘friend of children’) chosen by the children plays a supportive role in ensuring that children’s voices are heard in the Panchayat and Task Force. The first phase of the programme aims to guarantee that the panchayats are child labour-free¹⁷ and the second phase is to ensure that the panchayats are child rights-friendly.

Through the Makkala Panchayats and Bhima Sangha children have identified several problems and issues of inadequate services and infrastructure in their areas. They have lobbied powerfully with local panchayats and have joined with them to address those problems. They have, for instance, had Extension Schools set up in Keradi, Bellary and Alur. For this they identified the number of children requiring Extension Schools and the most suitable locations for the schools. They carried out interviews and identified activists to manage the schools. Since the establishment of the schools, they have been actively involved in monitoring them. In Belve and in Alur, they have mobilised their panchayats to construct footbridges and have had water taps installed in locations they chose based on the results of their consultations within the community.

Through their organised participation in local governance children are being recognised as social actors and partners for change. Adults who were traditionally feudal, patriarchal and gender insensitive have become advocates for children’s rights, and children are able to hold adult decision-makers accountable for the overall benefit for the entire community. Observations suggest that children’s participation in political space gives other marginalised groups such as women and ethnic groups, the opportunity to change their immediate situation and to strengthen and redefine democracy.

¹⁵ 1 From Nandana Reddy and Kavita Ratna (2002). A Journey in Children’s Participation. Concerned for Working Children.

¹⁶ This is a programme of comprehensive development primarily focusing on empowering children. It aims to enable children to play a proactive role in decision-making and governance.

¹⁷ Child labour-free means that no children have to do work that is detrimental to their normal growth and development, no children migrate from the panchayat for employment, and all children in the panchayat get an education that is appropriate to them and compatible to the formal system.

In Northern India, the CCVDs and the District Level Children’s Councils are also joining in strategic partnerships with Local Government officials, structures and decision-making processes. Save the Children has been working in Ladakh and Kashmir for the past 20 years and has a long history of co-operation with the local government. Generally, Save the Children starts innovative programmes with the intention of seeing them taken on by the Government. Thus, Save the Children UK and its local partners have worked strategically with the existing government system to take district administration along with them at every stage of CCVD developments. Advocacy efforts aim at having Local Government create a budget for CCVDs as an official part of the local governance system. Such funding would greatly increase the sustainability of children’s participation in governance.



“The CCVDs are a good step in hill areas like ours as they help children mature earlier. ...These kinds of initiatives make children think about their future, their lives, village development and bring maturity at an earlier stage. It is good. Still we have miles to go. Kargil, our sister district, also wants to replicate some of the ideas. It is a long process, but we are on the right path... It is hard to bring changes in Government mind sets, but we are on the right track.”

(Executive Education Councillor, Ladakh Hill Council, India)

Formation of District level Children’s Councils: Ladakh and Kargil, India

The formation of elected Children’s Councils for Development of Ladakh (CCDL) and Kargil (CCDK) are establishing stronger links between children and government officials. Children’s issues can be represented by children and addressed more effectively by adults at the district level. The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council has recognised the benefits of children’s participation in decision-making and formally invites CCDL child representatives to participate in district level education meetings. Child representatives have also been able to meet with the District Development Commissioner and with the Chief Education Officer, finding solutions to many of their issues. The Superintendent of the Police has also been very supportive.

In Nepal Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Municipalities are the national political system’s local level governing bodies. The VDCs have the mandate over education, health and other basic services. Strategic linkages are thus being developed between Child

Clubs (and their networks) and VDCs. In Palpa district for example child representatives from the Child Club network regularly attend VDC meetings. Child Clubs can register as organisation at the VDC level. In some areas VDCs are even providing financial support for the Child Clubs.

District Level 'District Child Welfare Committees'¹⁸ (DCWCs) are formed with representation of concerned government officials and other relevant agencies. The DCWC is a district level structure of the Central Child Welfare Board (CCWB), established in 1996 under the National Council for Women and Child Development of Ministry of Women and Social Welfare. Nepal Children's Act 1992 mandates the DCWCs to adopt district level policy and programmes for the overall development of children and for promoting and protecting their rights. Since the DCWB manages resources and budgets related to children's issues, Child Clubs representatives are seeking opportunities to engage with the them in meaningful ways. Save the Children is also working with DCWC members to increase their understanding of child rights and to strengthen the DCWC's capacity to monitor and take action to fulfil children's rights.

Children's Participation in District Child Welfare Committee (DCWC), Surkhet, Nepal¹⁹

Four children (2 girls and 2 boys) are members of Surkhet District's DCWC, which is co-ordinated by the Chief District Officer (CDO) and plays a key role in bringing about district level changes for child rights. The children are representatives from two village level child networks. One boy and one girl represent the Bal Association (Child Association), is a network of 24 child clubs in Birendranagar Municipality. Each of the 24 clubs elected two representatives to the network. The other children are from Bal Sarokar Kendra (Child Concern Centre) a network that includes representatives from 22 clubs. Diverse representation is encouraged in terms of caste, age, gender, disability, and in/out of school.

Two strategies led to children's involvement in the DCWCs. First, following a review of Child Clubs, Save the Children and its partners recommended to the Central Child Welfare Board that children should be involved in DCWCs. The CCWB followed this up with a letter to all DCWCs, recommending that they involve children in their decisions. The Bal Association had already been advocating, through written letters to the DCWC, that the DCWC should listen to them and to the children they represent. The DCWC agreed and invited the Bal Association to send representatives. The Bal Association decided to send two representatives - the chairperson and vice-chairperson (a boy and girl respectively) to the DCWC. A few meetings later, the Bal Sarokar Kendra also approached DCWC, presenting itself as an equal representative of children, and was also invited to send two representatives to join the DCWC.

Initially, when only two children were on the DCWC, they said they often felt uncomfortable and that the adults did not always listen to them. Having the meeting in the CDO's office was also a bit daunting. Moreover, meetings were called during school hours. Sometimes, after a long bus ride, then some adult representatives would stroll in an hour late. Now, however, the DCWC has made several adjustments. The meetings are set for Friday afternoons from 2-4 (when the children out of school). The

¹⁸ Sometimes referred to as District Child Welfare Boards (DCWBs)

¹⁹ From Jasmine Rajbhandary (2002). LEARNING WITH CHILDREN: The experience of Save the Children (UK) in Nepal.

meetings are not called at the last minute, so the representative children can discuss issues with the children they are representing. This had been a problem initially, as the children would be informed of meetings only a few days before the meeting date. The children are now invited to every meeting (monthly) by letter, just as are the adult DCWC members. The representative children use their own monthly network meetings to share earlier DCWC meeting updates and prepare the children’s agenda for the upcoming DCWC meeting. The agenda at each DCWC meeting is decided upon after the members gather, and put their own agendas on the table. The four representatives don’t always meet separately, but they share their agendas through the district level child network.

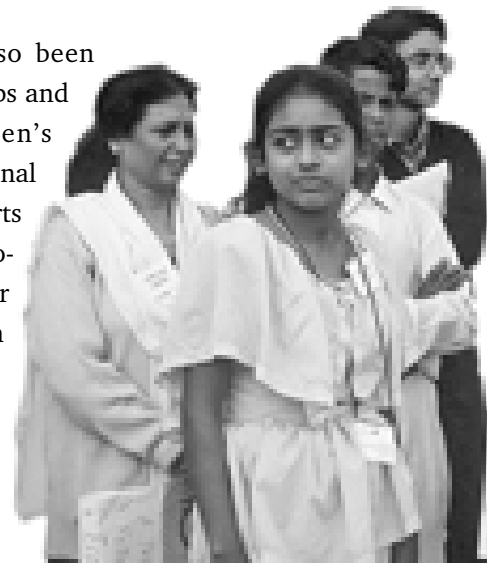
“The children have contributed very much. They share the problems children face in a very frank way, so that the adults can develop responsive policies and programmes”.

(Adult member of Surkhet DCWC)

Many the adult DCWC members are now invited to and attend events organised by children’s groups and clubs. The children can also approach DCWC members, including the CDO directly when there are rights violations, or actions needed from that level.

In Tangail District of Bangladesh, ‘Shishu Parishads’ (Children’s Councils) are being encouraged and supported at village, union and district levels to form alliances and linkages with officials at each level. Shishu Parishad members have achieved the capacity to bargain with the District Council. The children pro-actively organise meetings with District Council representatives whenever an important issue that affects them arises. District Council representatives have also written to Shishu Parishad representatives on occasion to seek their involvement in development issues. The District Council is supportive of the Shishu Parishad and has granted funds for building an office. It also encourages each Ward Commissioner to provide a room for Shishu Parishad members in the Chairperson’s Office.

In Sri Lanka Save the Children and partners have also been supporting the development of linkages between Child Clubs and government structures, such as the Village Children’s Development Committee (VCDC), as well as with the divisional and district level Child Rights Monitoring Committees. Efforts are made to strengthen these structures and to further co-ordination between government officials and other stakeholders. Currently children have some representation in the VDCs and in some divisional level Child Rights Monitoring Committees, but not yet at the divisional level.



The District Child Rights Monitoring Committees were set up in 2000, with the District Secretary as chairperson. All Department Heads (e.g. zonal directors from Education, Health, Social Services, Police) and Divisional Secretaries are expected to serve on the committee, and representatives from INGOs such as Save the Children and UNICEF are also invited. Initial developments to promote children's participation in the district level are being undertaken. The issues raised by the Divisional Secretaries have mainly focused on Government shortcomings. They have included: lateness in distribution of Government text books, concern about school drop outs, lack of proper infra-structure in pre-schools, lack of access to quality tuition; cases of sexual and physical abuse of children, lack of effective follow up to child abuse cases and lack of supportive rehabilitation to children. The Child Protection Authority has not made effective linkages with the Child Rights Monitoring Committees, as a co-ordination mechanism is lacking.

My No: DS/KY/SSB/CRC/24/2002

Divisional Secretariat

Kinniya

3/6/02

To: The President
Children's Club

DIVISIONAL MONITORING COMMITTEE CHILDREN'S CHARTER (DIMCCC) 12th June 2002

The DIMCCC meeting will be held on June 12th 2002 at Divisional Secretariat, Kinniya at 2 pm.

Since this is a very important meeting and certain decisions have to be made we would kindly request you to attend this meeting without fail.

You are kindly requested to bring the report pertaining to the activities in realisation of child rights in your GS division/ under your department/ by your organisation.

Thanking you

MAM Niyas

Divisional Secretary

Kinniya

Children’s Participation in Divisional and District Level Child Rights Monitoring Committees, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka

Children from Manchoalaichenai Child Club described how child representatives from their Club were participating in monthly divisional level Child Rights Monitoring Committee meetings. Their MCC files included formal invitations to participate in meetings from the Divisional Secretary. Club members informed us that they are often instrumental in having the divisional meeting held. When issues arise which the concerned officials need to address, Club members have personally gone directly to the Divisional Secretary’s office to request a date for the next meeting. The Divisional Secretary has been supportive to their Club. Child Club members send copies of their monthly meeting reports to the Divisional Secretary and to Save the Children UK.

In the most recent Divisional level Child Rights Monitoring Committee meeting some Club members said they had presented issues to the provincial level child rights monitoring committee.

Five children from five divisions presented issues concerning child labour, early marriage, quality education, health and transport to the Chief Secretary. They explained their concerns on each of issues and the relevant officials have verbally agreed to take action on all of them, except for child marriage.

However, while significant developments are being made to provide representational space for children in the District and Divisional level Child Rights Monitoring Committee Meetings, Child Club members have described the challenges they face due to the Committees’ inefficiency. Sincere efforts are needed to ensure that adults in positions of authority are willing to engage with children and young people in genuine ways and that the infrastructure of local governance bodies are strengthened in order that they can fulfil children’s rights.

Drama of Children’s Participation in a Divisional Level Child Rights Monitoring Committee Meeting, Sri Lanka²⁰

A child narrator introduced the drama by explaining that the setting was a Divisional Child Rights Monitoring Committee Meeting. Children are attending the meeting to raise issues that affect them. The first part of the drama reveals the current difficulties of adults not listening to children properly or not taking issues of child rights seriously.

Part One: The Discouraging Reality

Key officials (including the Divisional Secretary, an Education official and a Health official) are sitting on chairs. A police official arrives late to the meeting. Meanwhile, three children are sitting on the floor. While the children try to introduce themselves and the issues that concern them, the adults do not pay much attention. The health official is talking on his mobile phone and the education official is almost asleep on his chair. The Divisional Secretary (DS) is reading out minutes with disinterest. Only the children sit attentively listening. An assistant interrupts the meeting to let the DS know that she has a phone call. She leaves the meeting to take the call. The DS then returns and closes the meeting, thanking everyone for attending. Nothing of importance relating to child rights has taken place.

The narrator explains that this part shows how children’s rights are currently being denied as adults fail to listened to children. They want a world where children are listened to and their rights are realised.

²⁰ Presented by child clubs members and adults during a workshop on child participation in October 2002.

Part Two: The Hope for the Future

Key officials (including the Divisional Secretary, an Education official, Health official, and the Police officer) are sitting on chairs, alongside a group of three children, also on chairs. Everyone listens attentively. The Divisional Secretary welcomes everyone to the meeting and emphasizes the importance of listening to children’s views and of the concerted efforts officials are taking to address children’s problems. She requests the children to present their issues. One boy explains that some children in his village have not received any Government allowance for school uniforms. He request assistance to solve this problem. The Education officer agrees to take up this matter. Another girl raises health issues that the health officer agrees to help address with the co-operation of children in the community. One boy raises issues of domestic child labour and gains the co-operation of the police official to take action. The Divisional Secretary notes down all the decisions made. Everyone looks happy. The DS thanks the participants for their active contributions to the meeting.

The narrator reiterates that listening to children helps adults to bring about the realisation of children’s rights.

In a refugee context in Pakistan’s North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Save the Children UK and Sweden worked with the Social Welfare Cell of the Commissionerate of Afghan Refugees to empower and mobilise Afghan women, men, youth, girls and boys to work on improving the quality of life and service delivery in the refugee camps. Such efforts included the creation of clear linkages between girls’ and boys’ groups and the refugee camp authorities (i.e. those with power to make governance decisions).

Girl and Boy’s Participation in Refugee Camp Governance, NWFP, Pakistan

Kotkai refugee camp, designed to accommodate 15,000 refugees, was started in November 2001 in response to the influx of Afghan refugees fleeing the conflict in Afghanistan. Save the Children Sweden worked with the Social Welfare Cell (SWC) - Commissionerate Afghan Refugees to provide community services, and Save the Children UK was responsible for child protection monitoring.

In supporting the development of community services and child protection, Save the Children promoted opportunities for children’s participation and community participation in the refugee camps. Save the Children’s co-operation with SWC of CAR helped establish mechanisms so the refugee communities could fully participate in planning and implementing the social delivery system, become self reliant, and by solving their problems through a participatory approach, make their lives as normal as possible.

Child-to-child groups were developed as part of the overall strategy. Furthermore, the child protection monitoring strategy included ‘reflect-action’ circles among girls, boys, youth, women and men that used participatory visual activities to explore important issues. The aims of the participatory sessions with children were to help them identify the problems they faced, to analyse their causes and potential solutions, to explore and re-define power relations and to communicate with the concerned camp officials to have these issues addressed. A children’s participation in camp governance model in which the children made fortnightly presentations to the camp and agency officials was developed in collaboration between the concerned agency officials and the children in Kotkai refugee camp.

An Example of the Children’s Reflect-Action activities and meetings with authorities:

Following some reflect-action activities in which girls, youth and women’s issues were represented visually on charts, a meeting was arranged so the refugees could meet with camp administrators to influence governance decisions. The impact was very positive for both children and adults. For example, during the meeting girls as young as five years old could voice some issues that concerned them and gain an immediate response from the relevant adults. These young girls mentioned that they were being subjected to physical violence by the security guards. The agency administrators promised to follow it up. The children also raised issues about the scarcity of school books and the lack of a water tank in their school. The concerned NGOs provided the necessary books the very next day and a water tank was also installed. Furthermore, a schedule was developed for the administrators to visit the school twice a week and talk with the children to make sure that things were progressing well.

As a result of Save the Children and the Social Welfare Cell’s participatory approach to working with children in Kotkai camp, many other agencies have also decided to change their working style to empower all age groups and involve them in governance.

Governance in urban locations is often more complex, with a wider variety of actors and more divisions of roles and responsibilities. Government officials are often less accessible to representatives of civil society groups than in rural settings and/or refugee camps. However, strategic efforts are also being undertaken in urban areas to develop partnerships with officials of relevant municipality divisions, with the police, lawyers and with relevant Ministers.

Street Children Take Action Against Police Violations, Delhi, India

In 2001 children of the Bal Mazdoor Union, Delhi took a letter to the DCP (higher police official) in Darya Ganj Police Station to raise their concerns about beatings the police gave them. The DCP met the children’s delegation and also told them they could come see him again. He sent the children’s letter to the Crime Branch for an enquiry to be made into police violations against street children. The Vigilance Dept has sent information that they are investigating the police. However, continued monitoring and action efforts at many levels are required as street children continue to be beaten by the police on a daily basis.

CRC Bal Sangha Taking Issues to Relevant Authorities, Vijaywada, Andhra Pradesh, India

Navajeevan and APCRAF (Andhra Pradesh Child Rights Advocacy Foundation) have supported the formation of Bal Sanghas in Vijaywada city and surrounding villages. The CRC Bal Sangha in Vijaywada has 22 members, 15 girls and 7 boys, all working children. Issues discussed through the Bal Sangha include lack of educational opportunity, lack of freedom for girls, who are not allowed out, bad health, too much work for the boys (e.g. as porters or in hotels), girls’ house and domestic work, exploitation of child workers (one girl domestic worker had died), bad drainage, dirty pigs, poverty and lack of electricity in their school.

“If people do not respond at the grassroots level we will go to higher level officials.” (Boy)

Through their sangha the children have tried to address problems facing them at home and work settings. For example, concerning the dirty pigs, Sangha members complained by submitting a memorandum to the corporation.

Sangha members had also complained about the drainage. Initially they received no response, so an interaction was arranged between the children and Vijaywada officials. The children asked the collector why he had not responded to their memorandum. His promises to follow up with the corporation, to have the pigs chased away and the drains cleared were then fulfilled. The children also raised the issue of the lack of electrical current in their school with the municipality and succeeded in getting electricity. Furthermore, regarding the domestic worker's death, children wrote to the State Women's Commissioner, to the Chief Minister, to the Police Commissioner and to the Collector demanding justice. They also shared discussed the issue with the media.

"When we take up an issue and we are committed for the cause we need adult support and collaboration to stand with us."
(Girl)

Children and young people are also becoming involved at national levels in processes to influence the development, implementation and monitoring of National Plan of Action (NPA) processes²¹, Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes (PRSPs), as well as state and district level planning processes.

Children's Participation in State Level Planning Processes, India

In Andhra Pradesh, a state level children's consultation on child rights implementation was organised by the State Government and UNICEF in 2001 with support from other agencies including Save the Children (who played a key facilitation role). The children's proceedings were included in the State CRC report without any changes. Furthermore, during the Governor's launch of the report, children convinced him about their demands and the state accepted most of their recommendations. Following this consultation, the Government of India and UNICEF asked Save the Children to facilitate the children's participation in upcoming planning meetings.

3.4 Children's Participation in the Broader Context

Children's participation in the broader context of media initiatives, programme and policy developments are also being encouraged within the region. These initiatives tend to be most successful and sustainable when built upon children's participation within communities.

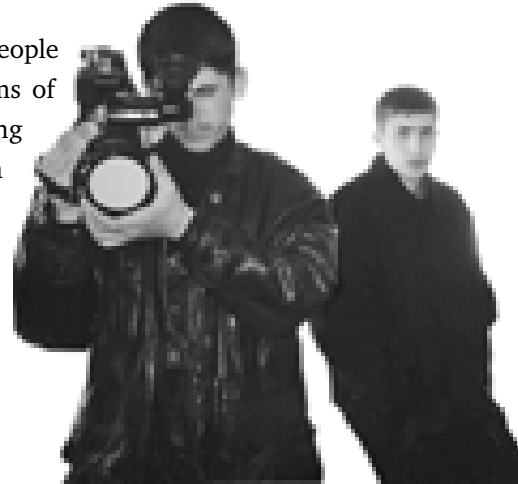
Children's Participation in Media

The CRC enshrines children's rights to freedom of expression and access to the media. The status of children's voices may be raised through their involvement in media. In addition,

²¹ See section 3.4, Box "Children's Participation in the Special Session and NPA Processes in Tajikistan and Central Asia."

information is crucial to making children’s involvement genuine. Considering the many ways of communicating and sharing information, children’s media initiatives and partnerships between children and media professionals can be significant in increasing access to information on important issues for children, young people and adults.

Across South and Central Asia region children and young people are raising issues concerning them and using varied forms of media to give their voices more power. Children and young people are producing their own wall newspapers in urban and rural areas of India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Central Asia; their own radio programmes in Nepal, Afghanistan and Central Asia; and their own TV programmes in Bangladesh and Central Asia. Children are also making greater use of video for documentary and film production. One film was made by a group of children with disabilities in Nepal to highlight their strengths and as a means to overcome societal prejudices. In Sri Lanka Child Club members have received training and support to develop their own ‘Kids in Touch’ network via the internet. Child Brigade in Bangladesh has formed a unique partnership with a human rights NGO and media journalists to ensure legal assistance and media coverage in cases where children’s rights are violated.



Training in media skills for children and young people involves information gathering, teamwork, communication, accuracy, time-management and more, and thus is a training for life, with applications to other spheres.

Radio Hatemalo, Kathmandu, Nepal

Hatemalo Children’s Radio started informally in 1982, and was registered as an NGO in 1994. Hatemalo’s programmes include child-to-child, training, and awareness campaigns, in addition to radio programming and the ‘Sankesra’ publication. School-going children aged 8-18 years participate in Hatemalo programmes, which are dedicated to the children’s overall development and emphasis child rights.

The Hatemalo Child Club, with 180 child members, has two branches, one in Kupandole and one in Kirtipur. Members meet every Friday and Sunday. The children receive training in radio production and produce a weekly 15 minute programme broadcast on Saturday evenings at 5pm.

Radio Hatemalo has:

- Provided a platform for children to express their ideas, explore solutions to their issues, and present their views in a way that will be listened to.
- Inspired children to dedicate themselves to promoting child rights.
- Recognised and encouraged children to develop their talents, potential creativity and skills, providing equal opportunities and a good environment.

Radio Afghanistan has a half hour weekly programme on issues affecting children with hearing impairments. It covers issues like the CRC, and provides stories and entertainment. Children have been involved in sending articles for the programme. In addition, youth groups in Mazar in Northern Afghanistan are involved in developing their own radio programmes.

Central Asia has some comprehensive Children’s Media initiatives involving children and young people’s participation in radio, TV and print journalism. The young journalists are increasingly interested in developing networks among the different media initiatives.

Children’s Media Centre, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

The Children’s Media Centre in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan started in September 1999. It began as a project of the Centre of Creative Development. Adults organised a children’s group and helped children to start raising awareness activities on the CRC. Children came voluntarily after announcements were put on school wallpapers in Bishkek. The activities were later divided into two areas: TV and print media. In February 2000 a new current of children joined with a different initiative of hold training and seminars on child rights and related issues. About 50 children and young people of school age (13–17 years) who live in Bishkek are involved in the Centre.

Children and young people can meet in the Media Centre everyday. They participate in regular meetings twice a week to discuss various issues. The main aims of the Children’s Media Centre are to:

- Reflect child problems and interests through mass media,
- Further protection of child rights, and
- Create opportunities and space for self-realisation.

Through their involvement in the Children’s Media Centre children and young people have been involved in child rights training, TV programme shooting, Radio show recording, Research and analysis, various forms of discussion groups and publishing activities.

Children’s Media Group in the Republican Children’s Centre, Dushanbe, Tajikistan

An organisation called Nasli Navras in Dushanbe supports several children and young people’s participation and cultural initiatives including a ‘Children’s Media Group’ in the Republican Children’s Centre in Dushanbe. Through the Children’s Media Group children and young people have a choice of five media opportunities in which to participate:

- 1) Republican TV: involvement in a monthly Children’s TV Programme called ‘Me and the World’ which focuses on Child Rights. Children identify programme themes, develop scenarios and interviews and undertake monthly broadcasting.

- 2) City TV: working closely with City TV station to produce a weekly programme called 'Capitol' and also to develop separate children's programmes. Children and young people are involved in all aspects of the programme development.
- 3) Republican Radio: The youth radio programme 'Nasli Somon' ('Descendants of the Somoni') is broadcast on national radio each Wednesday for 20 minutes. Child or youth correspondents (girls and boys, aged 12-16 years old) are involved in preparing radio programmes for the whole territory of the republic and the capital. They provide news items, poetry, discussion on child rights and themes of interest to children and young people.
- 4) Newspaper journalists: writing articles for inclusion in local and national newspapers.
- 5) Trainers or Peer Consultants: Children and young people act as trainers conducting workshops for other children on issues relating to child rights, or the media.

The children receive relevant training and equipment and each of the groups holds its own meetings. Representatives from each group also come together as a 'Board of Representatives' for general meetings to plan new activities. The children and young people have also developed two of their own films.

'I like the possibility of discussing issues relating to children which are not so often presented in the media or the newspapers.'
(Boy, TV programme reporter)

'Once I went to interview the Chief Education Officer. He made me wait for a long time. However, he finally gave me time and let me interview him.'
(Boy, TV correspondent)

'As the young people have gained experience in developing their own TV programmes, we have noticed how they become more and more open, more able to express themselves and more able to negotiate with adults.'
(Adult support worker, Nasli Navras)

In Bangladesh, Save the Children Sweden supported a partnership with ETV, a private TV station, to enable children's participation in 'Mukto Khabor' a weekly television programme with news and topics of concern for adolescents in Bangladesh. Save the Children became involved to ensure the inclusion of marginalised children.

Mukto Khabor, Dhaka, Bangladesh

The 'Mukto Khabor' reporters and newscasters are between 12 and 17 years old, and came from different social, economic backgrounds. With guidance from adult reporters and a producer they report on issues of interest to their peers. The group includes 32 boys and girls divided into four teams. Each team is in charge for one week per month. During that week they cover news items and prepare their reports for broadcasting (research and actual shooting and editing). The Mukto Khabor activities take place after school hours.

Over a two-year period the Mukto Khabor programmes have become professional and meaningful. Children's knowledge, experience and skills have increased, as have the adults' confidence in children's capacities. The young reporters are taken more seriously by a range of agencies and are often invited to function as media journalists in a variety of events.

Street and working children in the Butterflies Programme of Street and Working Children in Delhi, India run several media initiatives of their own, including wall newspapers, drama

and radio. They want to open their own Children's Media Centre. The child journalists have also trained other child workers from across northern India (including some CCVD members from Kashmir) to bring out their own wall newspapers.

Butterflies Children's Media Initiative, Delhi, India

The main aims of the Butterflies Children's Media Collectives are to raise awareness of child rights and violations of child rights, especially of working children, by actively participating in the media as powerful advocates for change in public and policy opinion.

The Children's Theatre Collective took formal shape in 1995 when a group of street children became very interested in theatre, finding it a powerful communication tool to advocate for their rights. Children meet for theatre classes five days a week, and the group develops plays on the theme of child rights and child right violations.

The 'Bal Mazdoor Ki Awaz' is the Bal Mazdoor Union wall newspaper, written by street children. A group of child reporters hold weekly meetings to discuss and decide themes. The children have two editors and a team of reports who produce the wall newspaper. The paper shares concerns of child workers, as well as information on their legal rights. Previous issues have included major themes of education, drugs, police, health, girls who work, participation (2 issues), war, disability, society's views of us and our views of society, children and media. The bi-monthly wall newspapers (1000 issues each) were previously pasted around the city to raise awareness. Since pasting such posters in the city has been banned, however, the group now produces a newspaper that is publicly distributed.

Through a partnership with PressWise (a media ethics body in UK) Butterflies has also been involved in training child radio broadcasters, in teaching media about sensitive child rights reporting and in encouraging a code of ethics among media journalists. A group of interested girls and boys formed the 'Butterflies Broadcasting Children' (BBC) for radio broadcasting following a five-day radio training programme in March 2000. The radio group produces broadcasts (on cassettes) on issues of child rights and justice issues. They are trying to form partnership with All India Radio for a regular broadcasting spot. The child journalists also plan to hold regular meetings with media professionals regarding 'codes of conduct'.

Butterflies NGO also monitors newspaper articles on issues concerning children and brings out a regular publication, 'My Name is Today' that contains articles concerning child rights.



Children’s Participation in Programming

As noted in section 2.4, children’s participation in all stages of the programme cycle remains experimental. In most Save the Children organisations in the region children’s participation in situational analysis, programme design, planning, implementation, review, monitoring and evaluation has not yet been systematically promoted. There are, however, good examples of Save the Children members fostering children’s participation in sectoral work in different aspects of programming. Some NGOs have had more success in facilitating children’s participation in all aspects of the programme cycle. Furthermore, children and young people are gaining experience in different aspects of programming through their own organisations. Moreover, examples are increasing of children and young people being involved in interesting ways in Save the Children’s recruitment process, strategic and operational planning processes.

In child-led organisations such as Child Brigade that are currently managing their own budgets, members are involved in planning every stage of their programme interventions, with adult support when requested. In most children’s organisations (clubs, unions etc.) members tend to play a key role in all stages of planning, implementing and reviewing their action programmes, particularly when they take place at local levels.

Community Mapping Action Planning Process, Delhi Child Rights Club, India

Members of the Delhi Child Rights Club (DCRC) meet monthly. One of the Club’s aims is to work together to promote a child safe and friendly city. From January to August 2000 the main focus of their meetings was on a ‘Community Mapping Action Planning Process’. A participatory community mapping exercise enabled children to identify positive aspects and problems in their own communities. The problems identified included: drugs, alcohol, harassment, prostitution, beatings by police, dangers of child work, fighting, poor sanitation, lack of toilets, bad water, bad roads, noise pollution and dangerous animals.

At subsequent monthly meetings the children continued the process of prioritising problem issues, collecting and analysing information on these issues, action planning, preparation, implementation of action plans and evaluating the impact of their actions.

On the basis of importance and ability to change in a short time, children prioritised the problem of adults in their communities drinking alcohol and harassing children. In groups the children undertook a thorough analysis of why adults (men in particular) drink and harass children (particularly girls). Based on their analysis, the children moved on to explore how they could begin addressing the problem. The range of ideas included collective efforts by children to develop and use posters, dramas, songs and rallies to highlight the seriousness of the problem and its impact among the general public; to file cases against adults who harass girls or boys; to campaign for stricter laws and punishments for adults who harass or abuse children; to stop illegal liquor sales in the community; to increase police surveillance of such problems; to censor films and publications which show men teasing girls (or boys); and to encourage discussions among children in schools and communities on harassment that would encourage all girls and boys to have the strength to cry out against injustice at the first and every instance.

The children subsequently developed key messages for their campaign and prepared posters, dramas and songs to use in local street and community based programmes to raise awareness and change behaviour. Following their programmes the children reviewed the impact of their actions. In some areas they felt that they had been successful in raising awareness and in changing some practices within families and the community.

"Having a rally in our area had a lot of influence as many people saw it. Also, children discussed in their own homes with members of their families the negative impacts of drugs."

"People were very appreciative of our drama and gave us good respect. Some people said they'd continue campaigning against alcohol and drugs and that they'd come forward to close the alcohol shops."

Children and young people have used participatory action research in several locations across the region, bringing about innovative and responsive programme developments based on their own ideas and perspectives. In Nepal in 1997 Save the Children UK organised a three phase capacity building programme on Child Centred Participatory Research. The first phase of the training was classroom based learning for adult facilitators, the second phase in the next two months involved participatory research with children, and the third phase involved report writing and sharing. Save the Children UK subsequently published a report entitled 'Children's Potentialities and Participation' that compiled the participatory research undertaken and the key learnings²². The research with children highlighted many policy and programme issues relating to education, health, child marriage, the environment and children's participation which Save the Children UK could further address.

For many children's groups or organisations the development of programmes may involve both children and the NGO supporting them, with participatory processes and negotiations at different stages, particularly regarding budgetary allocations and human resources. For example, Save the Children Australia's programming in Tangail, Bangladesh is primarily developed through a process of dialogue, consultations and negotiations with representatives of the Shishu Parishads and the NGO partners supporting them.

NGOs working directly with children and young people have developed various mechanisms to involve children and young people in their own programming. For example, Butterflies Programme of Street and Working Children in India sees the 'Bal Sabha', the Children's

²² Save the Children UK 'Children's Potentialities and Participation'. Nepal.

Council, as the supreme body, and its guiding force. Once a month, representatives from each contact point come together for the Bal Sabha. The children elect a chairperson to preside over the meeting her. Each member is encouraged to share any agenda issues, and each point is discussed. The Bal Sabha is a mechanism whereby children can speak, share ideas and develop programmes, while they also monitor and critique Butterflies existing programmes and orientation. It enables children’s participation in decision-making to be a central force guiding programme initiatives and developments.²³

Other organisations, including CWC, have included representatives of children and young people on their management boards to ensure children’s participation in strategic developments and programme planning. Furthermore, the Consortium of Organisations working for Child Clubs has developed a children’s advisory board so children’s involvement in planning and reviewing the Consortium’s yearly plans and efforts is guaranteed.

Many examples also exist of NGOs involving children and young people in advocacy efforts on issues affecting children. However, whether such processes are meaningful depends on how much children and young people have been involved in developing the advocacy messages and/or how much they agree with them.

Recently Save the Children members, in collaboration with their NGO partners, have undertaken some innovative efforts to involve children and young people in developing concept notes and project proposals, reviewing the Country Strategic Plans, conducting programme reviews, and acting as resource persons (facilitators, trainers and presenters) on child rights and participation. At an organisational level, examples can also be found of children’s involvement as members of selection panels interviewing and recruiting new staff members.



²³ See section 3.3, Box “Butterflies Bal Sabha (Children’s Council) and Bal Mazdoor Union (Child Workers Union) Delhi”.

Children's participation in developing the concept note for an advocacy project, India

In autumn 2001 meetings were held in Feroziabad, India between 35 Child Club representatives from CREATE, three Save the Children colleagues and two adult workers from CREATE. The meetings were to develop a concept note for an advocacy proposal for local advocacy on child labour issues in the glass industry. The children were involved in making a situational analysis of child work in their locality and of critical factors effecting the situation, followed by a stakeholder analysis. They identified 21 stakeholders with a role or interest in the bangle and glass industry, which thrives on cheap labour of children, and they undertook an analysis of which actors were most to least approachable.

The Save the Children Team found the overall exercise quite useful, as children from the clubs had good potential and clearly understood the socio-political dynamics of the situation in which they worked and lived. It was important for the children to be involved from the earliest stage of project development in developing the project objectives and local level activities to be undertaken. This enabled them to take ownership of the project. However, the Team also felt the children needed more time to contribute most effectively and to come up with their own ideas on project activities and the related budgets. CREATE and Save the Children could then jointly assess the children's suggestions for funding as part of advocacy programme. The team was also concerned about the participation of girls and younger children. Mostly boys aged 14-18 years had participated in the meeting. Further efforts to engage girls and younger children in meaningful ways were required.

Follow up action planning meetings with girls and boys of different age groups were planned and subsequently held to foster development of a concept note on a proposal for local advocacy with different stakeholders that would reduce the involvement of child workers in the glass industry and the sale of bangles made by children.

Children's Participation in Different Stages of Programming

Child Worker's Opportunities Project (CWOP) is a Save the Children Canada's project carried out in three states of India (Maharashtra, Tamilnadu and Rajasthan) and covers 9952 child workers [4816 girls, 5136 boys]. The children are from various informal and unorganised sectors such as – carpet weaving industry, fire works and matchstick industry, speaker cone industry, bidi making, gem polishing, agricultural labour and shepherds, tie & die industry, garages, hotels and domestic work. The project makes a sincere and conscious effort to incorporate the values of child participation and gender sensitivity, and it has been successful in releasing a sizeable number of children (2700 plus) from work situations.

Realizing the importance of children's participation in all stages of programming a 'Child Participation Strategy' was developed in collaboration with all partners. Capacity building on child participation was organised for NGO staff enabling them to facilitate space and opportunities for children's participation in all areas of decision-making.

Children participated in decision-making in the following activities:

- *Education:* influencing the management and running NFE classes and bridging courses in relation to place / timings / duration / attendance / curriculum / teaching methods
- *Life Education Skill:* children were involved in designing curriculum.
- *Vocational Training:* selection of trade, managing residential Vocational Training center

- *Income Generation Program:* selection of beneficiaries
- *Alternative support:* organizing child fairs, competitions for children
- *Awareness Generation:* Formation of child groups, involving other Community Based Organizations on issue of releasing children from work situations and putting them in school.
- *Advocacy:* Children have been involved in consultations at District / State / National / International level (on a par with adults). They have sensitized adult duty bearers [mostly government officers] by sharing their experiences at the State level NCLP [National Child Labour Project] meeting held at Amravati in Maharashtra State.
- *Evaluation:* Children set up selection criteria and selected their representatives for a children’s gathering. The selected children evaluated CWOP experiences, found out the changes that the project has brought in their lives and prepared a set of demands to share with policy makers to eradicate problem of child labour.

Demands raised by children to eradicate child labour

- Improving quality of education by incorporating vocational training and life oriented education skills in the syllabus.
- Representation of children in the village council and village education committees.

In Pakistan, Save the Children UK and Sweden have also been working with local partners to promote children’s participation in research about child labour in the glass industry. Children aged 6-14 are being consulted about their current situation, their future and their ideas for alternative income generation activities. Their insights are challenging adults’ pre-conceived ideas and are increasing recognition that children have clear suggestions for actions to improve their own lives and the lives of their families.

In Bangladesh Save the Children UK started in 1998 to develop programmes through a more participatory approach with children and young people. Following capacity building on the child participation concept and the use of participatory approaches, the ‘Aspiration project’ was developed in one rural location in partnership with children and their communities. Many learnings and questions about children’s participation in programming resulted from this experience. For example, while the project was effective in empowering children and bringing community support to assist children in implementing their action plan, issues were raised of how and when Save the Children should phase out. In addition, differences between children and adults’ time frame in project planning arose, as the project planning time frame of many adult organisations can be drawn out and bureaucratic, with children having difficulties in waiting for an appropriate response from adults.

The Aspiration project, Kurigram, Bangladesh

The Aspiration project in Kurigram, started in 1998, was an opportunity for Save the Children UK colleagues to engage children in a community context to develop on their own a project that would help them realise their aspirations. Save the Children colleagues spent a lot of time in the village, initially building rapport with the families and children's parents to develop the trust necessary to work directly with the children. Through participatory methods and games, children explore their lives, their aspirations and the constraints to realising these aspirations. Ten children served as core facilitators, participating in an orientation workshop where they learned how to seek the views of their peers. They elicited the opinions of about 55 children and young people, which a core group of children then collated and analysed, with support from the adults.

The children then discussed their findings with their parents and developed a report including a future plan of action to realise their aspirations. For example, one village area needed better education facilities. The parents were supportive of their ideas. The children next decided to organise a meeting to present their report findings and proposals to the wider community. They succeeded in organising a meeting with 60 women, 70 men, over 100 children, 17 NGO representatives, the Union Parishad Chairman and another union member. Invited Government Officials were unable to attend, but two Government representatives sent their apologies and agreed to meet the children at a later date. The adults attending the meeting listened attentively and supported the children's plans. The children went on to form a 'Doel Bala' Children's Group to take their issues forward.

Many interesting examples have been seen of children's involvement in developing Communication materials for advocacy initiatives. In Pakistan, Save the Children US worked with children to develop nutritional materials for refugees and to develop IEC (Information Education Communication) materials for a campaign on saving newborn lives. In both programmes children and adolescents successfully used child-to-child and child-to-adult methods to share the messages and materials with parents, families, children and young people. In Southern India as well, Save the Children UK involved children in developing IEC materials on HIV and AIDS.

Children's involvement in developing IEC materials and advocacy on HIV and AIDS, India

In Southern India consultations and workshops have been held with children, enabling them to discuss issues affecting their lives. Issues relating to HIV and AIDS have been raised, with children expressing their unhappiness over the current fear and morals based IEC campaigns. These tend to single out sexually active youth, children and adults with high-risk behaviour for targeted interventions. Children and community members felt that such morals and fear based interventions are leading to stigmatisation and discrimination.

While Save the Children tried to encourage partners to make HIV/AIDS a cross cutting issue in all projects, thereby leading to more inclusive, and less stigmatising programming, some partners were reluctant. In some cases, they were deterred by the use of current IEC / awareness programmes and liberal use of sexuality laden language by in-house advisors.

Further meetings with partners to explore programme efforts that would help break the silence on HIV/AIDS, however, led to agreement that initiatives to develop children and young people's capacities to create messages and materials that are child sensitive and friendly in form, content and structure would be beneficial. With children's interest and adult support, a proposal to make HIV a cross cutting issue was developed for 2002-2004. Once children have developed the IEC materials, the second year will see the launch of an extensive campaign on HIV/ AIDS in 135 communities, addressing needs for community care and support; sensitisation of schoolteachers and the community. The campaigns are likely to include: theatre, puppetry and folk art. Furthermore, by the end of the year a massive public programme in Hyderabad and Bhuvanewar is planned to influence policy makers and political representatives on the need for integrating HIV/ AIDS in state developmental programmes.

Generally greater efforts have gone into involving children in situation analysis to develop projects or programmes, while fewer efforts have been made in other stages of the project cycle. Recently however, there have been increased efforts to involve children and young people in reviewing, monitoring and evaluating programmes.

Children and NGO participation in reviewing Save the Children's Country Strategic Paper in India

A Central Management Team meeting in India in May 2002 agreed to undertake a mid-term review of the Country Strategic Paper for Save the Children UK in India. To this end the Southzone team organised programme visits and a workshop to engage partners, children, and key external stakeholders in a consultative process to understand the key factors affecting children currently, while also reviewing Save the Children's achievements, gaps and policy developments in relation to CSP themes.

The current CSP came into force from April 2001 and was largely based on a study to understand the macro policies and situation of children in different regions. A key focus of the CSP was on effecting changes in policies and legislation, and on influencing the external environment to enhance realisation of children's rights. For the Southzone office such a focus necessitated a shift towards a more proactive advocacy role and engagement with government and other key NGO and INGO players. Furthermore, the recruitment of new staff and processes relating to the Global Movement for Children, along with government efforts to increase the role of civil society in development programmes enhanced opportunities and energy for a greater advocacy role.

The CSP focuses on five strategic issues: Children and Work, Education Quality, HIV/AIDS, Violence against Girls, and Food Security. Citizenship is identified as a crosscutting issue, as is gender and disability. Furthermore, Child Rights Programming (CRP) and children's participation (which is integral to CRP) are fundamental to Save the Children's approach to work. In the first year of the CSP Save the Children began capacity building of partner staff on issues of gender, participation, poverty analysis, education and child rights. During the CSP's second year the focus has been on HIV/ AIDS, disability and broader policy understanding on quality and relevant education.

During the September 2002 workshop to review the CSP, partners and children presented a range of suggestions. For example, it was felt that the strategic objective focusing on Violence Against Girls should be broadened to focus on violence affecting girls and boys, involving a wider understanding of gender and exploring wider power issues and experiences affecting boys and girls. Furthermore, it was felt that the definition of violence should be determined by changing social and cultural values. The need to establish a more proactive relationship with government, media and the corporate sector in next two years was also expressed.

In addition, one child with disabilities significantly influenced the strategic development of Save the Children's work on disability. This boy challenged adults' perceptions on disability, and asked whether Save the Children UK's staff attitudes had changed after working for one year on disability. He shared his own experiences of being marginalised due to his disability. Suggestions to further inclusion, address discrimination and social exclusion of girls and boys with disabilities were shared. The meeting discussed what had been learned from the specific projects, and the partners agreed to integrate disability as a crosscutting issue in all their interventions.

Children's Participation in Interviewing and Recruitment Process of Staff²⁴

In programmes of Save the Children UK in India and Nepal, children have been included on the selection panel for interviewing and recruiting new programme staff. Save the Children UK Nepal has involved children in selecting appropriate candidates for two available posts within a one-year period.

In one case the recruitment process involved the applicants facilitating a session with children. The sessions were scheduled when children from two projects were coming to Kathmandu. They were requested to arrive half a day earlier than necessary for the workshop they were attending.

About eight children from two districts met with Save the Children UK staff, who explained why they had been invited, what they being asked to do. They described the post that was vacant and the type of person they were looking for, as well as the process of selection and their role. They were also told that this session was only one of many stages on which the candidate's selection would be based. The children's questions were clarified before the facilitation session. The children's group also reviewed the selection criteria in Nepali to make sure that they were clear about what each criterion meant. Save the Children UK ensured that the children understood the process and their role within it.

Three Save the Children staff were observers in the sessions. (These staff members were also involved in other stages of the selection process, such as selecting the candidate based on the written exercise and final interview.) They sat in one corner and watched the process. After each session they graded the facilitator and had discussions with the children.

The children made several good observations, noting that one facilitator did not ask the children's names, that one could not communicate the main point to them, and that one of the two arranged the seating participatory manner, and the other did not. They also noted that one talked only to the older children, one made a younger girl very self-conscious by trying to hard to get her to talk and one made the session fun.

Save the Children UK found this process extremely useful. It ultimately helped them select the most appropriate person for the post, as they had assessed the applicants' facilitation skills. More important, they gained the opinions of young people, some of whom this person would work with) on how well s/he would do. The children shared that they had also enjoyed the process and were excited to be so respected by adults and Save the Children. They appreciated these first steps and look forward to more such children's participation.

Later in the year children were again involved in selecting a programme manager. In the future, Save the Children will think more about the principles of democratic participation. Ideally, they will explain the already existing structures within the organisation, the level of the post being filled, and the level of the other selection panellists. They could explain the process and ask for help from volunteers. They could consult children about how to involve in planning the interview as well as some other stages of the process. They will attempt to build a process involving children and respecting their views and experience into their system of staff selection.

²⁴ From Jasmine Rajbhandary (2002). Taking Child Participation a Step Further: How Save the Children (UK) involved Children in its Staff Selection Process.

There are some interesting examples of children and young people being involved in reviews and evaluations of participation projects and programmes that are seeking to improve the realisation of children’s rights. While the concept of participatory monitoring and evaluation itself is not new, drawing upon 20 years of participatory research traditions (including participatory action research, participatory learning and action and PRA), tools and systems to monitor and evaluate the participation process itself are still in their infancy.

Recently, a review of a children’s project in Southern India that involved a team of child and adult reviewers developed participatory tools for reviewing and monitoring children’s participation and organisation processes and activities. These tools include a ‘*circle analysis*’ to explore levels of involvement, an ‘*H* assessment’ to explore strengths, weaknesses and suggestions for improvement, a ‘*time line*’ to explore children’s organisation developments and achievements over time, and *drama* to explore challenges and successes in participation. These could be used and adapted by other children’s groups and NGOs across the region²⁵.

Participatory Review Involving Child Reviewers of YIP project supported by SC UK Southzone, India

In mid July 2002 a review team made up of child and adult reviewers undertook a participatory review of Young India Project’s (YIP) ‘Bal Balika Kendram’ (a children’s project) in Southern Andhra Pradesh, for Save the Children UK Southzone. In 1999 YIP began supporting children to form children’s clubs and sanghas in 40 villages (15 panchayats, across two mandals) for children to address issues affecting them, to break down discrimination and to create awareness about child rights.

The core review team included a 15-year-old girl, a 16-year-old boy, a 13-year-old girl and two adults (one male, one female). A larger group of 61 representatives of child committee members (26 girls and 35 boys aged 12-18 years) from the project were involved in developing the indicators and the methodology for the review process.

In preparing for the review additional time was set aside for:

- involvement of child committee members in identifying what to look for during the review (indicators),
- exposure of child committee members and child reviewers to a range of participatory tools – to enhance informed choice of suitable methodology,
- preparation of child reviewers,
- analysis of the findings with the child reviewers,
- recommendations by the child reviewers,
- briefing of key findings to child and adult representatives.

Following children’s recommendations, the key methods used during the review process with children and with some groups of adults were participatory tools (Circle analysis, ‘H’ Assessment, Time line, Preference Ranking and Drama). Additional methods used included interviews, small focus group discussions and observation. In a 5-day period the review team gathered information

²⁵ See Claire O’Kane (2002). Report on Participatory Review involving Child Reviewers of YIP Project Southern India. Available from Save the Children UK South Zone team.

from about 400 children (girls and boys, aged 5- 18 years) and from 55 adults (parents, teachers, union leaders, Gram Panchayat members, village education committee members) in four different villages, as well as adults from YIP

Time for preparations and consideration of ethical issues were essential elements in bringing about quality participatory processes with children and adults. Overall, involving children as reviewers was a very positive learning experience. By ensuring that the process was supportive and flexible for the child reviewers, we trusted that the outcomes would be effective. Our trust proved to be well founded. Children and young people made excellent reviewers: they were able to gather information from children and adults in systematic and effective ways, to analyse information gathered, and to make recommendations.

YIP had succeeded in helping children form Child Clubs in 40 villages, but had not yet enabled the formation of Sanghas in at least 10 such villages. In most villages, children regularly participate in games and other Child Club activities, while an elected committee (including representation from girls and boys) works to organise regular monthly Children’s Sangha meetings to discuss and address issues concerning them. The review team found that in many villages children with disabilities and non-school going children were not attending the Child Clubs or Sanghas. While the Clubs and Sanghas were providing a crucial space to break down different forms of discrimination (e.g. gender, caste), discrimination remains prevalent, so that issues of inclusiveness need to be addressed further.

The Child Clubs had been successful to varying degrees in taking up and addressing issues on matters concerning them.²⁶ Many of what YIP learned through this participatory review process reflects a movement of change that many other organisations experience when empowering children within communities. Working with children in an empowering way necessitates commitment by organisations to a long journey of discovery by children and adults, often facing resistance, overcoming challenges and gaining inspiration along the way.

“When you (Save the Children) asked for child reviewers from each mandal we thought ‘why are they asking this? This is adults’ work. But, after seeing how children can interview adults in the villages I was very happy.”(YIP staff member)

“We are very happy do be doing a review with the children. Now we can see what we have done since 1999 and we have reviewed the progress. The children have done an excellent job.... The review process is really nice. If everything comes from children there may be progress in the future.”
(Union leader, YIP)

Review of Children’s participation in the UN Special Session Process in Bangladesh and Pakistan

In Bangladesh and Pakistan reviews were undertaken to explore what was learned and achieved from children and young people’s participation in the UN Special Session Process. In Bangladesh the review focused on the in-country process of seeking the views of children, young people and adults from NGO partners and Save the Children members, while in Pakistan the review explored what children and young people had learned from their involvement in local, national, regional and global processes relating to the Special Session.

In Bangladesh, participatory activities (circle analysis, H assessment) and group discussions were used to explore the children’s opinions, while interviews were conducted with adults from NGOs and Save the Children members. A core group of children who had been involved in the Special Session process felt they had a major role to play in getting the government to take children’s rights seriously. They felt the government’s lack of commitment during the previous decade had been the major

²⁶ See section 3.3, Box “Child Clubs and Bal Sanghas in Andhra Pradesh Supported by Yound India Project (YIP).”

hindrance. Through their ongoing involvement in monitoring the developments and outcomes of the National Plan of Action (following the Special Session) the children felt they could ensure action with positive impacts for children.

The children had gained a lot of information and learning through their meetings and exchanges with each other, with Save the Children, NGOs, local communities, media and government officials. However, at the same time they noted certain challenges and limitations within the process that hindered their effective participation. Their high enthusiasm was sometimes compromised, particularly when political crises - both nationally (due to violence at election time) and internationally (due to September 11th) prevented their participation in some events.

While the children were positive about the active participation of girls as well as boys, of children of different ages, and particularly about the inclusive participation of children with disabilities, they highlighted the continued resistance girls faced from parents and community members about their participation. Greater efforts to involve children's parents and communities are required to develop more community support for girl's participation. Children from the core group also felt they should have made better efforts to be inclusive, particularly to involve more children from rural areas and other marginalised backgrounds (e.g. children from garment industry, domestic workers). Constraints on children's time when they had work and study responsibilities were also noted.

However, the children's core group highly appreciated the Save the Children Alliance's facilitating role. They made clear suggestions for strengthening and formalizing their Children's Forum to support ongoing opportunities for children to discuss their concerns and work to bring about realisation of children's rights. The children promoted the idea of creating a national level children's network that could play a significant role in monitoring the implementation of the CRC and national plans of action.

In Pakistan, a series of participatory activities involving children and young people both as facilitators and participants were used to explore children's views regarding the impact of their participation in Special Session processes at local, national, regional and global levels.

Participatory approaches to monitoring and evaluation seek to include a wider range of stakeholders at every stage, encouraging local people to reflect on past experience, examine present realities, revisit objectives, and define future strategies. Such approaches recognise the different needs of different actors negotiating their diverse claims and interests. By fostering stakeholder participation beyond data gathering, participatory monitoring and evaluation promotes self-reliance in decision-making and problem-solving, strengthening people's capacities to take action and bring about change.

As children and young people gain experience and exposure through participating in consultation and decision-making processes, media initiatives, workshops and their own organisations, their skills and knowledge as resource persons (trainers and facilitators) on child rights and children's participation are being recognised.

Children and Young People as Trainers for Adult Union Leaders, YIP, India

In Andhra Pradesh children and young people from the Bal Sanghas have acted as resource persons and trainers on child rights, children's participation and HIV during training programmes for adult union leaders. Children have also participated alongside adults in trainings on Union ideology, responsibilities and leadership development; the Panchayat Raj System (how to run gram panchayats) and Gender Training to share their own perspectives.

Child Brigade Members as Resource Persons, Bangladesh

Child Brigade, the children's organisation run for and by working street children, has sought to liaise with other agencies in meeting their own needs and those of the children with whom they work. As their organisation has gained recognition and a good reputation for its child rights work, other organisations have invited Child Brigade members as resource persons. For example, members of Child Brigade have assisted World Health Organisation (WHO) staff in surveying the health needs of slum children. They have provided guidance to other NGOs wanting to work on children's participation and the formation of children's organisations, and have assisted Save the Children in developing a Child Rights calendar. They presented a drama in a regional workshop on corporal punishment, and made a presentation on children's participation to a multi-agency gathering in the launch of the 'State of the World's Children' by UNICEF. The members have also participated in many child-led initiatives and children's collaborative programmes, including work on children and justice and processes relating to the Special Session and Global Movement for Children.

Children's Participation in Policy Developments

Increasing efforts are being made to involve children and young people in policy developments on issues relating to their lives. Globally, the Special Session on Children (SSoC), which took place from 8-10 May 2002, represented a significant watershed in recognising children and young people as social actors in policy developments.

Children's participation in the Special Session on Children

The SSoC brought together world leaders for a review of progress made in the past decade on goals agreed to during the 1990 World Summit for Children, and to make new commitments for 'A World Fit for Children' during the next decade. During the 1990 World Summit for Children, in which a few children were involved only to usher adults to their seats and to pass on the pen for adults to sign the policy document. However, during the 2002 UN Special Session, 263 under 18 years olds participated as government representatives (representing 148 countries) and another 141 were present as non-government representatives. Each PrepComm (Preparatory Committee meeting) leading up to the Special Session saw more children and young people's representatives, and a cumulative increase in under 18 year olds serving as official representatives of government delegations.

A 3-day Children's Forum preceding SSoC enabled over 300 under 18 year olds from diverse socio-economic, cultural, political, geographic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds to work together to share their experiences, prioritise concerns and recommendations for change. Two young delegates presented the young people's 'Statement from the Children's Forum' in the UN General Assembly. Furthermore, the children and young people highlighted their opinions through direct participation in many side events organised during the SSoC, and through influencing other important government delegates from their countries and regions. The organisation of inter-generational round table discussions for each region of the world also provided significant opportunities for children and young people to dialogue with influential government officials on policy issues of their concern.

The Global Movement for Children (GMC) was spearheaded by UNICEF in collaboration with a wide range of INGOs and NGOs to generate further momentum for a broad global movement promoting children’s rights, giving all children have equal rights to grow up in health, peace and dignity. The GMC seeks to convince the world that investing in children is the key to social and economic progress. In the lead up to the Special Session the GMC included a “Say Yes for Children” campaign to engage as many people as possible (all ages, from different walks of life) to voice their agreement with the key goals that together constitute the GMC’s 10-point Rallying Call.

The GMC and preparation processes leading up to the Special Session made possible significant collaborative developments at sub-national, national and regional levels among children, young people, civil society, NGOs, INGOs, media, the corporate sector and governments in furthering issues relating to children’s agenda. Many various participatory processes with children and young were inspired, furthering opportunities for children’s participation in policy and programme developments for the next decade.

In the lead up to the 2nd World Congress Against Commercial forms of Sexual Exploitation of Children, which was held in Yokohama in December 2001, a series of local, country and regional level consultations involving children and young people were also held in the South and Central Asia region.

Consultations With Girls and Boys in Bangladesh on Sexual Exploitation²⁷

In June and July of 2001, a series of consultations was held in Bangladesh with eight groups of boys and girls aged 10 to 17 years who either had direct experience of sexual exploitation (including trafficking) or were considered at risk of sexual abuse. These consultations were designed to hear first hand about the problems faced by children who are sexually abused and exploited and their ideas about what should be done to help them and to combat this kind of exploitation. This exercise was part of a participatory process devised to develop a National Plan of Action against the Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children, including Trafficking.

The sessions with children generated a rich pool of information and ideas, which were subsequently shared with stakeholders at sub-national meetings in Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna and at a national meeting in Dhaka. The children’s inputs ultimately had a profound influence on the content of the NPA. This document, was finalised in November 2001, identified issues, objectives, strategies and partners under the following seven themes: prevention; protection; recovery and reintegration; perpetrators; child participation; HIV/AIDS, STIs and substance abuse; and coordination and monitoring.

Completion of the NPA was followed by a Regional Consultation in Dhaka in November, and the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (‘Second World Congress’) in December 2001. A delegation of Government

²⁷ See Rachel Kabir (2002). Consultations with Children on Implementation of the National Plan of Action against the Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children including Trafficking for Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Bangladesh/UNICEF/Save the Children Alliance.

and NGO representatives and two of the girls who had taken part in the children’s consultations attended the Second World Congress. In February 2002, the NPA received Cabinet approval.

In early 2002, steps were taken to start implementing the NPA. A national committee responsible for implementation and monitoring of the NPA was formed with four working sub-groups, on prevention, protection, recovery/reintegration and participation. Each sub-group prepared a work plan for 2002 that takes up for action selected strategies from the relevant section of the NPA. The Participation sub-group planned to carry out a further round of consultations in order to report back to children involved in the first round on developments since that time and to seek their ideas about the potential role of children in implementing the NPA. These views will be shared with the NPA Implementation and Monitoring Committee and the other sub-groups. The Participation sub-group is also developing a simplified version of the NPA that will be used for broad-based dissemination, including among children.

In every country of the region collaborative efforts fostered activities and processes to involve children in the SSOC. Efforts by Save the Children to produce Child Friendly versions of the Outcome Document, ‘A World Fit for Children’ and the development of child friendly consultation kits enhanced children and young people’s efforts to influence policy developments. At sub-national, national and regional levels children and young people’s representatives identified their main concerns, priorities and suggestions for change and shared these with key government officials. The regional ‘Change Makers’ event was another strategic effort made to engage with influential adults in the corporate sector (who have demonstrated their commitment to social responsibility), promoting the formation of new partnerships between children, young people, the corporate sector, the government and the media to increase economic and human investment in the best interests of children.

Change Makers For South Asia: Regional Consultation With Children And Young People, Corporate Leaders And Governments Of South Asia²⁸

In Kathmandu in May 2001 three successive, linked meetings organised by UNICEF, the Government of Nepal and Save the Children enabled children and young people, corporate leaders and government ministers to make regional commitments in preparation for the Special Session on Children, and to build the foundations for new partnerships to enhance action at various levels towards the realisation of children’s rights.

Save the Children facilitated the involvement of children’s representatives from seven countries in South Asia. Country level workshops were organised with children and young people’s representatives (mostly from children’s groups) to discuss their issues, prioritise their concerns, examine issues relating to budgets and resource allocation to children’s services and explore their vision for change. At the country level workshops children also selected their peers to represent their countries as ‘Change Makers’ in the regional Kathmandu meeting.

²⁸ From a report by Angela Penrose (Save the Children UK HQ). See Ranjan Poudyal and Samina Sardar (2002). Report on Regional Consultation with Children and Young People, Corporate Leaders and Governments of South Asia. Save the Children OSCAR (Nepal) for full details.

Seventeen children and young people elected at country level as ‘Change Makers’ met for their own two-day regional workshop to prepare for meetings with the Corporate leaders, followed by the High Level meeting between Government ministers, Corporate leaders and children’s representatives. The children came from a variety of backgrounds: most were from disadvantaged backgrounds, including working children, street children and young people with disabilities. Through their sincere, committed, innovative efforts the Change Makers made an extraordinary impact on both business leaders and government officials demonstrating children’s immense capabilities and immense potential as partners for significant change.

Furthermore, six child journalists, including wall newspaper journalists from India (from Bal Mazdoor ki Awaz), radio journalists from Nepal (from Hatemalo) and TV journalists from Bangladesh (from ETV) also joined the workshop and covered the whole series of events through diverse forms of media.

In the High Level meeting the statement by the corporate leader’s representative Ken Balendra’s was clearly influenced by the two days he had spent with the children: “If ever we had any doubts about investing in children these doubts have been dispelled by 2 days interaction with a group of exceptional children...the force of their arguments leave us little choice but to comply”. He said the world of trade and finance in South Asia was rich and powerful, but with the power comes responsibility. He made links between the need for government to invest more in the social sectors, and the need to explore and build upon partnerships between children, the corporate sector and the government to ensure better investments for children.

Concurrent Panel Discussions were held on key issues: 1) Investing in the girl child and gender disparity reduction (girls’ education, maternal health, exploitation issues); 2) The impact of HIV/AIDS: pre-empting the pandemic & the costs of inaction; and 3) New Partnerships for investment in children. Three or four speakers including a representative of the Change Makers spoke on each panel and key discussions were reported back during a plenary session.

The Change Makers were given an hour during the High Level Meeting to make their own presentation. They began with a multi-lingual song highlighting their hopes and fears. This was followed this with a drama illustrating the abuse faced by a girl domestic servant. Several children then presented their country budgets as they were and as they thought they should be with increased resources going to health & education. Finally the Change Makers presented large drawings they had made during their preparatory workshop depicting their vision of the future. One of the young people then chaired a question and answer session. Several of the governments including India and Bangladesh tried to suggest that they shared the children’s vision and were on track to increase investment, and one of the child representatives from Bhutan took his government to task for not preventing child labour and children on the streets before it became a major problem.

As the Change Maker event drew to a close, the delegations signed up to the ‘Kathmandu Understanding: Investing in Children in South Asia’, a two sided document stating that investing in children should be a national priority and poverty reduction should begin with children. It recognised “the need to listen to children and actively explore ways of involving them in decisions which affect them at all levels. It was recognised that the commitments made should be followed up and a recommendation was made to have an annual review of progress. All delegations made very positive references to the Change Makers in their concluding remarks. Furthermore, Reena, an 11-year-old girl from an isolated hill community in India made a powerful final statement on behalf of the Change Makers emphasising the need to keep to the commitments made.

In Afghanistan the ‘The Children’s Voices’ initiative was initially planned in 2000/1 to enable the voices of Afghan children to be heard in the United Nations Special Session, as with the earlier Taliban rule it was recognized that it was very unlikely that child representatives would have been able to directly participate in the UN Special Session. A strategy involving

collaborative efforts by Save the Children, NGO, INGOs was undertaken to develop a Children's Consultation Kit²⁹. A range of creative methodologies were encouraged enabling girls and boys to share their views about their lives and their rights through drawings, poems, as well as through words. Workshops to train partners in use of the consultation kit were organised. Afghan children in a range of situations inside and outside of Afghanistan were then consulted. Key messages, drawings and ideas from Afghan children about their rights to survival, protection, participation and development were then brought together in a very attractively designed book called "Afghanistan's Children".

I have been a teacher for 31 years. In all those years I have controlled the children by force and I would beat them. I was a dictator! But using the consultation kit changed me. I realised I could befriend the children. I used to be feared and hated. Now I am loved and trusted. Now the children know their rights and so do I'

(Teacher, Kabul, Afghanistan)

With the changing political scenario in Afghanistan efforts by Save the Children, UNICEF and local partners to build upon the children's consultations in meaningful ways enabling children and young people's ongoing participation in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan are underway.



²⁹ In Dari, Pashtu, Urdu and English languages.

The Global Movement for Children (GMC) Project, Afghanistan

The GMC Project led by Save the Children Sweden in collaboration with a wide range of local and national agencies and UNICEF has enabled regional children's consultations to be organised in 10 locations within Afghanistan. The 3-day children's consultation enables girls and boys aged 6-18 years to discuss their hopes, dreams, and concerns and culminates in an event where-by children presentation their priority issues to the concerned authorities and agencies. Local agencies are encouraged to support children and young people's action programmes and to continue GMC meetings to mobilise support for action on children's rights.

In Pakistan the Children's Consultation Kit was also used to consult children of Pakistan (with a particular focus on the most marginalized). NGO partners of SC UK and SC Sweden were engaged to consult children in a variety of settings and another publication of Pakistan's Children Voices was produced to share at SSoC in May 2002.

Many of the participation initiatives by children and young people which were inspired by Special Session and GMC processes have developed deep roots in their national soil and fuelled by children and young people's commitment to actively participate in the development, monitoring and implementation of National Plans of Actions (NPAs) their ongoing efforts are sure to continue to flower in unique and far-reaching ways.

For example, preparations for the 'Change Maker' initiative in Pakistan enabled Save the Children's first direct experience of working with children as an Alliance in Pakistan. The initiative was also organised in partnership with the Government of Pakistan and UNICEF. Through the 'Change Maker' process there has been more realization with the Government and UNICEF regarding the positive outcomes from children's participation, which had increased ongoing collaboration to involve children and young people in government planning processes and the development of the National Plans of Action.

Children's Participation in the Special Session and NPA Processes in Tajikistan and Central Asia

Children and young people were supported to participate in processes relating to the Special Session SSoC in Tajikistan, in the Central Asia Parallel Special Session in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), and were also sent as representatives to the SSoC in New York. In Tajikistan, Save the Children UK worked in partnership with UNICEF, local organisations (Nasli Navras, Youth of 21st Century, National Commission on Child Rights, Republican Committee on Youths Affairs, Republican Children's Centre) and children and young people's organisations (Children's Clubs, CYGs) to further children's participation in the SSoC process and the Global Movement for Children to influence local, national, regional and global decision-making and policy developments.

There were also wider strategies to build the capacity of children, young people and adults as effective facilitators and advocates for children's rights; and to support the development of children's forums and NGO networks to increase collaborative efforts

for monitoring and influencing action to promote children's rights in Central Asia. Children and young people were consulted in processes to engage with governments in developing National Plans of Action, which were to be developed and implemented following the Special Session.

The Bishkek Parallel Special Session on Children (BPSS) was held between 6-11 May 2002 as a parallel meeting to the UN SSoC. It brought together government representatives, NGOs, children's advocates and young people themselves. Children's representatives from children's organisations and CYGs in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan participated in the BPSS. These representatives, who had been part of in-country processes, included children from different socio-economic status, urban and rural children, equal numbers of girls and boys aged 12-19 years old, children with disabilities and children from institutions.

Delegates to the BPSS spent three days working in four committees: Education, Violence, Ecology and HIV/AIDS. The children had identified these four groups from the 10 points of the Rallying Call of the 'Say Yes' campaign. A training of facilitators held in mid April³⁰ had taught eight young people from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan necessary skills to facilitate the BPSS working groups. In the working committees the child participants discussed and prioritised children and young people's problems and developed recommendations to share with Central Asian and Kazakhstan Government officials in the form of a 'YES' document.

"We are children from Central Asia and Kazakhstan, participants of the Bishkek Parallel Special Session on Children. We address this statement to each person who is concerned with the well-being of the young generation. This message contains small pieces of the soul of each child from our countries. BPSS is the beginning of fruitful work by children and a first step for their cooperation with adults."

(Young people's representatives at the Bishkek Parallel Special Session)

On the fourth day, the children and official government representatives from each country attended orientation meetings to discuss the joint meetings planned for the following day. Day 5 focused on dialogue between adult officials and children and youth representatives. A series of plenary presentations was followed by country-specific group discussion groups. These resulted in heated debate and active discussion between children and adults on equal ground. A press conference was held in the afternoon, and the outcomes of the parallel session were discussed. A reception and closing ceremony marked the end of the official sessions. The sixth day was kept free for an excursion for the children and young people.

In Tajikistan ongoing national efforts have led to children and young people's follow up to the BPSS, and have furthered their involvement in the NPA process and the strengthening of their children's organisations and forums. A forum of children was organised in Khatlon in October 2002 for consultation on the NPA. This brought together over 220 participants including children, representatives of children's organisations, NGOs and different government structures. Working Groups on Education, Health, Violence and the Environment were formed.

A national forum in November 2002 was designed for children to share the outcomes of their research on "MY PLACE FIT FOR CHILDREN" and their vision and suggested actions (guidelines for the National Commission on Child rights on NPA development) for "MY TAJIKISTAN FIT FOR CHILDREN". Involvement of the media and national TV coverage on the children's programme "Manu Dunyo" spread the children and young people's vision widely. Adults from the National Commission on Child Rights, the Tajikistan government, UNICEF, NGO Forum and Save the Children also shared their commitments and/or responses.

³⁰ This training was led by the Association of Young Leaders (Kyrgyzstan), a grass-roots organisation of professional trainers.

In Sri Lanka Save the Children organised ‘The Sri Lankan Children’s Challenge’ a national programme on children’s participation in 2001. Its aim was to further children’s participation and partnerships between children, young people, civil society and government towards action for children in Sri Lankan society.

The Sri Lankan Children’s Challenge³¹

Save the Children worked with a wide range of partners, NGOs, INGOs, schools, government departments, children and youth groups to facilitate a detailed consultation on children’s priorities for the next decade in the lead up to UN Special Session on Children. The logo of ‘The Sri Lankan Children’s Challenge’ was ‘Let’s listen to children’s ideas and take their opinions seriously’. A child friendly information pack (in Sinhala, Tamil and English) was developed for children aged 12-18 years. It contained information on progress the government had made on children’s issues in relation to the goals of the 1990 World Summit for Children; a copy of ‘A World Fit for Children’ (draft outcome document for the Special Session); a leaflet on the meaning of children’s participation; facilitators’ notes and activities to take a group of children through participatory consultation process; two posters; and a questionnaire for each child who participated in the consultation. Children were asked to present their priorities to the Sri Lankan Government delegation.

Through their partner organisations and new contacts made in each district over 11,000 children from every province participated. Special attention was given to guarantee that the most vulnerable and marginalized children were also heard. Following the consultations and analysis of the questionnaires a series of provincial level workshops were organised for groups of children to meet, discuss their priorities and elect representatives to participate in a central national event.

The Sri Lankan Children’s Challenge culminated in the first ever Children’s Parliament on September 18th 2001.³² One hundred and thirty children representing every province presented their challenge to policy and decision-makers from the government, judiciary institutions and the private sector. Live media provided coverage throughout the nation.

A preparatory workshop for the children took place on 17th September. At this workshop the children discussed their provincial priorities and developed five major challenges for Sri Lankan Children to present at their Parliament. The challenges were:

1. Economic Problems
2. Education
3. Armed conflict
4. Alcohol and drug abuse, and
5. Problems faced by children in Institutions. The children presented their priorities through drama, song, debate, role-play, television talk shows and discussions.

“Today is a memorable day for all adults. The way the children presented their challenges brought tears to our eyes. They were so well-presented it was heart moving. As adults we now have a responsibility to discuss the questions put to us.”

(Mr. Bradman Weerakoon, Secretary to the Prime Minister and former Presidential Advisor)

The consultations and Children’s Parliament demonstrated children’s abilities to make concrete contributions to solving the country’s major issues concerns, bringing out the value of respecting their right to be involved in decision-making processes. The United National Front’s election manifesto referring to the Parliament and its priorities illustrate initial acceptance of this premise.

³¹ For further details see ‘The Sri Lankan Children’s Challenge’ by Save the Children (2002) Sri Lanka.

³² The UN Special Session was initially scheduled to take place in mid September 2001 but was postponed until May 2002 due to the September 11th crisis.

In Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and India children and young people were also supported to engage in varied processes at sub-national and national levels to have children’s views, concerns and priorities included in the outcome document and in developing responsive and effective National Plans of Action.

GMC management team promotes varied opportunities for children in Nepal

In Nepal a SSoc and GMC management team was formed, with representatives from Save the Children Alliance (UK, Norway and US), UNICEF and Plan International, along with a wider task group to make preparations for to the UN SSoc. Members of the management team were also part of a broader national task group which included representation from relevant ministries.

The GMC management team organised and promoted the following activities:

- *Media and Communication Activities: Information kits, press kits, leaflets, a -friendly version of the outcome document and other information materials related to GMC/SSoc were produced and distributed throughout the country. Radio, TV spots, as well as newspaper articles presented children’s issues and the GMC.*
- *Briefings on the Special Session and GMC with government, I/NGOs, private sector, media, child clubs and communities.*
- *Preparation and support for adult and child delegates in the first, second and third substantive sessions of the preparatory committee (PrepComs) of the Special Session;*
- *Support for children’s participation in national meetings and regional ‘Change Makers’ Event;*
- *Consultations and workshops with children and young people to gain their perspectives on the Outcome Document ‘A World Fit for Children’. In partnership with the Consortium of Organisations Working with Child Clubs, the GMC management team organised and conducted a six-day facilitators’ training in Kathmandu in May 2001 for twenty children and twenty adults from all five regions of Nepal. These trained facilitators went on to conduct regional level consultations with children to discover their opinions on the outcome document.*
- *Development of a GMC Theme Song: More than fifteen famous pop singers and child singers of Nepal recorded this song, which was aired by major radio stations.*
- *Organisation of the ‘Say Yes for Children’ campaign via self-addressed/stamped aerogrammes, newspapers or electronic voting (from the GMC web site of Nepal). Pledge forms and information materials were distributed throughout the country via Street theatre, theatre for development, focus group discussions, interactions and media mobilization. All together, 224,169 people, including the Right Honourable Prime Minister Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba made pledges for the well being of Nepali children by casting the ‘Say Yes for Children’ vote.*
- *Public hearings on Child Rights were organised by the District Women Development Offices working together with District Child Welfare Committees (DCWCs). Linkages were made to feed results into the government’s CRC reporting.*
- *A National Children’s Fair was held on 10-11 September 2001 in Kathmandu bringing together more than 150 representatives of child groups from all over Nepal and facilitating their interaction with the Nepalese delegation to the Special Session. The fair gave the children an opportunity to discuss their priorities, perspectives and concern for children in Nepal with the Nepalese delegation in the hope that their views would be presented at the Special Session itself. More than 150 children from all regions of Nepal participated in the fair.*
- *A Guidebook on Child and Youth Participation: Children and youth from Nepal’s five development regions gathered in a consultation workshop in Bhaktapur in April 2002. They drafted a guidebook with clear steps and approaches for participation of children and youth in development of the National Plan of Action based on the SSoc outcome document. The guidebook will also be used as a general toolkit of child participation.*

“If adults don’t call us to be part of the GMC, we ourselves can try to develop a forum and we will continue with the movement until at some point the adults will recognise us. We’ll develop groups of children and come together to further efforts...”

(Children involved in Special Session and GMC processes, Bangladesh)

Various processes and events led up to SSoC in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh Save the Children members worked with local NGO and INGO partners to involve children and young people's representatives in SSoC and GMC processes, including the Say Yes campaign. A core group of children and young people from children's organisations and/or NGO partners worked to raise awareness of children's issues and the Special Session, to influence policy developments and build partnerships for ongoing monitoring and action related to the implementation of children's rights. A series of events were organised from April 2001 onwards for children, policy makers and the media to interact. Children and young people from the Shishu Parishad, with support from the core group of children, Save the Children Alliance, NGO partners and the media also organised a Parallel Shadow Session in September 2002.

Building upon their creative efforts and what was learned from the Special Session in-country process, Save the Children made the following decision: “to continue with a long- term process which will adopt a holistic, integrated, inclusive approach and which will be driven by different stakeholders in Bangladeshi society, including children, wider civil society, NGOs and the media. To build upon the momentum gained, Save the Children should enable the development of a democratic FORUM or NETWORK of and by children, as well as a wider forum of committed organisations that can mobilize wider civil society. Furthermore, to ensure the participation of children in national policy developments, new partnerships need to be built and children's access to decision-makers enabled. Other mechanisms to influence the State level policies also need to be explored.”³³

Facilitating Children's Participation in Policy Developments, Save the Children UK, Southzone, India

Children's participation is an important cross cutting theme and approach for programming (including advocacy) in Save the Children UK's Southzone. The GMC and Special Session processes provided great opportunities to strengthen their alliances and partnerships with other INGOs (including UNICEF, Plan International) and NGO partners for advocacy on children's rights. These processes also increased Save the Children's position as a facilitator and advocate for children's participation. During the GMC process a resource base (including a CD and a film on facilitating children's participation) and actual skills of adult facilitators in the region were developed and an e-group started to enable ongoing sharing of experiences, concerns and learning on child participation.

Regional consultations were organised with children (including representation from street and working children, tribal children and children with disabilities) for State level CRC reporting and planning, and for GMC, Special Session and NPA processes. These provided space for children to explore their views and share their opinions with policy makers. Through these initiatives and partnerships with children Save the Children is seeking to establish a more proactive relationship with the government, media and corporate sector. It wants to help strengthen children's organisations and develop federations of children's groups at district, state and inter-state levels while also increasing staff members' skills of policy analysis and advocacy.

³³ See Save the Children Alliance Bangladesh (2001). Review Of In-Country Processes Related to Special Session: Key Issues and Learnings.

3.5 Children's Participation in Particular Sectors

The following sections share case examples of how children and young people are addressing crucial issues such as education, discrimination, economic exploitation, abuse and harassment, health and well-being through active participation. This illustrates the powerful impact of their participation and active citizenship in diverse programme sectors, in a variety of contexts, both rural and urban and including emergencies.



Education

Article 28: Right to Education

The child has a right to education. The State's duty is to ensure that primary education is free and compulsory, to encourage different forms of secondary education accessible to every child and make higher education to all on the basis of capacity. School discipline shall be consistent with the child's rights and dignity. The State shall engage in international co-operation to implement this right.

Note: see also Article 29 regarding nature of education.

Across the region access to quality education is a key priority of girls and boys in all settings. Children and young people have had many successful outcomes in their efforts to further the realisation of their education rights. Several examples are shared below that highlight the positive impact of children's participation in bringing about inclusive, quality education.

Children's participation in ensuring quality education

Children have no difficulty articulating what quality education means to them. Tribal children from children's groups in Orissa, India say that primary and upper primary education should be accessible to all children; that teachers should adopt bilingual teaching; that abuse should not be tolerated in schools; and that teachers should adopt joyful teaching learning methodologies.

NGO partners of Save the Children UK Southzone have established linkages with local bodies: Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Village Education Committees (VECs). Some have trained representatives of these institutions on education management and their roles and responsibilities in ensuring quality education. Children's organisations have also negotiated for space within PRIs and VECs to present their opinions about what is necessary to ensure quality education. They are thus securing a role in education management for themselves. Children are negotiating with block and district administration for effective delivery of

education and ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services). They are negotiating for anganwadis and early child care education to relieve older children from sibling care and free them to attend schools.

NGO partners including SOVA, Mahita, Akssuss and Janachetana have evolved empowering, inclusive participatory learning materials, including curricula that encourage children to question their own marginalisation and become involved in empowering processes. At higher levels Save the Children has been building constituencies by collaborating with INGOs/ bilateral/ UN and non-funding partners to work on issues of physical punishment and language polemics. Based on our learning from these projects we will be working closely with state governments to strengthen their structures and mechanisms in adopting all the principles of quality/ relevant and inclusive education. These efforts will involve children's active participation. They will negotiate with education departments on what kind of education they would prefer and also on developing a child friendly environment in schools.

Children and young people across Asia have been pro-active in efforts to convince parents to send their daughters and sons to school, rather than to work. Children have discovered that it is strategic to try to convince influential adults such as religious leaders and community elders of the longer term benefits of sending children to school, as well as the necessity of improving quality and access of education.

Youth Involvement in Back to School Campaign in Mazar, Afghanistan

In the northern region Save the Children UK is working with a number of youth groups that have been involved in a campaign to get children back to school. They have been using multi-media and advocacy tools. Young people from youth groups went across the Northern region to meet with children, parents, community leaders and the Ministry of Education and discuss the types activities that would help get children back into school. The youth worked directly with school age children and gathered considerable information within two weeks. Using poetry, song and drama, they conveyed how children could get themselves and their peers back in school. Children and young people had a major role in this initiative, with six young people also involved in the proposal writing.

Children have also served to monitor teacher attendance and school drop-outs. In situations where government teachers have not been attending school regularly, children have reported this to District level education officials and have achieved positive results. The benefits of monitoring with clear information collection have been fruitful.

Children's Collective Organising Results in the Appointment of a Science Teacher: Southern Andhra Pradesh, India

"We had no science teacher in our schools, so made a complaint to the education government officials and now we have a teacher."
(boy, sangha member)

In 2000 in Gondireddipalli village of Raphthadu mandal, the Zilla Parishad School began the term without a science teacher. The children's sangha members in one village (supported by YIP) raised and discussed the problem among themselves and with their adult organiser. The organiser advised them to take the issue to the Mandal Education Officer (MEO) and suggested that they join with Child Sangha members from three other villages with the same problem. The children from four different villages then met together. They made a petition and took it to the MEO, explaining the problem and the adverse impact on their education. When the MEO requested that the children try to manage until the end of the year without a science teacher, they explained that their exam results would suffer badly. The MEO then took their request seriously and promised to help solve the problem. Within 15 days a new science teacher was appointed.

Children in different localities across the region have addressed issues relating to school transport, school infrastructure, supply of books, water and heat.

Children Address Bus Transport Problem, Andhra Pradesh, India

Children in several villages in Southern Andhra Pradesh have identified bus transport to get to school and to arrive on time as a problem. YIP-supported Child Sangha members in different villages have taken up this issue, with varying degrees of success. In one area the bus driver failed to stop for school children since they had bus passes and he made no money from them. The children then had to walk to school; arriving late, they were reprimanded. Discussing the problem in their sangha meeting, the children decided to go together to see the bus depot manager. In another case, children worked to change the bus timetable in order to reach school on time. In some instances the children have been successful, action being taken by adults in authority and the bus drivers stopping to pick up the children and/or changing their schedules.

"Our school starts at 9 am, but our bus collected us at 7am. We also had to wait 2 hours after school to get home. So we complained to the bus depot manager. Now they have adjusted the bus timing according to our needs as school children."
(girl, sangha member)

CCVD action by girls: Gaining concession for bus fare for students

Chuchot Gongma CCVD near Leh, Ladakh has been running for about 18 months, holding meetings every Sunday. The children have tried to address a range of village issues, including village cleaning. They also managed to get a concession for student bus fare. The cost of taking a bus to school plus tuition was expensive. In April 2001 a group of three girls from the CCVD travelled from their village to see the Chief Executive Councillor to try to obtain a concession on the bus fare for the students. They were advised to also meet the Bus Union manager. Successful in their negotiations, students now receive a fare concession.

"Our dream is for good education. We are trying to get free tuition. Currently they charge Rs300 per subject per month. Some children travel to Leh for tuition. Others have to make do with the local teachers. We plan to go to the Education Department about these issues. We also want to apply for the appointment of a games teacher and sports equipment in our local school."

The Executive Education Councillor of the Leh Hill Council has worked on the formation process of the Children’s Council for Development of Ladakh (CCDL). He praised Save the Children on the good efforts they and their partners have made to motivate children. He felt the CCDL links the adult Hill Council and the children’s committees. Children themselves can come and meet with the adults, bringing their problems and issues. He has been impressed by the children’s participation and assures us that children’s representatives will be invited whenever the Leh Hill Council calls an education meeting.

Children’s Participation in District Education Meeting, Ladakh

Shri Rigzin Spalbar, Executive Education Councillor, invited child representatives from the CCDL to participate in the District level Education Review meeting in December 2001. A girl and a boy representative attended with positive feedback.

“Since taking part in the Education Review Meeting I’ve been more confident to speak. Before I was too shy to talk... During the meeting the failure rate was discussed...I told them that I was very happy to have been invited on behalf of the CCVD. I asked the government officials what help they had given to stop exam failure and what help we CCVDs could give. I also gave information about our CCVD and how we were addressing village problems. We also asked about whether free tuition could be provided to the students up to matric level.”

(Zubaida, CCDL Representative)

“Children tell us their point of view. Sometimes we don’t see things, and they come up with issues that we adults may neglect. We value their participation... There was a tendency to neglect children, but now that we have started this process of involving them, children have motivated their parents and other villagers. They have made lots of positive changes... Children’s Committees for Village Development can enable children to participate with adults in making the education system function... CCVDs play a very active role, particularly in getting the smaller demands fulfilled, making villagers aware of the importance of education, stopping school drop-outs and motivating their friends and villagers to make policy-makers, teachers and others more serious about doing what they say they will do. It is beneficial to involve children in decision-making.”

(Executive Education Councillor, Ladakh Hill Council)

Andhra Pradesh has also seen significant developments in creating partnerships between Child Club representatives and the State level Commissioner of Education.

Commissioner of Education, AP Government, responds to children’s concerns regarding education issues

Divya Disha, an NGO in Andhra Pradesh, supports 100 Child Rights Clubs in both government and private Schools. Child Club members who attended the 3rd Annual Conference for child leaders in early 2001 described the issues that they had presented to Dr. Sindh, Commissioner of Education for AP, and the nature of his response. He seemed very positive about listening to children’s views and he played an important role by providing a direct channel of communication between the children and the government. His responses to the children’s suggestions included a willingness to: establish a Grievance Cell in the Commissionerate; to support the development of Child Rights Clubs in schools (in a phased manner), and the development of a city level Children’s Forum to support consultations with children on curriculum reform. He was less forthcoming in designing a policy to ban corporal punishment in schools. However, he agreed to meeting a small group of children (elected from each zone) on a regular basis (every two months) to promote action and review progress on education issues.

Furthermore, in every process and event relating to the Special Session in which children and young people took a major role, issues relating to education were priorities and recommendations for policy and programme developments to promote accessible, inclusive, and quality education for all girls and boys were made.

Children's Concerns regarding education highlighted in Special Session related events in Bishkek Parallel Special Session (Central Asia) & in the Children's Parliament, Sri Lanka

In the Sri Lankan Children's Challenge consultations education was the second highest priority. Children also highlighted their concerns about education during the Children's Parliament. Some of the key issues raised were the lack of equal opportunities for all children; the disparity between rural and urban schools; inadequate facilities for children with disabilities; the shortage and lack of education resources, including teachers, text books, stationary and uniforms especially in rural areas and areas affected by the armed conflict; and added pressure due to tuition classes. The children advocated for greater efforts to increase access to quality education for all children across Sri Lanka, including children with disabilities.

In the Bishkek Parallel Special Session in Central Asia education was also a priority issue. Education concerns included: disparity between education in rural and urban areas, low level of teacher training, lack of integration of children with disabilities, choice of language, lack of access for child workers. Children and young people identified a range of actions to be carried out to addressing these problems by the concerned Ministries and collaborative efforts by NGOs, teachers, children and parents.

Non-Discrimination

"In Asian countries boys have more of a voice..."

Girls and boys are both equal in their wisdom. But due to stereotypes the voices of men and male children are taken more seriously by the nation."

(Girl, Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia)

"We should be treated as human beings. We should not be discriminated against. People should talk to us with the same kind ton, that they talk to other children."

(Ragpicker, street boy, India)

"There is discrimination in schools between the rich and the poor."

(Children, Kyrgyzstan)

Socio-cultural, economic and political factors in South and Central Asia lead to different groups of children being discriminated against in private and public arenas. These include girls, younger children, children with disabilities, street children, domestic workers and tribal

children. Such children are often further marginalised in participation processes within and outside their families. For example, in most parts of South Asia parents have been largely unwilling (at least initially) to allow their daughters to offer their opinions or to leave home to participate in external initiatives.

“With regard to early marriage the girl’s views are never listened to. She is forced to go for early marriage. Her consent is not taken and she may be forced to stop her education.”
(Boy, Bangladesh)

Article 2: Non-Discrimination

All rights apply to all children without exception. It is the State’s obligation to protect children from any form of discrimination (due to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status) and to take positive action to promote their rights.

The principle of non-discrimination is fundamental to child rights programming and to citizenship work with children and young people. The concept of citizenship in programming involves focusing on the most excluded, using the CRC as a tool to understand and challenge issues of discrimination within the established system, promoting girls’ and boys’ participation in decision-making processes, focusing on values of inclusion.

Across the world children of different cultures appear to share an acute sense of justice. They are quick to say that something *‘is not fair’* when exposed to situations of inequality, whether big or small. Through their participatory initiatives girls and boys taking on the important role of bringing about social change. They are increasing a climate in which girls and boys voices are listened to and all forms of discrimination challenged.

“Through our Child Club we are able to mix with children from other cultures and religions.”
(Members of a Child Club, Sri Lanka)

Their participatory and collective activities regularly bring together girls and boys from different backgrounds. They play and talk together, and undertake common activities. All these efforts function to transform attitudes and break down traditional forms of discrimination based on gender, religion, dis/ability, ethnicity, caste, age etc.

“We have done a lot of work towards children’s participation. Since children have been involved in our work, many adult perceptions, barriers, and egos have been crashing and the world becomes less hegemonic, less exclusive.”

(Save the Children UK South Zone Manager, India)

Many forms of discrimination are subtle and pervasive. Thus, as organisations we need systematic efforts to identify and combat all forms of discrimination. We need to make certain that we are reaching out to the most marginalised and excluded girls and boys, empowering them to raise their voices and challenge discrimination. When undertaking any kind of situational analysis, monitoring or review process we must disaggregate data and information to understand differences in the status of children’s rights according to their gender, age, dis/ability, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic, HIV status and others.

“At first there was a low level of girl’s participation in our child clubs, so we spoke to parents and school principals to encourage girl’s participation. Now we have more girls’ participating in the Child Club activities”

(Girls and boys from Child Clubs, Sri Lanka)



In our direct work with children, young people and adults, an emphasis on inclusive values and behaviour is required to strengthen children’s associations as democratic, open fora, with opportunities for fair representation. We also encourage children to be pro-active in challenging all forms of discrimination. In identifying different forms of discrimination children face, girls and boys should be supported to analyse the root causes of the discrimination, and to identify the concerned adult duty bearers to hold accountable to act to overcome the discrimination.

Issues of children in institutions prioritised in the Children’s Parliament, Sri Lanka

Child representatives from throughout Sri Lanka who had been involved in local and provincial level processes had a one-day workshop to prepare for the national level Children’s Parliament. In deciding which issues to focus on they referred to concerns children had prioritised during the survey of 11,000 children), as well as discussing their own ideas and experiences. During this process they brought forward the problems facing children in institutions as one of their five priority issues. This was not among the top five priorities from the survey, but children from institutions were participating in the Parliament and based upon a general agreement that their opinions are seldom heard, the group as a whole decided to prioritise their problems.

Presentations on Discrimination by 1) Children from Child Protection Centres/ Children’s Homes and 2) Children with Disabilities, Kyrgyzstan

Presentation 1) The children presented a drawing depicting the situation of children living in children’s centres or homes, as compared to those who live in families. The picture showed a boy in the mountains, isolated, with no-one listening to him. This is how they feel. The children from institutions said other children look at them as though they were ‘devils’. When they go to school, other children take their money and abuse them because they are from institutions. They then described the sun rising behind the mountain, giving light and trying to help them overcome their constraints and solve their problems. An image of two hands reaching towards one another illustrated the children’s belief that if different kinds of children could meet and become friends, such increased understanding would overcome discrimination. As friends, other children they would no longer see them as devils, but instead as good children like themselves.

Presentation 2) The group presented a puppet show and a visual picture to portray discrimination against children with disabilities. Some children are playing and a girl with a disability asks to join them. The children refuse, saying, “No, you can’t play. You have no hands.” The girl is sad. Then a young child says: “Every child has rights. You have the right to free health care to get some kind of artificial hands. You don’t have to go to a special institution either. You can go to a regular school and play with others. Everyone should treat you nicely. You can have equal opportunities. Please don’t mind these children here, they are young and unaware.”

Through the puppet show the children also said that while children with disabilities should be included in all mainstream services, they would also like their own special clubs for children like themselves to increase their self-realisation and so they can learn about their rights.

Child members of a children’s union in India recognised that children with disabilities were not included. Discussing the need to be more inclusive, the members realised they should recognise the strengths of all children and build friendships. “*We should become friends with children with disabilities and encourage them to join our Clubs.*” They also noticed that boys were more vocal and active in meetings than girls were. Considering how to encourage girls’ participation, one boy commented: “*The change should come from inside.*” The boys and girls also pointed out that girls need positive role models, more space and encouragement for their participation, as well as action to encourage gender equality within the family environment.

In some situations, it has proven useful to form distinct groups of children who share common experiences of gender, disability, work or ethnicity before encouraging them to join with other groups of children. This helps increase their understanding of their particular situation and the reasons for their oppression. It builds their confidence and positive identity. In some parts of Bangladesh, India and Nepal, for example, children and young people with disabilities have formed their own organisations, networks and media initiatives. They have worked on increasing understanding of their situation, raising awareness of their equal rights and challenging all forms of discrimination they face. While undertaking their own initiatives, they are actively engage in participatory initiatives with other children and young people.

"We were totally deprived. We never thought we could participate in this type of process. Once we started coming together and discussing we learned there are many children like us. Now we are happy and proud. We have discovered that children have rights and if we all unite together we can get people to listen to what we have to say. We discuss things together and we will raise the problems we face and present some ideas for solving them to the Government and organisations working for the development of children. We can influence their plans."

(A group of street children with disabilities, CSID, Bangladesh)

Differently Abled Union, Vijaywada, India

Seventeen young men with physical disabilities have united in their own association in Vijaywada, in southern India. They all knew each other through their involvement in Navajeevan, a local NGO. They intend to highlight the potential and capabilities of young people who are differently abled. Through regular meetings they also hope to analyse the difficulties they face and find solutions for them, in particular by trying to abolish discrimination. When they are busy with different activities they need not feel they are different or not capable. If they experience discrimination in the work place or in public, they intend to come forward and talk about it with elder community members. They intend to fight discrimination together.

They also hope their union can link up with other organisations working against discrimination, considering networking and exposure to similar groups to be important. They plan to form a committee to demand proper delivery of government programmes for children and others with disabilities, and are researching the proper authorities. As a start they are making sure that all who are entitled freely receive their 'certificates of handicap', since some doctors currently demand bribes for these. They have also discussed the question of who should be entitled to bus passes. The group meets regularly. They collect a membership fee towards a collective fund and are developing an action programme. They are united to show how able they are.

“There should be no poverty, but it has been created by the rich. The rich also feel superior to us just because they have money. As street children they consider us especially inferior and downtrodden.”

(Street boy working as ragpicker, member of child worker’s union, Delhi)

Working children have found it beneficial to form their own organisations, such as the Bal Mazdoor Union, Bhima Sangha and CRC Bal Sangha. Through these groups, they can address the problems and challenge the discrimination they suffer as working children. These children’s unions also work with other children’s organisations to influence wider policy developments at district, state, national and regional levels to bring about positive changes for all children.

In Nepal, Save the Children UK has supported some projects focusing primarily on increasing girls’ participation and protection. The office also supports a film initiative to empower children and young people with disabilities with the skills and confidence to bring up their issues in innovative and pro-active ways.

Girl’s Participation in Creating Safe Spaces, Nepal³⁴

In 1999 Save the Children UK researched the problems of girls in Ramghat Village Development Committee in Surkhet. The girls discussed the low value they experienced as females and the difficulties they faced: heavy workloads, restricted mobility, early marriage and fears for their personal safety. During the discussions, a core group of 18 girls (members of nine different Child Clubs, each from a different Ward) decided to work together to effect positive change. Save the Children began supporting the girls to undertake a project to show their capacity and potential to create safe spaces for girls. Both school going and non-school going girls were involved in the project. The group met regularly to carry out information gathering and analysis of unsafe and safe spaces and activities for girls in their localities. The following were found to be unsafe: travelling to school, collecting wood or water, going to markets, festivals, or relatives’ houses on foot or by bus. At these times boys, neighbours, police or teachers could threaten them.

This analysis, their new knowledge and understanding of gender, and the increased self-esteem they gained through participating in the project led the girls to negotiate for change. They met with community members and authorities to raise awareness and call for action to bring about the changed behaviour, attitudes and service delivery required to transform unsafe spaces to safe ones, to improve girls mobility, and provide access to public services and opportunities. The girls have continued to protest against any incident of harassment or abuse of girls.

The girls’ group has developed strong linkages with village and district level Child Club networks, the District Child Welfare Committee, the local police, teachers, and women’s groups, as well as the local decision-making body, the VDC. All of these actors now recognise the group as a crucial agent for improving the lives of girls in the community. The girls’ initiative has resulted in positive behaviour and attitude changes among teachers, boys, parents and community members towards girls. Furthermore, the girls have become more confident, articulate and able to negotiate for necessary changes in their families and communities.

³⁴ From article by Irada Gautam in Newsflash of Save the Children Alliance (South and Central Asia) 2001.



"We need more children to be involved in our organisations to develop good attitudes and not to discriminate against people."

(Children from children's groups, Kyrgyzstan)

Reflection and action planning among children on becoming more inclusive and democratic are to be encouraged. Ongoing efforts to involve girls and boys, younger children, less vocal members, and children with disabilities are needed to bring about the democratic development of children's participatory initiatives.

"Group work gives a chance for more shy children to participate and become more active."

(Child Club members, Sri Lanka)

Despite initial resistance from parents to the idea of girl's participation, over time girls are coming to play active roles, including leadership roles, in children's organisations across the region. While we recognise the benefits of such changes, we must continue to encourage and sustain boys' participation as well. There are indications of changing trends in some parts of India and in Central Asia, with levels of boys participation declining.

"In our school council it is mainly the girls who participate actively..."

Boys don't participate as much since they are busy with sports and other social activities they are more interested in."

(Girl, Kyrgyzstan)

We should build upon all efforts to encourage understanding between boys and girls from different backgrounds and their ability to work together and with adults in challenge all forms of discrimination preventing realisation of their rights.

“Our vision is for children to have a great voice and be united to address child right violations. Girls and boys are together and there is more equality among children.”

(Girls and boys in Sri Lanka)

Birth Registration

Birth registration has been described as ‘a ticket to citizenship’³⁵. Every child is born with the right to a name and nationality, and registration of birth is the State’s first acknowledgement of a child’s official existence. Birth registration provides legal access to the various privileges and protections nation provides during childhood and adult life. These include: school enrolment, access to health services, ability to open a bank account, get married, own land and obtain citizenship and/or a passport.

Articles relevant to Birth Registration in the CRC

Article 7: Right to a Name and Nationality The child has the right to a name at birth. The child also has the right to acquire a nationality, and as far as possible, to know his or her parents and to be cared for by them.

Article 8: Right to an Identity The State has an obligation to protect, and if necessary, re-establish basic aspects of the child’s identity. This includes name, nationality and family ties.

A child who lacks proof of identity is a non-person in the eyes of officials. Children who are not registered do not appear in statistics and may not be taken into consideration when planning health or education services etc. Planning and allocation of resources would then be inaccurate.

“Birth registration is not only important from a statistical view, but also because each and every child counts and his or her existence needs to be legally acknowledged as without a name and identity, without a record of child’s existence, the child becomes vulnerable to abuses such as exploitation, trafficking, child labour and child prostitution.” (Save the Children Japan Nepal, Booklet on Birth Registration, 2001)

Despite its importance, birth registration rates remain low in South Asian countries. UNICEF reports indicate fewer than 30% of children being registered in Bangladesh, and only 30-40% in India and Nepal. The situation better in Pakistan (70-80% registration) and Sri Lanka (90%). Efforts are needed to make birth registration more accessible for all new parents in each type of community (urban, rural and refugee).

³⁵ See booklet on ‘Birth Registration: “A Ticket to Citizenship”’ produced by Save the Children Japan in Nepal.

In some countries, such as Bangladesh, decentralisation is increasing access. The newly adopted decentralised system gives Ward Commissioners a pivotal role in maintaining register books and working with health workers and NGO staff to identify new parents. However, while the Ward Commissioner must certify the Birth Registration format, overall responsibility remains with the Chief Health Officer whose office collects and analyses data on births.

Children and young people from across the region have recognised the problems arising from non-registration of births. These include difficulties enrolling in schools, and in proving a child's age in cases relating to child marriage or arrests of juveniles. Thus they are working to increase birth registrations and the issuing of birth registers to older children.

Encouraging Parents to Register Child Births, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh

In different settings in these countries, children and young people – generally members of children's groups – are conducting awareness raising activities and campaigns (e.g. wall slogans, leaflet distribution, house visits, rallies) to encourage new parents to register the births of their sons and daughters. These children's groups have also met with concerned officials to encourage them to become more pro-active in encouraging birth registration and making information concerning the process more accessible to all parents.

In Nepal, Save the Children Japan has integrated the issue of birth registration with other project components in the Eastern Terai with Aasaman NGO. Part of their strategy to increase birth registration includes the mobilising children in Child Clubs to raise awareness about birth registration. Aasaman has also facilitated interaction between children, community members and government officials (including teachers, VDC officials and health workers) to increase efforts towards enhanced birth registration.

Children's Action to Enables Delivery of Birth Certificates, Sri Lanka

In Northern Sri Lanka, Child Club members became aware of problems facing children without birth certificates, especially difficulty in enrolling in school. With support from Save the Children UK staff, the children joined together to speak to the Divisional Secretary and Registrar of Births to organise a mobile service to issue birth certificates. The children volunteered their time to collect information on people lacking birth certificates and to assist them to fill out the necessary forms. The Village Headman is responsible to see that the forms are filled. Thus an evening session was organised for the children to raise the local Village Headman's awareness about the importance of birth certificates. The Registrar of Births has now produced a clear leaflet on the procedure of obtaining a birth certificate when a child is born. This information is being distributed to all pregnant mothers in the province.

Protection from Economic Exploitation

Article 32: Protection from Economic Exploitation

The child has the right to be protected from work that threatens his or her health, education or development. The State shall set minimum ages for employment and regulate working conditions.

Save the Children works with local NGO partners to empower working children to exercise their rights and to protect them from harmful work. With the understanding that the best interests of working children are the main focus, intervention opportunities have been encouraged that promote children’s genuine involvement in all stages of programming.

Existing case examples have already indicated how child workers and other children, both urban and rural, are organising themselves and participating in local and national processes to raise awareness of their issues and to protect themselves from economic exploitation. Additional examples below illustrate how children are holding adults responsible and mobilising action to improve the lives of working children.

The Bal Mazdoor Union, Delhi, India

The Bal Mazdoor Union has held adults accountable when children’s rights have been severely violated. In 1994 the Union brought to light the callous death of 15 year old Zaffar Imam caused by his employer. Through dialogue with the Chief Minister of Delhi the Union changed the charge against the accused employer from attempted murder to an actual murder charge. Further, on behalf of the child’s parents the Union filed a case in the Delhi High Court for compensation in the amount of Rs. 10,80,000.

Ragpickers Union (children, young people and young adults), Vijaywada, India

Supported by Navajeevan, the Ragpickers Union was formed in Vijaywada in November 2001. Its 35 members include children and young adults who work as ragpickers. The members meet every Sunday to discuss issues of importance to them, including rates and police harassment. They are starting a micro-credit system and exploring options for training and education. The Union also aids individual members who have been ill, beaten or exploited. Members are assisted by Navajeevan in their collective efforts. One night Navajeevan staff helped have a boy released from jail after he had been unfairly arrested.

The union also undertakes collective efforts to raise awareness about street and working children and their problems. They presented a drama illustrating just who street children are to a group of officials who were participating in an awareness programme. They have also taken action against a local ‘dada’ (gangster) who had been extorting money from ragpicking children and providing them with drugs. The union members filed a complaint against the ‘dada’ with the railway police and a case was made against him. The union supports efforts for increased awareness training among police on the Juvenile Justice laws. Members also contact children who have newly arrived on the street, to try to persuade them to return home and/or to introduce them to Navajeevan’s street educators. Since forming the union the members feel much more confident in claiming their rights.

In assisting child workers to have some influence on matters that affect them, Concerned for Working Children has pointed out the importance of children's access to information. Information on governance structures makes it possible for children and young people to target influential adults to create change. Moreover, boy's and girl's own systematic collection of data helps them present their case in powerful ways, increasing their negotiating power and influence.

A key strategy for empowering child workers and children who are members of the Makkala Panchayat (children's government) has been to teach them skills of collecting, analysing and presenting data (e.g. surveys, PRAs) on issues of importance to children, young people and community members. By collecting statistical information on children through a house to house survey in their Panchayats, members have been able to make informed advocacy and action plans for children in their areas. They have also been assisted to research and develop booklets on work that children can and can't do.

'Work We Can Do and Cannot Do' (Children's definitions of their work)³⁶

As part of the strategy to end all forms of child labour, CWC has assisted children and young people of the Bhima Sangha (working children's union) and the Makkala Panchayat in southern India to develop their own definitions of the work they are engaged in and to determine what they can or cannot do at different ages. The children's definitions have been published as booklets in local languages for use by adults and children in the Panchayat to monitor the situation and to work towards child-labour free Panchayat.

The process has been both challenging and exciting. Children in each of seven Panchayats where CWC works have been through a similar process: they list the various occupations engaged in by children under 18, discuss the pros and cons of each job and determine what is good or bad work. Each Makkala Panchayat has reviewed and ratified the definitions as the basis for working to make their Panchayats/Wards Child-Labour free. Children used the documents in their Centre's and Extension Schools as an empowerment tool, and adults and children in the Panchayat use them to review the Child-Labour status.



In developing their definitions, children did not always realise the extent of the danger in certain specific types of work, saying: "we are already doing this work, so we can continue". They had to be made aware of the various aspects certain jobs, according to age, gender and ability. In other cases, differences of opinion arose between younger and older children or between girls and boys. When discussions among the entire group could not reach consensus, decisions were left to the particular group concerned (e.g.: younger children or girl children).

³⁶ Bhima Sangha. 'Work we Can and Cannot Do' CWC, India.

This process revealed the extent of children’s awareness as well as their views about their work and in what contexts and conditions they like to work. The following are examples from ‘Work We Can and Cannot Do’ for children between 9 and 18 years:

“We can drive the sheep out of the shed, let them graze in the fields around the village and then drive them back into the shed. We know how to keep a watch over them. We can keep them from straying into the cultivated fields. We can manage even when grazing land is thorny and bushy. We who are between 9 and 12 years of age can take about 5 sheep out for herding. We can take them to a distance of 1 km from the village. We can do this work for 2 hours a day. We who are between 12 and 15 years of age can herd 10–12 sheep within a radius of 2 kms. from our homes, for about 3 hours a day. Those of us aged 15–18 years can herd 15–20 sheep within a distance of 2–3 kms from our village. We can do this work for about 5 hours a day but we should have break in between. If we are engaged by other people to do this work, we should get a wage of Rs.20-25 per day”.

(Source: children’s definition on herding sheep, Holagundi Panchayat.)

“The laterite blocks are very heavy. Lifting the blocks can hurt our hands, head, neck and chest. Working in the dusty laterite-cutting site causes respiratory problems. The sharp edges of laterite blocks can hurt our fingers. It is very difficult for us to bear the scorching heat at the site. The blocks can slip from our heads and fall on us. Therefore, we cannot do this work”.

(Source: Children’s definition on work in Laterite Stone Mine, carrying laterite blocks, Alur Panchayat)

In a number of areas children and young people who belong children’s groups are monitoring the type of work children do. They are furthering efforts to protect children from all forms of hazardous labour and to improve working children’s access to quality education.



Press release issued by the Concerned for Working Children: Children challenge fictitious surveys by the Government³⁷

It has come to our notice that false reports declaring several Panchayats in Karnataka as child labour free have been submitted to the district level authorities. The Supreme Court of India had sent a directive to survey the situation of bonded labourers in the country. The local administrations decided to include child labour figures in the survey and as a result a series of incorrect statistics is flooding the District Offices.

The Concerned for Working Children works in five districts of Karnataka. It has come as a shock to us to learn that the Bairumbe Panchayat in Sirsi Taluk and Holagundi Panchayat in Bellary District, where we work, have been declared child labour free by the local administrators. According to our records, based on house-to-house surveys conducted in May 2001, Bairumbe has 162 (under 18) child labourers and Holagundi has 327. Kundapur Taluk, according to the present government survey has 1 child labourer. But the figures in 4 Panchayats in Kundapur where we work, according to our statistics, are 304 child labourers.

In Sirsi, Bhima Sangha, a union of, by and for working children and the CWC have challenged the figures of this survey. We welcome the decision taken by the District Commissioners of Bellary, North Kanara and Udipi who have re-ordered the child labour section of the survey in their jurisdiction. We sincerely hope more of them will follow suit.

Letters of protest have been sent to the District Commissioners of all the five districts in which CWC works. Fictitious surveys such as these defeat their very purpose. They do injustice to children, mislead the public, misinform policy makers and misdirect state programmes.

Such instances have to be exposed in the media in order to redo and rectify the lapses in the present survey and to prevent similar atrocities from occurring in the future. Instead, real achievements such as the Balkur Panchayat, which has been declared Child Labour free, and four other Panchayats, which will become child labour free by the end of the year due to sustained work by CWC need to be recognised and highlighted. The child labour free statuses of the Panchayats we work in are being achieved through a comprehensive, multi-pronged programme and not through a rescue and rehabilitation package.

Protection from Violence, Abuse and Harassment

"Due to poverty and economic problems mothers are migrating and children are being handed over to other caregivers. Some fathers are sexually abusing their own children. Organisations needs to support children to address their issues."

(Girl, member of Child Club, Sri Lanka)

Due to their lack of power, girls and boys are invariably affected by violence, abuse and harassment in the home and in public places (schools, work place, markets etc). The nature of violence affecting girls and boys in different settings varies. However, marginalised girls and boys (e.g. street children, domestic workers, tribal children, children with disabilities, refugee children, children affected by HIV) tend to face higher levels of harassment and abuse.

³⁷ Case study from Annual Report 2002 by CWC, India.

Article 19: Protection from all forms of abuse

The State shall protect the child from all forms of abuse or maltreatment by parents or others responsible for the care of the child. The State must establish appropriate social programmes for the prevention of abuse and the care and support of victims.

Article 34: Protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

The State shall protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, including prostitution and pornography.

Children and young people across the region have united to raise awareness and challenge all forms of violence, abuse and harassment against children. Through their own participatory initiatives children and young people have been able to hold adults accountable and to further practices that increase realisation of their rights to protection.

Children Take Collective Action Against Sexual Harassment, Andhra Pradesh, India

‘In our village the teacher molested a girl. We organised a rally and took a petition to the police station. They arrested that person.’
(Boy, sangha member)

In July 2000 in a village high school in Andhra Pradesh, India a physical education instructor molested a 13 year old dalit girl. The girl complained to her mother, who charged the school. Playing on the children’s loyalties to their teacher, the school authorities mobilised children to stage dharna for the teacher’s release. Most of these children, including the girl affected were members of the Children’s Sangha supported by the Young India Project. When the YIP organiser came to the village the Sangha members discussed the incident and the children formed a fact-finding committee. Once the children gathered more information about the incident they wanted to take action against the teacher. Child representations met with the district police authorities to call for the teacher’s arrest. Although the superintendent of police is a woman who is known for her sensitivity and courage, political pressures led her to try to dissuade the children from proceeding further. Even some of women teachers tried to prevent further action, saying: “harassment of women by men is so common there is no need to make mountains out of anthills”.

YIP, however, continued supporting the children to pursue the case. At the same time, other left wing political parties jumped into the fray. They were more interested in getting an out-of-court settlement. Back at the village, the girl’s brother and sister stopped attending school. Sangha girls started visiting the girl’s house to persuade her mother to let her children continue attending school. Initially the mother chased the girls away, but finally the Sangha members convinced the parents and the girl to return to school. The adult union also took up the issue on behalf of the children and after two months of struggle succeeded in having teacher suspended and finally removed from the school. Unfortunately, the girl left the village and is continuing her studies elsewhere.

Note of Reflection: This is an interesting case example since when the initial allegation was made against the school teacher, the children (lacking adequate information) supported the teacher. However, after being encouraged to find out more, the children set up a ‘fact-finding group’. As a result of what they discovered, the children organised a rally against the school teacher and called for action to be taken against him.

Children's action against a rape case, Andhra Pradesh, India

In September 2000 a 3-year-old child was raped by an adult in Kadri. For the first time, union members and child sangha members became jointly involved. Union members, local press, another local NGO and children from sanghas in six villages united to organise a rally and submit a petition to the police. When the police ridiculed the children's attempts and said that the incident had happened somewhere far from their homes, the children said they were expressing solidarity with the girls' parents who faced violence and that they expected adults to be sensitive to the issue. The police promised to take the accused man into custody immediately, but failed to do so. The children challenged the police for their lack of action and threatened to submit a complaint to the Jamma bhoomi if the accused was not in custody within 10 days. The police then brought the man into custody.

Protection and Prevention of Child Marriage

Children in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nepal have brought up concerns about early child marriage and have organised several action initiatives against it. While children from different socio-cultural settings struggle to convince parents not to let their daughters marry at a young age, children and young people also engage other influential adults in the community to change the overall cultural acceptance of early child marriage.



When children challenge their own or other children's parents, the adults tend to ask: *"Who are you to tell us what to do? We are the parents – we know what is best for our child. In our culture it is best for our daughter to be married now."* Seeking greater influence, children have found that it helps to gain support from influential adults in the community. They have also sought NGO help to

bring together religious leaders, local leaders and local officials to explore the negative impact of child marriage and to develop both preventative and responsive measures. If influential adults become convinced about the negative impact they can begin changing existing practices and social norms in the community.³⁸

³⁸ See section 3.3, Box "A Shishu Parishad Takes Action of Early Child Marriage."

Children’s Perspectives on Child Marriage: Causes, Consequences and Alternatives. Southern India

A study by adults³⁹ on child marriage that incorporated children was conducted in Mathihalli village in Davangere District of Karnataka State in southern India. The study focussed on children’s perspectives of the causes, consequences, alternatives to and changes in the practice. Low levels of awareness and information, and economic and social pressures were among the major causes for the prevalence of early marriage. Leaving school and health problems for the young couple and their children, in addition to marriage breakdown were considered to be some of the consequences. Children’s ideas for stopping the practice included awareness raising efforts with community members and influential adults, education, collective action by children to prevent early child marriages, and more stringent legal action against adults who seek to marry off their young children.

“We can do something with Bhima Sangha, but we need support from local leaders and government. In case one of our friends is about to get married at a young age, we will try to convince him or her or the parents not to do so”. (Bhima Sangha children during group discussion, India)

Findings from the study have been shared with Panchayat level Co-ordinators, field activists, children and community members. Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayat members have resolved to stand against child marriage and not allow it in their lives or in their families. They are campaigning strongly against the practice in their community as well as in neighbouring villages and panchayats. The issue is raised constantly in Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayat meetings and extension schools. The whole community is now more aware of the negative impact of child marriage and fear the children’s challenge as a force against it in the village.

Protection from Alcohol Abuse by Adults in the Family and Community

Children’s groups in diverse parts of India, Sri Lanka and Nepal have prioritised alcohol abuse and its negative impact on children in the family and community. For example, during the national level Children’s Parliament in Sri Lanka children between 12 and 18 made alcohol and drug abuse one of five major issues affecting the country’s children. Apart from disturbing household peace and contributing to domestic violence, children pointed out how alcohol use in the family can disrupt their education, deepen their poverty and increase marginalisation.

“Father, please don’t take the drink. This is not good for our development. When you drink you beat our mother and all our barley is turned into chang.”

(Children’s song, by CCVD members, Ladakh, India)

Children and young people in different areas have organised innovative awareness and action programmes to reduce alcohol abuse and its negative impact.⁴⁰

³⁹ The study was conducted by Dianne Horsting from Wageningen University along with an Indian Research Assistant in collaboration with the Concerned for Working Children, India.

⁴⁰ See section 3.3, Box “The Delhi Child Rights Club, India.”

The Makkala Panchayat closes liquor shops in Keradi Panchayat⁴¹

Nandrolli is a small hamlet in Keradi Panchayat of Udupi Taluk, a remote village of the Western Ghats in Karnataka, India. Typically agrarian, the village lacks modern technology, without proper roads and transport, communication systems or other infrastructure.

Alcoholism was a way of life and a major issue in this area. Besides licensed vendors, liquor was sold in vegetable and grocery shops, by cycle, under trees and in other innovative ways. Though the issue had been raised in various meetings at the panchayat and Taluk level, nobody paid any attention. The Makkala Panchayat pointed out several times during monthly Task Force⁴² meetings that the village had too many arrack (local liquor) shops. The Panchayat ignored this complaint since some of the shops belonged to the Gram Panchayat, which received rent from them. During the Makkala Gram Sabha⁴³ in January 2002, the Makkala Panchayat raised the issue again, identifying it not only as an individual or family problem, but as a community problem that affected the entire village. Prior to meeting at the Gram Sabha the children had collected several case studies of drunkenness and the resulting problems in the village.

Based on their findings the children analysed why alcoholism was a major issue of concern for them, for other children and their communities. They said that alcoholism caused disharmony and violence at home, loss of income ("we can't study at home", "we don't get money for tuition fees, books and stationery"), with children from some homes saying they did not even get sufficient food: "other children make fun of us and teachers say 'your father is an alcoholic'". In addition, the children noted that alcohol causes many health problems, injuries and death. "There are unnecessary expenses for medicines and doctors on account of alcoholism, families get into huge debts, and girl children do not get good bridegrooms due to alcoholism among family members."

Though the children presented their findings at the Gram Sabha, the adult Panchayat members were not moved, nor could they push the issue strongly as an agenda for action.

The Makkala Panchayat raised this again in the following Task Force meeting. But it was brushed aside, the adult members saying: "What is your problem? Some people drink. We can't stop it; we cannot close down the shops because they have licence from the government. What's more, the law does not prohibit anybody from stocking up to 10 bottles of liquor."

For the following Makkala Panchayat meeting the children decided they needed a better plan. They discussed the adults' apathy and why they were ignoring this problem. They decided the only way to 'open their eyes' was to prove it in monetary terms. Their first step was to collect actual quantitative information. The children decided to get the required information as a part of their 'clean the village' campaign. They first cleaned the entire area around the Nandrolli arrack shops. Each day for a week they gathered all the empty arrack sachets near the shops and counted them. They found that an average of 300 packets of arrack were consumed per day. They then calculated the amount of money adults in the community were spending on alcohol.

The children gained the support of certain strategic adults and decided to present their findings during the Independence Day Celebrations at the main school. The Taluk Panchayat members, the headmaster, teachers, other invitees and the entire village

⁴¹ Case Study researched by Lolichen, R.J. (Research Coordinator), CWC and written by Nandana Reddy (Director of Development), CWC, India.

⁴² The Task Force is a structure created through CWC facilitation. The Panchayat's decision-making arm, it is a tripartite body composed of government officials, representatives from the community and businessmen/employers. Elected representatives of the Makkala Panchayat and Bhima Sangha are also members.

⁴³ Children's Village Council meeting with concerned officials to discuss and raise concerns of the children and their community in order to arrive at speedy solutions.

were shocked by what the children told them. They could not imagine the huge amount of money the village was losing. It was inconceivable. The entire gathering felt ashamed that they had to be informed by children, that they as adults had not recognised this issue and that no one, including those in senior positions, had taken any action. A unanimous public response demanded that the concerned authorities take the matter seriously and take stringent and immediate action.

Juvenile Justice

Ongoing structural adjustment programmes and increasing rural to urban migration are leading to growing number of families living in poverty in urban settings across South and Central Asia. Moreover, in countries affected by armed conflict, internal and external displacement has also caused an increase in refugee children in urban areas.

In a world without adult care and protection, the lifestyles of street children (and to a large extent working children and refugee children as well) are characterised by a struggle to survive. Eking out a living to meet their basic needs, these children are vulnerable to harassment, assault, abuse and exploitation. Their difficulties are further compounded by prevailing negative attitudes towards them, which cause further discrimination and a general lack of support from the general public. Street and working children and refugee children are thus often labelled as ‘neglected’ and ‘delinquent’ and brought within the juvenile justice system. Research in the area of juvenile delinquency shows that many situational compulsions, including deprivation, destitution and neglect lead juveniles to drift away from socially accepted norms.

CRC Articles Relevant to the Juvenile Justice System

Article 37: Protection from torture and cruelty

No child shall be subjected to torture, cruel treatment or punishment, unlawful arrest or deprivation of liberty. Both capital punishment and life imprisonment without the possibility of release are prohibited for offences committed by persons under the age of 18 years. Any child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child’s best interests not to do so. A child who is detained shall have legal and other assistance, as well as contact with the family.

Article 40: Administration of Juvenile Justice

A child in conflict with the law has the right to treatment that promotes the child’s dignity and worth, takes the child’s age into account, and aims at his or her re-integration into society. The child is entitled to basic guarantees as well as legal or other assistance for his or her defence. Judicial proceedings and institutional placements shall be avoided whenever possible.

Listening to the statements and experiences of children who have come into contact with the Juvenile Justice system in Asia reveals not only the system’s current ineffectiveness, but worse the discrimination, abuse and neglect that occurs within it.

Street Children's Experiences of Police Treatment and Government Institutions, India

"Police are not good, they should catch the accused - and leave the rest alone."

(Boy ragpicker, Delhi, India)

Street and working children members of the Bal Mazdoor Union in Delhi have described their daily struggles for justice in dealing with the police. Far from receiving police protection, they must protect themselves from police harassment and violence. Struggle to survive, these children are frequently scapegoated as thieves and delinquents and treated unfairly as a result. The children report numerous cases of the police beating them, taking bribes from them, locking them up in cells, harassing them and placing them in government institutions where their rights may be further violated.

"They arrested us because we are Bangladeshi. Our family will come, pay and have us released. They catch us to make money. The police are meant to be for security and protection, but they are always beating us children"

(Working girl, Chandni Chowk).

The street children generally refer to government children's institutions as 'children's jails' *"We call it a jail as we can't get out"* (street children, Delhi). Furthermore, many children have been placed in Homes with poor living conditions, minimal facilities, and in circumstances where abuse and neglect are common.

"I have been beaten and mentally tortured because they call me a thief. I was beaten by the police and by the Remand home staff during my 18-day stay.... I was caught when I was ragpicking.... It was bad in the Remand Home since they used to beat us. Food was not good; they woke us early in the morning and we had to bathe in cold water. I fell sick but they did not give me any medical care. They made us sleep all in the same room and there the older boys would beat the younger ones and do the dirty acts with them.

(Street Boy, age 11, Ragpicker).

In campaigning for change, Bal Mazdoor Union members have organised rallies against police violence and inappropriate Juvenile Justice systems, particularly on Human Rights Day (10th December) and have held meetings with the Human Rights Commissioner. They have been involved in training with the police on child rights and juvenile justice and have taken part in national workshops contributing to the development of recommendations for improving the Juvenile Justice system. Children's ideas for a better Juvenile Justice system have focused on four main areas:

- addressing violations by the police,
- mechanisms to improve children's institutions (homes with good conditions, open door policy where children are treated with respect and their voices are heard),
- development of mechanisms for monitoring and responding to children's rights, and
- efforts to raise public awareness about child right violations.

In Bangladesh Save the Children UK facilitated participatory research with children on the Juvenile Justice system. This process enabled a wide group of children and young people to explore issues relating to children and state violence. They also shared their recommendations with the concerned policy makers.

Children's Participation in Policy Developments on Justice for Children in Bangladesh

In 1999 Save the Children UK undertook a participatory research project with a core group of 14 street children (girls and boys) who had been in jails and government shelter homes. These children involved a wider group of children and young people and NGOs in consultations over a two-year period. In examining the juvenile justice system and making recommendations for change, the children developed a short video called 'Shoshur Bari'. In July 2000 Save the Children UK organised a workshop in Dhaka for representatives of NGOs and government organisations, donor agencies and media to discuss the research findings and the video.

The children who had worked on 'Shoshur Bari' suggested that a similar meeting be organised for children. Thus, in September 2000 120 children between 10 and 18 years old met in Dhaka to discuss 'State Violence Against Children'. From diverse social backgrounds, the participants included privileged children who attend school, children from shelter homes and slum communities, working children and children with disabilities. The children discussed the researchers' main findings and the video and worked in groups to develop a series of recommendations for relevant policy makers, NGOs and the UNCRC committee.

In addition to a list of six general recommendations, the children made specific recommendations for parents, government and legislative organisations, police, courts, jail authorities, NGOs, media and politicians. They also developed a list of actions to be undertaken by children and young people themselves. The recommendations were produced in a short booklet for distribution to the concerned authorities and used to advocate for policy and programme changes. The booklet was also submitted to the UNCRC committee in September 2000 during a meeting in Geneva on 'State Violence Against Children'.

In Tajikistan Save the Children has focused on Child Clubs as a preventative measure to keep children out of crime and the juvenile justice system, to involve them in positive activities and have them return to school.

Health

Article 24: Right to Health

The child has the right to the highest standard of health and medical care attainable. States shall place emphasis on primary and preventable health care, public health education, and the reduction of infant mortality. They shall encourage international co-operation in this regard and strive to see that no child is deprived of access to effective health services.

Various participatory initiatives with children and young people in the region impact upon issues relating to health. In Afghanistan, Save the Children UK has a team of child-focused health educators who have developed child-friendly learning materials to inform children about health issues such as nutrition, diarrhoea and malaria etc., and to mobilise them as health educators. Save the Children US is also doing similar work. Basic Health education is often integrated into child organisation activities. In Delhi, street and working children have formed their own health co-operative. They contribute monthly savings towards an emergency health fund and participate in monthly health workshops on topics like first aid, hygiene, malaria, HIV and drug abuse.

HIV and AIDS

Many children and young people's groups are increasingly promoting awareness and advocacy on issues relating to HIV and AIDs in their local and national communities. For example, children's representatives from different organisations in southern India have developed child-friendly IEC (information education communication) materials on HIV/AIDS. Children have also been engaged in awareness raising, dialogue and action on HIV related issues in village communities through theatre for development. While resistance from adults to children and young people discussing sensitive issues such as HIV continues, the children are encouraging adults to discuss 'taboo' subjects which need to be addressed if children's rights to survival and protection are to be realised.

Adult's resistance to children discussing HIV as 'not appropriate'

During a children's sangha meeting in a south Indian village, the adult Vice President of the Panchayat who was observing the meeting reacted defensively to children speaking of their concerns about HIV.

VP: *"If you are going to discuss something you should know about it. You are not old enough to know about AIDS, so you should not discuss it."*

Boy: *"Social discrimination exists in society because of this issue, so we want to discuss it."*

NGO adult: *"It is not a mistake to discuss it."*

VP: *"I am not saying it is a mistake, but you have to know everything about AIDS before discussing it."*

Girl: *"We know something about it. It is important to discuss."*

Boy: *"We know you can get HIV through injections."*

Boy: *"Due to illegal relationships we can get it from each other and from blood transfusions. We don't get AIDS from living with each other or eating the food someone has touched."*

Village adult: *"There is TB – you can discuss about TB also. Why do you want to discuss about AIDS? We should treat other diseases and learn good habits."*

Girl: *"This AIDS is a world wide problem, not just a problem in our own country."*

Boy: *"Even children can be affected, even if it is not their mistake."*

In Nepal Save the Children UK has supported the development of a social movement against HIV/AIDS in Jhapa, Achham and Morang districts. Save staff initiated projects concerning HIV. They increased community members' access to information, mobilised some local volunteers and encouraged them to reflect on the information given and their own experiences. The volunteers have since taken over management of the projects. They organise various activities to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS in their community and to identify more volunteers among their friends and peers to strengthen the movement.

Children and youth involved in a social movement against HIV/AIDS in Nepal

This social movement in Jhapa began with a Save the Children Programme Officer (PO) approaching some VDC members. He explained that he wanted to initiate a social movement and asked them to call together a few adolescents. Twenty young people aged 17 to 24 (10 men and 10 women) were invited to the meeting, where they were informed about the new project. This group discussed it with friends and neighbours. A few weeks later the programme officer returned to the village and organised a five-day training session for 30 young people had expressed interest in becoming a 'Social Volunteer Against AIDS' (SoVAA). They started working as volunteers, spreading information and inviting more people to join their movement.

The Programme Officer next approached a school in the same VDC. He explained the project concept and asked for 20 children, aged twelve to sixteen (ten boys and ten girls) to be called. He informed them about the movement and they immediately had a three-day participatory training session on reproductive health and HIV, run jointly by the PO and the older SoVAA. If they wanted to become SoVAA, they were asked to identify more SoVAA and to raise awareness.

Since the first SoVAA were identified through the VDC or schools, they were mainly well-educated young people, often at the top of their class. The movement thus immediately became concentrated on a small elite sector of the community, rather than all children. The SoVAA have now started working to identify marginalised groups, however, especially non-school-going children and disabled children. This is not an easy task. The project has proved that building a movement and sharing information works best among peers: people of the same age, sex and often social and economic status. The SoVAA realise they will have to work much harder to identify children and adolescents who are of a different social standing. A danger is of the higher classes feeling they can 'dictate' to the lower ones, thus destroying the movement's participatory nature. So far this has not happened, and the young people have been surprisingly capable of working together as equals, transcending even the caste system.

A main aim of the SoVAA has been to ensure that young people know about safe behaviour, especially safe sexual behaviour. The youth have now set up a village-level network of volunteers and are developing a district level network so they can support each other and share ideas and experiences across the whole district. This movement of young people and adults has succeeded in raising awareness of HIV/AIDS, reducing discrimination facing those with HIV and increasing understanding among young people and adults about how they can protect themselves.

The SoVAA's activities have made a significant difference on their own lives and the lives of many in their community. They analyse how their activities are impacting the lives of their peers by seeing at how things are changing in their community, whether people are using clean razor blades and needles, and whether people are less shy in talking about HIV/AIDS.

In Bangladesh, Save the Children US have developed a project called 'KAISHAR' (Knowledge and Attitude Improvement of Sexual Health for Adolescent's Responsibility) to improve adolescent's reproductive and sexual health. To achieve this, the project seeks to improve adolescents' help-seeking behaviour and utilisation of helpful sources of care through increased access to information on health and health services, and through support for informal sources of care and support, among peers, parents and teachers.

Two important strategies have been adopted, one with adolescents and the other with their parents. Participatory learning and action (PLA) sessions are facilitated with peer groups of young people. This allows them to participate in a process of self-discovery, shared learning and collective action on reproductive and sexual health topics. The second strategy is with adults; it involves workshops during which educational and training activities are facilitated with parents to increase their knowledge of adolescent reproductive and sexual health. It also improves parents' ability to comfortably talk with their adolescent child on related issues. A third strategy is also being planned to reach other stakeholders who influence young people's lives. This approach will involve community-wide communication strategies for disseminating reproductive and sexual health messages, as well as organising discussions and training with other key adults, such as public and private health care providers, religious leaders and teachers.

Emergencies

Article 38: Children Affected by Armed Conflict

State Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that children under the age of 15 years of age have no direct part in hostilities. No child below 15 shall be recruited into the armed forces. States shall also ensure the protection and care of children who are affected by armed conflict as described in relevant international law.

Article 39: Promoting Recovery

The State has an obligation to ensure that child victims of armed conflicts, torture, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation receive appropriate treatment for their recovery and social reintegration.

"War is causing all our troubles. It has taken our schools and our houses and made us leave our land. The hospitals are ruined, the farms are destroyed, the children become orphans and desperate families are forced to sell their children. People become disabled and the women are left widowed and traumatised. The children are forced to work on the streets or go to Iran and Pakistan to find work."

(Street working child in Kabul, Afghanistan)

“When we were displaced we had no food to eat. We stopped going to school. We still live in a camp.”

(Boy, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka)



Due to their young age and lack of social power, children and young people are often among the most severely affected by adverse circumstances such as war and disaster. Modern policy and practice has clearly embraced the ethical and moral view that children have a right to special consideration in emergencies. The Convention on the Rights of the Child demands that children’s best interests be of paramount concern in determining all actions that concern children. However, people have conflicting views over what constitutes what is best for children and how to deliver it. Nevertheless, in terms of psychosocial assistance to children and youth living in adversity, research is growing and informal consensus has been reached about good practice among many child-serving agencies (see Boyden and Mann, 2000). Many humanitarian agencies working in emergency contexts now emphasize resilience, and participatory non-medical approaches to respond to the psychosocial needs of children and young people.

‘Resilience’ refers to an individual’s capacity to adapt and remain strong in the face of adversity. It depends on both individual and group strengths, and is highly influenced by supportive elements in the wider environment. The way individuals experience and cope with the adversity (including war, disaster or violence) depends on social, cultural and

political aspects of their situation. Thus outsiders must help local caregivers to work from within the 'local idiom of distress' (Lowry, 2000). Children's vulnerability, resilience or coping are not merely functions of health, sickness, or pathological behavioural reactions, but also of beliefs, feelings, cognitive and social competencies and actions (see Boyden and Mann, 2000)

Although traditional western approaches in emergency contexts tend to be highly medicalised, emphasising individualised therapeutic care of traumatised children in clinical settings, more recent strategies place greater emphasis on structural or community-level measures. Especially in post-conflict settings, these aim at social reconciliation, healing and rebuilding a sense of community through the restoration of normal every day routines and activities (Boyden and Mann, 2000). As much as 80% of the so-called mental health needs of a population affected by organised violence may be addressed by non-mental health interventions that attend to basic needs, restoration of the rule of law, safety, security and human rights (Lowry, 2000).

Furthermore, children living in difficult circumstances, including situations of conflict, are increasingly being recognised and involved as social actors with valid insights and skills that contribute to positive response efforts:

'It is vital to recognise that if overcoming stressful life events involves beliefs, feelings, competencies and actions, children's own perspectives on adversity and the strategies they employ for their own protection are critical to coping and resilience. It is perhaps in the context of adversity when support for children's own efforts is most crucial, since taking away even the slightest element of control from children's lives under such circumstances can be very damaging.... Finally, children do not always understand, experience or respond to misfortune in the same way that adults do. Therefore, disregarding children's perspectives can result in misplaced interventions that do not address children's real problems or concerns'

(Boyden and Mann, 2000, p.20).

Several innovative programming efforts in South Asia have successfully involved children and young people as social actors in emergency situations. The example of empowering

Afghani girls and boys in Kotkai Refugee Camp in Pakistan⁴⁴ shows how girls and boys can play a positive role as social agents in their own right, and can influence their situation in a positive way. It highlights the benefits of broader community participation and empowerment within an emergency context.

Women, men, youth, girls and boys are all encouraged to reflect on their situation, to question power, to work together to plan action and engage with the camp governance officials. Thus they take on an important role in determining structures, services and actions to increase their well-being and help develop their communities. Using participatory learning methods and reflect action groups with different community stakeholders, including girls and boys of different age groups, also made possible more sensitive and effective monitoring and action concerning child protection issues.

Save the Children UK has also supported the development of Children’s Forums in Bhutanese refugee camps in Jhapa, Nepal since 1997, increasing space for children to implement activities for their development. Children were democratically elected to the Forum with the supervision of the Camp Management Committee members. In addition to girls and boys aged 12 to 18 years being elected to the Forum, a Junior Forum for children aged 5-11 years was also started.

⁴⁴ See section 3.3, Box “Girl and Boy’s Participation in Refugee Camp Governance, NWFP, Pakistan” and section 3.5, Box “Children and Adult Participation in Reflect Action Groups Enhancing Their Protection, Refugee Camp, Pakistan”.

Children and Adult Participation in Reflect Action Groups Enhancing Their Protection, Refugee Camp, Pakistan⁴⁵

In response to the new influx of refugees from Afghanistan into Pakistan following the US attack on Afghanistan after September 11th 2001, Save the Children Alliance began an initiative to further children's protection and well-being. A Child Protection Monitoring Tool was developed by Save the Children members and piloted by Save US in refugee camps in Balochistan, and by Save UK (in collaboration with Social Welfare Cell of the Commissionerate of Afghanistan Refugees and Save Sweden) in Kotkai camps in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

In Kotkai camp, the child protection work evolved over time. Save the Children UK developed visual participatory tools for exploring issues identified within the child protection monitoring tool. Then, using 'reflect-action' groups the local community, including women, men, youth, girls and boys was empowered to address their important concerns. 'Reflect-Action' is defined as 'a structured participatory learning process, which facilitates people's critical analysis of their environment, placing empowerment at the heart of sustainable and equitable development. Through the creation of democratic spaces and the construction and interpretation of locally generated texts, people build their own analysis of local and global reality and re-define power relationships (in both public and private spheres)'⁴⁶.

Save the Children UK provided capacity building for a local team to facilitate Reflect-Action circles to ensure community based child protection monitoring and response. This work has given children in Kotkai confidence, voice and influence to address their issues. Girls and boys have demonstrated in practical ways that they are capable of analysing their own situation, identifying concerns and developing strategies to address them. Within months, the children won the confidence of the refugee camp management and relief agencies, and established themselves as valuable partners in camp administration. Children raised their concerns with relief agencies and camp administrators at fortnightly meetings. They shared their visual presentations and sometimes used drama. They also kept the wider community members informed about adult responses

The specific issues children explored and presented to officials have include the education system, children under stress, disease, water shortages, drugs and early marriages. Responses by the camp and relief agency administrators have led to improved school facilities, changes in teacher behaviour, checks on corporal punishment, awareness of early child marriage and gender related violence, increased access to hygienic sanitation, and a more adequate supply of water.

An analysis of Save the Children's work in Kotkai by community members clustered the impact into three categories: 1) empowerment, 2) change in social behaviour and 3) capacity building.

1) Empowerment: Community members felt the Reflect-Action gave them confidence to communicate with any individual regardless of their status or position, and to take their own initiatives. Girls and women felt their mobility had increased, and girl's registration in schools had also increased. As community members gained more understanding of the camp governance structures and the roles and responsibilities of different agencies they could develop linkages to agencies to address issues affecting them.

2) Changes in Social Behaviour: Community members felt the greatest impact had been in terms of better social behaviour in the camp. Generally there was less fighting on petty issues. Children and young people said that they had recognised the negative impacts of fighting at Reflect-Action circles and had resolved to consciously try to live in peace. Community members were more able to recognise and avoid bad company, particularly individuals involved in drug use, theft or other anti-social activity. They demonstrated increased social responsibility by trying to help each other. The community began providing human

⁴⁵ From: 'Child Protection: The Kotkai Experience. Save the Children UK, Pakistan, and 'Child Participation in Camp Management: Kotkai Refugee Camp'. Save the Children. 2002.

⁴⁶ 'Child Participation in Camp Management: Kotkai Refugee Camp'. Save the Children. 2002.

resource support to agencies to maintain the camp’s physical infrastructure, to run youth groups, children’s and women’s groups, and reconciliatory jirgas, to maintain libraries and recreational parks. School attendance of girls and boys had increased.

3) Capacity Building: Community members had gained skills in situational analysis and developing solutions. Community members know which officials to present their problems to in order for them to be addressed. Communication has increased as officials listen more and try to respond effectively. Through the process some women have learned to write, increasing their literacy. Overall, community members felt they had increased their general knowledge.

Save the Children felt that child protection through children’s participation should be initiated as a long-term development strategy. They plan to introduce children to participatory video to further children’s advocacy on issues affecting them.

Within Afghanistan and Sri Lanka Save the Children and their partners have also made interesting efforts to seek to understand children’s perspectives of conflict and its impact on their lives. They are trying to respond to the positive resources that children draw upon to cope with the impacts, and to promote their well-being.

Research Projects on Children Affected by Crisis in Afghanistan

Two research projects with children have been carried out in order to inform ongoing programme developments of Save the Children members in Afghanistan. One was done in 1998 by Save the Children Alliance members in collaboration with UNICEF, and the other more recent ‘Children and Crisis’ project was by Save the Children US.

The earlier study seeking children’s perspectives on the impact of conflict on children in Afghanistan was undertaken by researchers for Save the Children (Sweden, US and UK) and UNICEF⁴⁷. Focusing on children’s rights to survival, protection, development and participation, almost 500 semi-structured interviews with children aged 6-18 years of age (equal numbers of girls and boys) across five zones of Afghanistan were conducted in rural and urban settings. Particular attention was given to seek the opinions of children with disabilities, displaced children, working children and child soldiers. Building upon children’s responses, recommendations included programmes which increase children’s safety and security, support parents’ and adult guardians to earn an adequate livelihood and to develop a regular routine for children that fosters their overall development, and international and local advocacy for peace. It was also recommended that agencies make greater efforts to build on children and young people’s capacity, and to harness their optimism and skills. In addition, programmes should take care to focus on the most marginalized children, taking into consideration gender, disability and existing conflicts.

In 2001 Save the Children US initiated a research project on ‘Children in Crisis’ in Kabul. As part of the research, six sessions were to be facilitated on different topics with a group of 8-10 children. The research is being facilitated with children’s groups from across all districts in Kabul. Session one encourages the children to share their views about a very happy day and a very sad day in their life. They express themselves through drawings. The facilitators encourage the children to explain their drawings and why they represent their happiest or saddest day. All the children’s pictures and contributions are kept in a ‘research box’ – indicating to the children that their work, their writings and drawings, are being kept safely and respectfully. Another session has the children draw around a volunteer child to make a big body. They design the body to represent their likes and dislikes,

⁴⁷ See Patricia Selleck and Sami Haashemi (1998) ‘The Impact of Conflict on Children in Afghanistan.’ Save the Children (Sweden, US and UK) and UNICEF .

where they can and can't go, their concerns and how this impacts their body: when do they face anxiety? Where is the feeling? — in the heart? the lungs? the mind?). This activity helped children expressed their fear of dogs, of fighting among family members, their worries about where they would get food, and so on. Another session has children make a map of their community. They are encouraged to highlight the most important thing in their community and any areas that cause them fear. Some children revealed their fear of the army - which they find dangerous as they drop bombs; electricity power points, as they fear being killed from high voltage; roads as they are afraid of accidents. Once the information is collected it will be analysed. The findings will be used to design appropriate programmes with children.

Children's Study and Development of Psycho-Social Programmes for Children's Well-Being, Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka Save the Children Norway has focused on programmes to promote children's psycho-social well-being. In order to understand children's ideas and the impact of living in conflict they facilitated a 'Listening to Children' study, initially in Batticaloa and more recently in Vavniya. This study gave children an opportunity to interact and share their opinions about their lives through talk shops, informal discussions and discussions in schools. A team of trained volunteers involved 1800 children in Batticaloa and a similar number in Vavniya in each study. Children discussed many dimensions of their lives, including their parents, families, education, dreams, death, happiness etc.

An attractive document summarising children's views from Batticaloa has been produced and is being distributed to influence programme and policy developments. Information with implications on programme development includes children's interest in going to school for quality education, their emphasis on the importance of good family relations and the negative impact of quarrels in the home and loss of siblings and family members, and their need for someone to care for them and listen to them.

Some children from the study have also been involved in three-day camp experiences. This brought together 100 children from different communities, enhancing the peace process. Future camp activities will all be planned by a Children's Advisory Committee of children from different schools in Vavniya.

Building upon the children's attitudes, Save the Children Norway has also developed Psycho-Social Sensitisation and Training Programmes for people responsible for children. Non-clinical, integrated approaches are promoted. Rather than having 'psycho-social workers', adults who work with children in existing capacities — teachers, doctors, probation workers — are trained to have understanding and skills to promote children's psycho-social well-being. In addition, they must also be able to address the wider societal impact of the conflict, such as family break-up, migration, increased poverty and breakdown in services.

Two types of programme are run, a short 'Sensitisation Programmes', and a 12-month Training Programmes. The short programmes on psycho-social well-being are designed to reach as many officials and families as possible (NGOs; Government such as Education, Social Services, Probation, Health, Police; and religious leaders) to help adults work more effectively with children who have faced severe experiences. The 12-month 'Supportive Counselling' course involves five days a month residential training (on long weekends), and targets Government officials (probation officers, child rights officials etc) and NGO staff.

“If we want to survive we should get rid of bullets, pistols, fighter planes and war.”

(Child, Afghanistan)

“If we listen to children and act on their opinions there will be peace not war. In Afghanistan children’s priority is peace.”

(Save the Children colleague, Afghanistan)

The right of children to participate actively is the foundation of children’s involvement in peace making. Children are potentially among the most powerful peace builders, and we should listen to them, learn from them and support them in their endeavours.

“I hate fighting. One day I was walking on a path. Suddenly I stopped near a tree. Two birds were fighting on the branches of that tree. In the end they both fell down and a cat ate them. This is what fighting does!”

(Child, Afghanistan)

“Peace is not sold anywhere in the world, otherwise I would have bought it for my country.”

(Girl, Afghanistan)

In the national survey and in the Sri Lankan Children’s Parliament, children and young people prioritised issues of armed conflict and its negative impact on children. The conflict had caused displacement, affected access to basic services including education and health and had impacted upon their physical and mental development. Most children living in the north and the east had experienced conflict for their entire lifetimes. Nevertheless, girls and boys across the country continue to dream of peace and seek an active role in the peace process.

“Children want and have a right to be involved in the peace process. They have high expectations and unless they are consulted and play their part in contributing to the plans for peace they will not understand why progress is slow on issues that directly affect them. Giving children and their communities ‘a say’ in the rehabilitation priorities will do much to ensure that relevant actions are taken and understood.”

(Save the Children, Sri Lanka, The Sri Lankan Children’s Challenge Report, p.31)

Centre for Performing Arts (CPA), Sri Lanka

The CPA was founded 20 years ago in Jaffna. It aims to increase reconciliation through art and cultural programmes particularly focusing on children and youth. Through awareness raising and skill building, children learn to express themselves and their experiences, particularly relating to war and trauma. Drama, poetry and other cultural arts, enable children and young people to share with other members of the community. They can become peace agents. Inter-cultural exchanges, joint performances and campfires are also organised, as supportive environments for children from different communities to express their feelings about war. Seminars on children's rights, women's rights and the impact on their lives have also been organised. In addition children (aged 5-18) and youth (aged 18-35) receive training so they can reach other children and young people like themselves.

CPA work through 20 units around the country. Eleven of the units are run by CPA and another nine are "Children's Zones of Peace" (part of an initiative undertaken with UNICEF). These units reach 2500 children and youth and are building the foundations of peace, fostering connection among the young minds of Sri Lanka.

Interactions and cultural programmes remove mutual animosity removed. When "darshana" (a wordless play) was being shown in different locations around the country, a child from Jaffna said that before he watched the drama the only Sinhalese people he had ever known were the soldiers at the checkpoint. All his impressions were based on them, but now that he had met children he realised that Sinhalese people were like he was. Likewise, during one of the camps a Sinhalese child said: *"I thought every Tamil person was a tiger. Now, having lived together I realise they are like me.... And we wonder what have these adults been fighting for?"*

CPA has a special programme with Save the Children in Jaffna to promote sharing of capabilities and to prepare children in creative arts, particularly drama. Through their own Child Clubs the children have also been involved in landmine awareness programmes.

Children and young people have also been active in distributing goods in relief and emergency contexts, e.g. following the cyclone in Orissa, and in raising awareness about land mines in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. Save the Children and other NGO partners have developed child-friendly information and participatory training materials on landmine awareness. Landmine education project games and activities are intended to stimulate children's thinking and encourage active learning, peer learning and increased decision-making skills.

Save the Children US has also encouraged building safe playgrounds for children in Afghanistan, acknowledging the importance of play and social stimulation in children's lives. By involving girls, boys and children with disabilities in designing the playgrounds more inclusive playgrounds for all children are developed. Adolescents and young adults are encouraged to organise sports and activities for younger children, bringing about more opportunities for them to experience a sense of competence. The playgrounds also serve as a focal point for further outreach work with girls, boys and their communities.

3.6 Conclusion

The case studies detailed in this booklet explore the positive experiences Save the Children has had with children’s participation in the region. From child-oriented and focused organisations at the neighbourhood or community level, to programmes involving the family unit, schools and other community groups, there has been a concurrent positive impact on children’s personal development. This has presented an opportunity to play a greater role in claiming their rights, as well as the created space for children in decision making bodies. Broader programming as well as work in different sectors, has given young people hands-on experience in governance, encouraging them to set up their own network of children’s organisations in many places. These positive examples of child participation in arenas involving their social roles and development have raised awareness not only of the value of young people’s input but also the constructive role they can play in their societies.



Appendix 10

Guidance Materials to Support Children and Young People's Participation in National Plans of Action

Extracts from Guidance Materials to Support Children and Young People's Participation in National Plans of Action
Developed by Save the Children in Consultation with Children and Young People:

To help achieve the global plan outlined in 'A World Fit for Children' (outcome document of the UN Special Session), governments agreed to prepare National Plans of Action (NPA) for children by the end of 2003. These National Plans of Action will explain how each government will work towards achieving the goals and targets of the global plan within their country.

Guidance materials for governments and civil society to support children and young people's involvement in the National Plan of Action process have been developed by Save the Children through consultations with children and young people. Over 4500 children and young people from 14 countries (including India, Nepal and Bangladesh) shared their views about what they thought governments, civil society and young people should do.

The summary guide for governments (see www.savethechildren.net for full text) includes: reasons why young people should be involved in the development of NPAs and suggestions as to how governments can create an environment which is conducive to the genuine involvement of children and young people in the development of NPAs, as well as the implementation and monitoring of NPAs.

Some of the children and young people's suggestions about how children can be involved in the development of NPAs included:

- Involve children from the start and encourage their involvement throughout the whole process
- Provide all the relevant information on children's issues and the NPA process in simple language and circulate it widely e.g. by radio or a special newsletter.
- Use 'child-friendly' approaches to encourage children and young people's participation – where necessary, change the way adult procedures work.
- Be open about the resources that are available to support the process
- Special considerations need to be made to ensure all young people are part of the processes, including young people with disabilities, children under the age of 12, rural and urban children, boys and girls, children in armed conflict, orphans and marginalized young people.
- Make the process as fair and honest as possible
- Make sure that the government officials involved in developing the National Plan of Action understand the importance of children and young people's involvement, are trained in child rights and know how to support children and young people's participation
- Children and young people need to know more about how governments work and how they can contact the right people – who, where and how?
- Governments should consider how they could listen more carefully to children and young people's views and set up mechanisms and channels to make this happen. Once they have done that, they should make sure that all children and young people know about these channels of communication.
- Remember that action is as important as talk – deliver on commitments
- Governments should consider setting up a place in government with particular responsibility for children and youth such as a Minister for Children or a Children's Office.
- It is important to follow up on consultations with children, to let them know what happened next and what progress is being made

Furthermore, in contributing to the implementation and monitoring of the National Plans of Action, children’s suggestions included:

- Creation of a permanent, representative group of children and young people to be in continuous contact with the NPA process
- Children could work with their own organisations and other adult community-based and national organisations to review and monitor implementation at different levels
- Through regular feedback meetings by government to discuss progress in implementing the National Plan of Action
- ‘Monitoring days’ could be organised to see if what was agreed in the National Plan of Action was being implemented.

Furthermore, a summary guide for civil society (see www.savethechildren.net for full text) relating to the support of parents, community associations and NGOs in supporting children and young people’s participation in the NPA process was also produced. Some of children and young people’s key suggestions relating to support from civil society groups included an emphasis on increasing their: access to information and resources (including money, places to meet and computers), training in skills (e.g. facilitation, advocacy and negotiation) and opportunities to share information and approaches with other groups of children and young people. Furthermore, they also felt that civil society had a role to play in:

- Moral and financial support for children and young people to stay involved
- Persuading government that children and young people’s involvement is practical and worthwhile
- Training of children to facilitate the maximum participation of children and young people in the NPA process
- Training of adults in government to overcome their resistance to children and young people’s involvement and to give them the confidence and skills to encourage children’s involvement
- Support to capacity-building with child-led and youth-led organisations
- Acting as an intermediary and facilitator between government and children and young people
- Supporting peer (child-led) research to produce evidence to support children’s advocacy
- Producing child friendly versions of key documents
- Working with children and young people to follow up on government promises and hold governments accountable
- Organising meetings to share information and consult with children and young people
- Helping children and young people learn more about how governments work and how they can contact the right people – who, where and how?
- Taking special action to ensure all young people are part of the processes



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