

STRATEGY STRENGTHENING MEANINGFUL CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION



The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children

Children and young people are a major part of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children. Never before did humankind have the capacity to do so much good, to reach so many, to work with the poor and the oppressed, to empower them, and to promote justice and human rights for all, as we do today.

Let us commit ourselves, therefore, on Universal Children's Day, to harness the power of our religious traditions and moral leadership to liberate all God's children from poverty. Let us raise children to their full human potential. This is not just our duty, but the ultimate mark of our great human civilization.
Kul Chandra Gautam Convening Chair

Introduction

To attain our vision “**The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children envisions¹ a world in which all children have a joyous childhood: where they can play, learn and grow, where they are loved and cared for, where their health and safety are protected and where their gender is not a liability -- a world in which their human rights are protected and fulfilled**” and our mission is to “Celebrate on Universal Children’s Day – 20 November of each year – the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children which connects people and organizations to protect children. Improving the welfare of children is an urgent global challenge. By working with the world’s diverse faith communities, governments and non-governmental organizations can accelerate and magnify their efforts to help children worldwide.”

We firmly believe that we need to work with children and youth through transformative strategies² and inclusive participatory methodologies³ in promoting their human rights and ending violence thereby promoting the goals of the World Day of Prayer and Action.

This strategy have the following components that bring out the strategic needs, rational and direction for The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children to strengthen meaningful participation of girls and boys and young women and young men.

- Background to child and youth participation
- Strengthening child and youth participation in ending violence against children
- Life cycle approach to child/youth participation
- Strategic direction for strengthening child and youth participation
- Basic requirements for the implementation of the right of the child to be heard

¹ <http://dayofprayerandaction.org/who-we-are/vision-and-mission>

² Strategies that place the right holder in the centre of the positive social change process and empower them to actively participate in the transformational process of claiming their human rights as individual and in collectives by participating in decisions that affect them.

³ Inclusive participatory methodologies are based on experiential learning cycle (learning by doing) that places the learner in the core of the learning/educational process through applying inclusive, participatory and non-discriminatory (respecting diversity and culture) learning methodologies in an enabling and supportive learning environment.

1. Background to Child and Youth Participation

Participation⁴ is one of the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child⁵, yet it is arguably taken less seriously than the other key principles of universality, the best interests of the child, and survival and development. To some extent, child and young people's participation may be seen as more controversial, challenging or difficult to implement than measures supporting child survival, development and protection because it is based on presenting children as rights holders rather than as recipients of charity. Also, there is less experience in this area among the child rights community than in survival, development and protection. Children and young people's participation has a vital role in empowering them in their own development. Through participation, girls and boys can learn vital life-skills and knowledge and take action to prevent and address abuse and exploitation. Participation initiatives are strengthened when children know and understand their rights. Consulting with children and young people is critical to ensure that child survival, development and protection measures are adequate and appropriate



The Convention⁶ does not use the term 'participation' or explicitly state that children have a right to participate – except as a goal for children with disabilities (article 23). But it requires that their views be heard in relation to all matters that affect them and that their views be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity (article 12). This right is part of a broader body of participation rights that children hold, starting with the right to freedom of expression (article 13), thought, conscience and religion (14), association (15), the right to privacy (16) and access to appropriate information (17) that provides the basis for the child's right to participate.

⁴ *The State Of The World's Children | Special Edition, UNICEF, 2009*

⁵ *Child includes all people less than 18 years of age, as stipulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).*

⁶ <http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/>

Article 12⁷

- 1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.**
- 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.**

The Convention refers to children's "evolving capacity" for decision-making – a revolutionary concept in international law and this has profoundly influenced the practice of organizations working in the field. **The right of children to participate is a fundamental component of respecting them as holders of their own rights.** Being able to influence decisions that affect an individual is one of the defining characteristics of human rights principles. When it comes to designing opportunities for children to participate, conditions need to be adjusted in accordance with a child's age and maturity (article 5). They should not be pressured, constrained or influenced in ways that might prevent them from freely expressing their opinions or leave them feeling manipulated.

2006: The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children²
"103. Recommends that States actively engage with children and respect their views in all aspects of prevention, response and monitoring of violence against them, taking into account Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children's organizations and child-led initiatives to address violence guided by the best interests of the child should be supported and encouraged"

"Youth should be given a chance to take an active part in the decision-making of local, national and global levels."
United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon

⁷ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

Effective and meaningful participation depends on many factors, including the child's developing capabilities, the openness of parents and other adults to dialogue, and safe spaces within the family, community and society that allow such dialogue. It also depends on stakeholders being willing to take children's views into consideration.

The 2006 UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children⁸ was the first United Nations study to consult with children and reflect and incorporate their views and recommendations. Children and adolescents participated in national, regional and international consultations, together with policymakers. To disseminate the findings of the study, child-friendly versions were created for a range of age groups. Children and adolescents were also strongly represented at the November 2008 Third World Congress against the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). **It is increasingly being recognized that consulting children and adolescents is a practical way to ensure that policies and practices affecting them are effective**

Participation in decision-making is a key priority area of the UN agenda on youth. In 1995, on the tenth anniversary of International Youth Year, the United Nations strengthened its commitment to young people by adopting the World Programme of Action for Youth⁹ (WPAY), an international strategy to more effectively address their problems and increase opportunities for participation in society. The international community has reaffirmed its commitment to youth participation through UN General Assembly resolution 58/133, which reiterates the "importance of the full and effective participation of youth and youth organizations at the local, national, regional and international levels in promoting and implementing the World Programme of Action and in evaluating the progress achieved and the obstacles encountered in its implementation".

⁸ <http://www.unviolencestudy.org/>

⁹ <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpay2010.pdf>

2. Strengthening Child and Youth Participation in Ending Violence against Children



Protection of children against violence can only be efficient if it is done in dialogue with all relevant stakeholders, such as United Nations partners, civil society INCLUDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, national governments, regional organizations, parliamentarians and national independent institutions on children's rights. Our task is critical and we must move ahead with a sense of urgency and impatience"

Marta Santos País, SRSG on Violence against Children

There have been many efforts that have led to supporting and strengthening of children and adolescent's participation in

programmes/ projects that aim at ending sexual exploitation including their participation in the development and implementation of the National Plan of Actions on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Trafficking. Children and adolescent's participation gained momentum and received support in the UN Secretary General's study on Violence against Children. *'Child participation' means children thinking for themselves, expressing effectively, and interacting in a positive way with other people. It means involving boys and girls in the responses/decisions that affect their lives, the lives of their family and community and the larger society in which they live.*

"Children and young people's participation is a continuous process for positive social change in partnership with girls/boys as social actors (as individuals and in groups) from diverse backgrounds. It supports them to positively interact and dialogue in decisions that affects them, amongst themselves and with adults, through enabling and inclusive processes and environments that apply participatory and inclusive methodologies, thereby, contributing to individual development and positive social change in making human rights based society achieving social justice¹⁰.

Meaningful adolescent's participation is characterised by¹¹:

- *An ethical approach and a commitment to transparency, honesty and accountability (impact on decision-making).*
- *A safe approach in which children's protection rights are safeguarded.*

¹⁰ Ravi Karkara, Keynote Speech, Strengthening Children's Participation in Social Transformation at the IV World Congress on Child Rights, Puerto Rico, 2010

¹¹ Adapted from the Workshop Report On Child Participation in the UN Study on Violence against Children, International Save the Children Alliance

- *A non-discriminatory approach that ensures that all adolescents (regardless of their class, gender, disability, language, ethnicity, sexual preference, religion, economic or other status etc.) have an equal opportunity to be involved.*
- *An 'child and adolescent-friendly' approach which enables them to contribute to the best of their abilities (adequate information, availability of venues, procedures and support that encourage rather than hinder adolescent's involvement).*
- *Commitment to support follow-up and continuity of adolescent's opportunities to strengthen their endeavours and realize their actions.*

The mandate of the Secretary General Special Representative on Violence against Children¹² creates an opportunity to work with girls, boys, young women and young men to be meaningfully involved in creating protective environments in all setting family/care facilities, community, educational, work, internet and media.

An Example of Children Participation on Violence Prevention¹³

TANGAIL, BANGLADESH

Shishu Parishad Takes Action on Early Child Marriages

In Tangail, Bangladesh, Shishu Parishads (Children's Councils) use various means to raise awareness to prevent child marriages. They use local media like theatre, along with newsletters and TV to create awareness. This is followed by extensive community discussions which highlight negative aspects of this practice.

Actions

Children, mostly girls, from different Shishu Parishads created a play on the theme of child marriage. Overcoming traditional barriers, the girls' groups in the village confidently presented their drama to a crowd of about 200, including male village elders. The play highlights the negative impact of child marriage and the range of actions Shishu Parishad members are taking to end this practice.

In another village in the same area, a group of girls and one boy presented a drama telling the true story of a girl from the village who was married at 13 years of age. She became pregnant and although she had health problems during her pregnancy her in-laws prevented her from seeing a doctor. She had a miscarriage and died at the age of 14. Shishu Parishad members had previously informed the media about the case and a TV channel reported on it.

The children in this village also undertook a survey of child marriages in their village. They found that 65 children under the age of 18 had been married during the past year. A nine-year-old girl

¹² <http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/>

¹³ S Jabeen and R Karkara, ACTION! – Analysis of Children's own action to end Violence against Girls and Boys - case studies from various parts of the world

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was the youngest, with the majority being 13 or 14 years old. The children have shared their findings with adults and taken part in discussions on the negative impact of child marriage. They sought support from local non-governmental organisations and Save the Children Australia to bring together religious and community leaders and other influential people to form a committee against early child marriage.

Impact/Outcome

Members of the Upzila level Shishu Parishad know of five cases where the children have succeeded in preventing early child marriage. Child journalists have written about these cases in various newsletters.

The need to strengthen youth participation has been highlighted in the Outcome document of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding (July 2011)

- ***“(i) Adopt appropriate laws and develop strategies for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against youth, in all settings, and to ensure the implementation of policies and adequately resourced programmes on ending violence against youth, including initiatives to support youth action to end violence through youth-led organizations and networks;***
- ***(ii) Encourage Member States, the international community, the United Nations system and the private sector to support youth-led organizations in achieving openness and inclusiveness and to strengthen their capacity to participate in national and international development activities”***

3. Life Cycle Approach to Child and Youth Participation

The strategy is based on the lifecycle approach of child and youth development. Participation varies according to a child's evolving capacities. However, children can participate in different ways from the earliest ages. Competence comes through experience, and is not suddenly endowed at a certain age. Our earliest interactions establish our sense of who we are and the confidence and skills to express ourselves and negotiate our rights. Tiny day-to-day events lay the foundation for participation.



Efforts to further realisation of children's rights, including their participation rights, require consideration of Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes (see Arnold, 2002). Building on work with children in the early years, a life cycle approach to children and young people's participation can be explored, enabling girls and boys participation at different ages and abilities. A life cycle approach encourages us to approach girls and boys at different ages, building upon their strengths and their abilities to participate. Young people's transition to adulthood can also be supported, so that young men and women who have played an active role as children can continue to be active in their community as young adults. Intergenerational dialogue between adults and children of different ages can also be encouraged, thus promoting increased understanding and collaboration among the generations.

Children are born into societies that practice discrimination, oppression, non-participation and exclusion. As a result girls and boys learn and may practice prejudicial behaviour during childhood. Some call other children "names", bully and exhibit targeted violent behaviour, or

4. A Life CYCLE APPROACH TO CHILD PARTICIPATION¹²

We are born:

Elderly people can encourage girls and boys to express their views. They can value non-discrimination, inclusion and participation.

As 0-6 year olds boys and girls begin to explore the world around them and express their views through body language and physical expressions. With encouragement from adults, the foundations for participation can be laid in the early years.

Adults can be active citizens. They can also encourage girls and boys of different ages and abilities to express their views and to participate in decisions affecting them. Adults can encourage children from the earliest age to learn in active ways, to question and to share their views and ideas. Partnerships can be developed between adults and children.

**Child Participation for
a Rights Based Society**

As 7-10 year olds girls and boys can express their views and actively learn about the world through exploration, questioning and access to information. They are able to play an active role in identifying, analysing and solving issues affecting them. Girls and boys can play a key role as active citizens in challenging and overcoming all forms of discrimination and gender inequities.

Youth can play a vital role in forwarding inclusion and participation for positive social change. They further their meaningful participation through youth led organisation, youth networks that promote human rights.

Adolescents As 11-19 year olds, adolescents can be active social actors and citizens, improving their local and national communities. They can work to overcome all forms of discrimination, gender inequities and exploitation. They can support child-led initiatives that include younger children and support partnerships with adults

exclude certain groups of children in their games - for example girls, children with disability and children from minority groups. If they go unchallenged, a young person may act based these stereotypes; this becomes discriminatory behaviour as they transition into adulthood and leads to further violence.



This strategy proposes a life cycle approach to work on child and youth participation. For instance a 12 years old boy will participate differently in this process, based on his evolving capacity, then a 22 year old young woman. There is a need to develop age and diversity appropriate informational material, tools and methodologies for both of them catering to their age cohort and context.

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Conclusion

This overall framework will be the basis for all the work that will be undertaken by the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children. The strategy will be implemented through capacity development on meaningful child participation; creation of tools for children, adolescent and youth; effective and inclusive social media use in reaching to young people with special consideration to minimise digital divide; and solid knowledge management for/with children and young people on their civic engagement initiatives on the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children.



ANNEX 1

General Comment on the Right of the Child to be Heard; CRC/C/CG/12, 2009¹⁴.

Basic requirements for the implementation of the right of the child to be heard

The Committee urges States parties to avoid tokenistic approaches, which limit children's expression of views, or which allow children to be heard, but fail to give their views due weight. It emphasizes that adult manipulation of children, placing children in situations where they are told what they can say, or exposing children to risk of harm through participation are not ethical practices and cannot be understood as implementing article 12.

If participation is to be effective and meaningful, it needs to be understood as a process, not as an individual one-off event. Experience since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989 has led to a broad consensus on the basic requirements which have to be reached for effective, ethical and meaningful implementation of article 12. The Committee recommends that States parties integrate these requirements into all legislative and other measures for the implementation of article 12.

All processes in which a child or children are heard and participate, must be:

- a) **Transparent and informative** - children must be provided with full, accessible, diversity-sensitive and age-appropriate information about their right to express their views freely and their views to be given due weight, and how this participation will take place, its scope, purpose and potential impact;
- b) **Voluntary** - children should never be coerced into expressing views against their wishes and they should be informed that they can cease involvement at any stage;
- c) **Respectful** - children's views have to be treated with respect and they should be provided with opportunities to initiate ideas and activities. Adults working with children should acknowledge, respect and build on good examples of children and young people's participation, for instance, in their contributions to the family, school, culture and the work environment. They also need an understanding of the socio-economic, environmental and cultural context of children's lives. Persons and organizations working for and with children should also respect children's views with regard to participation in public events;
- d) **Relevant** - the issues on which children have the right to express their views must be of real relevance to their lives and enable them to draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities. In addition, space needs to be created to enable children to highlight and address the issues they themselves identify as relevant and important;

¹⁴ <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/type,GENERAL,,4ae562c52,0.html>

- e) **Child-friendly** - environments and working methods should be adapted to children's capacities. Adequate time and resources should be made available to ensure that children are adequately prepared and have the confidence and opportunity to contribute their views. Consideration needs to be given to the fact that children will need differing levels of support and forms of involvement according to their age and evolving capacities;
- f) **Inclusive** - participation must be inclusive, avoid existing patterns of discrimination, and encourage opportunities for marginalized children, including both girls and boys, to be involved (see also para. 88 above). Children are not a homogenous group and participation needs to provide for equality of opportunity for all, without discrimination on any grounds. Programmes also need to ensure that they are culturally sensitive to children from all communities;
- g) **Supported by training** - adults need preparation, skills and support to facilitate children and young people's participation effectively, to provide them, for example, with skills in listening, working jointly with children and engaging children effectively in accordance with their evolving capacities. Children themselves can be involved as trainers and facilitators on how to promote effective participation; they require capacity-building to strengthen their skills in, for example, effective participation awareness of their rights, and training in organizing meetings, raising funds, dealing with the media, public speaking and advocacy;
- h) **Safe and sensitive to risk** - in certain situations, expression of views may involve risks. Adults have a responsibility towards the children with whom they work and must take every precaution to minimize the risk to children of violence, exploitation or any other negative consequence of their participation. Action necessary to provide appropriate protection will include the development of a clear child-protection strategy which recognizes the particular risks faced by some groups of children, and the extra barriers they face in obtaining help. Children must be aware of their right to be protected from harm and know where to go for help if needed. Investment in working with families and communities is important in order to build understanding of the value and implications of participation, and to minimize the risks to which children may otherwise be exposed;
- i) **Accountable** - a commitment to follow-up and evaluation is essential. For example, in any research or consultative process, children must be informed as to how their views have been interpreted and used and, where necessary, provided with the opportunity to challenge and influence the analysis of the findings. Children are also entitled to be provided with clear feedback on how their participation has influenced any outcomes. Wherever appropriate, children should be given the opportunity to participate in follow-up processes or activities. Monitoring and evaluation of children and young people's participation needs to be undertaken, where possible, with children themselves.