

A Position Paper on Children's Participation



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Alliance

ChildFund Alliance

ChildFund Alliance is a global network of 11 child-focused development and humanitarian agencies reaching nearly 36 million children and family members in 70 countries. Our members help children and their families overcome poverty and the underlying conditions that prevent children from reaching their full potential. Together we work to end violence and exploitation against children; provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children and their communities; and engage children, families and communities to create lasting change. Our commitment, resources, innovation, and expertise serve as a powerful force to transform the lives of children around the world.

The members of the Alliance are:



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ChildFund New Zealand
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Christian Children's Fund of Canada
Educo (Spain)
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Glossary of Terms

Accessibility: Accessibility is the guarantee of flexibility to accommodate each user's needs and preferences. In dealing specifically with people with disabilities, accessibility ensures that they can access the physical environment, transportation, information, and communication systems and participate fully in society on equal terms with all others, ensuring that they can exercise all rights and fundamental freedoms equally.

Accompaniment: Accompaniment describes sustained assistance and support throughout the implementation of activities, meaning that support is not limited to the workshop setting only, but will continue in concrete ways during the day-to-day implementation of project activities.

Accountability: The concept of accountability was developed in the context of analyzing national governance. It refers to oversight over the fulfillment of responsibilities of public sector officials and the checks and balances on the exercise of political power. Accountability also implies the requirement that officials answer to stakeholders on the disposal of their powers and duties, act on criticisms and feedback or requirements made of them and accept responsibility for failure, incompetence, or deceit.

Action-training: Action-training is an approach to training in which participants are presented with new information and encouraged to discuss, debate, and describe the information in their own words - and are supported to directly apply the information to their work during the training session.

Advocacy: This process comprises actions taken to influence the policies and actions of governments, international institutions, and the private sector, to achieve positive changes in children's lives.

Agents of change: Agents of change are individuals who advocate for, and support change within a group or an organization. Agents of change have particular responsibilities such as reinforcing the importance of transformation, outlining how changes will be achieved, guiding transition processes, and ensuring that new processes and projects are implemented. To achieve their objectives, agents of change must be equipped with adequate information about project cycles, shortcomings, and goals.

Basic social services: Basic social services are the building blocks for human development comprising the package of primary health care, basic education, clean water, and proper sanitation and safety that are indispensable for health, nutrition, and well-being. Basic social services are the essentials of life that allow people to live and function.

Bottom-up accountability: An accountability framework where stakeholders receive information about the shortcomings of a project or the delivery of a service to put them in a position to put pressure on service providers and policymakers to do better throughout this process.

Capacity building: The process of development that focuses on understanding the obstacles that inhibit individuals, organizations, institutions, and societies from realizing developmental goals while enhancing the abilities that will allow them to achieve measurable and sustainable results.

Child-friendly Accountability (CFA): Child-friendly Accountability is a process by which children are empowered to meaningfully participate in making certain that those charged with protecting and fulfilling children's rights do what they are supposed to do in accordance with their obligations under international human rights law, and if they do not or cannot, that children and their representatives have some recourse to address the failure.

Child participation: All activities undertaken by children that are conducive to the realization of their rights and to have their opinions considered in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, according to their level of maturity.

Child protection: Child protection comprises interventions to prevent and respond to violence, exploitation, and abuse to protect the fundamental rights of children as per the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This includes protection from economic exploitation, sexual exploitation, and abuse, protection from physical or mental violence, ensuring that children will not be separated from their families against their will, and protection from discrimination and stigma.

Child safeguarding: A set of policies, procedures, and practices deployed by a project or business that guarantee the safety of all the children they work with or come into contact with during the discharge of their duties to actively prevent harm, abuse, exploitation, and distress and any deliberate or unintentional acts that lead to the risk or actual harm of children.

Non-discrimination: Non-discrimination means abstaining from treating an individual or a group of people less well because of who or what they are.

Duty-bearers: Duty-bearers are those actors who have a particular obligation or responsibility to respect, promote and realize human rights and abstain from human rights violations. The term is most commonly used to refer to State parties, but non-State actors can also be considered duty-bearers. Depending on the context, individuals e.g., parents, local organizations, private companies, aid donors, and international institutions can also be duty-bearers.

Facilitators: Facilitators are individuals who assist in reaching an outcome. The main responsibilities of Facilitators include providing a structure and support system to enable cooperative decision-making. Facilitators also identify problems in the project cycle and intervene where necessary to improve outcomes. Facilitators do not lead the process but rather guide participants toward an outlined goal.

High-level Political Forum: The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is a UN platform established to monitor and review the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its global goals.

Human Rights-based approach: A conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promote and protect people's rights. It seeks to analyze inequalities that lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress and often result in groups of people being left behind.

MEL processes: Monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes are made up of three components – the monitoring of project resources, activities, and results; the assessment and analysis of ongoing or completed projects; and reflecting upon information generated by monitoring and evaluation to improve a project's ability to achieve results.

Participatory monitoring: Participatory monitoring and evaluation is a process of joint assessment, collective knowledge generation, and cooperative action in which stakeholders in a program or intervention substantively and collaboratively identify the evaluation issues, collect, and analyze the data, and take action as a result of what they learn.

Public decision-making: Public decision-making includes actions taken within government settings to impact communities and the broader population. The decisions undertaken by government bodies are based on perspectives, values, and information obtained through public involvement and input. Public decision-making ensures that relevant stakeholders are part of the decision-making process and made aware of the impacts of policies implemented.

Referral system: This is an organized process through which it is possible to formally request services for a child or their family from another sector or organization for case management, cash assistance, health care, psychosocial support, etc., through an established procedure and/or form.



I. A World of Children as Agents of Change

ChildFund Alliance members work in 70 countries giving children a voice and a level playing field especially aiming at the most vulnerable children across the globe.

Within a framework of participatory monitoring and accountability, ChildFund Alliance members carry out their work increasingly in partnership with children for desired outcomes, highlighting children's roles as drivers of change and improvement in their own right.

ChildFund Alliance provides the networks and platforms to empower children as agents of change, making it possible for their advocacy and direct action to be felt in both local and international contexts. Much of the work to empower children and support their efforts at driving change involves bridging the socio-economic divide that sets children apart while connecting the dots to like-minded networks of supporters and champions with universal outreach such as the High-level Political Forum (HLPF).

Key Message:

The concept of children as agents and drivers of change is recognized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the context of participatory approaches to development that envision local leaders working with children, young women, and men to deliver on the promise to return the benefits of human development to communities.

Over the past decade, ChildFund Alliance has worked to change the course of children's participation in advocacy, direct action, and accountability. We have done this by investing in proven approaches to programming and launching innovations in participatory monitoring and accountability through the Child-friendly Accountability project that seeks to empower children and young people as drivers of change in the global effort to end violence against children.

Working with like-minded child-focused agencies to shape the post-2015 development agenda, ChildFund Alliance secured a global commitment to position a stand-alone target on violence against children in the Agenda, namely "to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children" (SDG Target 16.2). This implies raising awareness and building the capacity of children to use data and other evidence-based approaches to assess the performance of relevant duty-bearers in the delivery of essential services including the child protection system at the local and national levels.

Key Message:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for the first time, in the context of global goal setting, announced the world community's embrace of the notion of children as agents of change and active partners in sustainable development saying: "Children and young women and men are critical agents of change and will find in the new Goals a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world".

In addition to the CRC, the global mandate for children as agents of change is embodied in this call to action which requires that civil society and governments at all levels engage, encourage, and report on the activities and progress that children's participation is making in the implementation of the SDGs.

A. Innovating to Implement the SDGs

Through its Child-friendly Accountability initiative, ChildFund Alliance members have been able to systematically harness the agency of children and channel their boundless creativity and interest in changing the world around them to engage them in the worldwide effort to end violence against children and shift the attitudes of people away from the tolerance of violence.

Children have undertaken the process of raising awareness about the consequences of unchecked violence against children while also unleashing a sense of urgency to transform and change the tolerance and acceptance of violence in their communities. These children have received support and encouragement at all levels in their struggle to end violence against children including the opportunity to address the High-level Political Forum – HLPF of the SDGs at the United Nations New York Headquarters. These children have similarly addressed mayors and local decision-makers throughout the Child-friendly Accountability project cycle.

Children as agents of change, through similar projects for children's participation, bring an enormous opportunity to change the way participatory monitoring and accountability for global goals occurs. ChildFund Alliance is fully committed to expanding its experience in this area of activity and is keen to share what has been learned to engender greater engagement of children in the process of assessment, analysis, and taking action to resolve issues of concern to them and their communities. This way, children can directly contribute to strengthening policies and programs that affect them in the implementation of the SDGs.

B. Objectives of the Position Paper on Children's Participation

This position paper aims to set standards across the Alliance for Children's participation, allow consistency, and as a tool, guide the understanding and approach of Alliance staff to children's participation. It lays out examples of approaches that have worked for children's participation and builds on these experiences to drive greater results for children. The position paper lays out the diverse approaches to children's participation, the lessons being learned by ChildFund Alliance members and partners and what needs to be done differently to better the experience of children's participation overall.

Specifically, the position paper will:

- Contribute to strengthening ChildFund Alliance's collaboration and partnerships in working with children and young people in advocacy and fieldwork.

- Help ensure there is consistency of standards and messaging around children's participation across the Alliance.



The position paper shares the experience of ChildFund Alliance members who have been actively engaged in advocating for the cause of children as agents of change through children's participation projects to build a better and more sustainable world for children today and future generations.

C. What is Children’s Participation

“ ChildFund Alliance recognizes that children’s participation means that children can discuss and co-decide on all matters that affect them such as family, school, community matters, government policies, legal policies, and others. This implies that children have the right to have their views taken into consideration, as appropriate to their age and maturity, in all decisions that affect them. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child says that every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This principle recognizes children and young people as actors in their own lives at all times throughout the child’s life.

The four core principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are:

- The best interests of the child
- Non-discrimination
- Child participation and
- Survival and development

In addition to the above, the Do no harm principle is especially vital in the context of children’s participation. It implies that those engaged in child participation and protection activities should ensure that children do not suffer unintended harm as a result of any intervention. The “do no harm” principle requires that “...efforts be made to minimize possible negative effects and maximize possible benefits.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as a person under the age of 18 years which is the purview of this position paper.

The participation of children is recognized as part of the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. It enables the Committee to have a stronger understanding of children’s rights in their communities and countries and takes into consideration the perspectives of children on issues that directly affect them.

Children’s participation is established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a child right that also leads to the realization of other rights.

Youth aged 18 years and above can help to achieve results for children, particularly in the area of participatory monitoring and accountability.

Meaningful children’s participation enables children to acquire skills, and build competencies and confidence for activism, civic engagement, tolerance, advocacy, and direct action for a better world. It is imperative to be clear about the purpose of children’s participation in any activity to avoid symbolic gestures with little impact and the risk of tokenism.

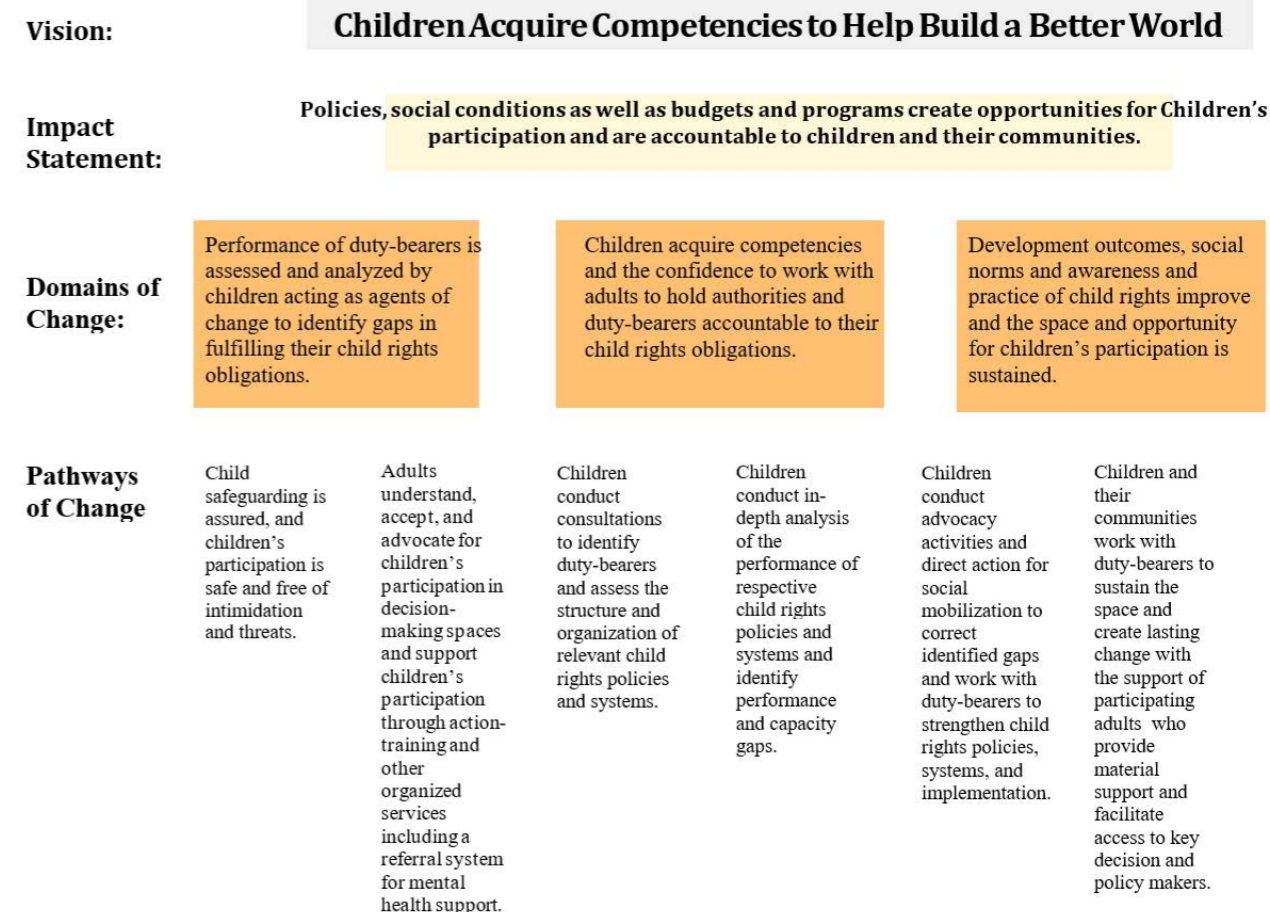
Children’s participation can be directed towards simply fulfilling children’s right to participate, building their knowledge and skills, and raising their awareness about child rights. Children’s participation can also have an external focus by improving public decision-making and strengthening basic social services for women and children.

Key Message:

In practice, children’s participation and child protection are inseparable. Children’s participation is essential to achieving good outcomes for children in child protection systems. To be successful, children need to be consulted and made to feel adequately involved in decisions about their lives. It is impossible to think about children’s participation without the participating children being protected. This is when a community can truly expect to reap the benefit of children as agents of change and active partners in ending violence against children in the community.

II. Children’s Participation: A Theory of Change

“ Below is a diagram of the Theory of Change underlying a Rights-based approach to children’s participation. As children’s participation grows and is mainstreamed, it is expected that children will contribute to activating the pathways of change envisioned below but must be paired and implemented in conjunction with other efforts including the support of participating adults:



A. Rights-based Approach to Children’s Participation

“ Children’s participation is often realized from a “projects” or “spaces” perspective such as supporting children’s clubs or parliaments, consultations and advocacy with children, and child rights reporting with children. While these initiatives are important aspects of children’s participation, the efforts of ChildFund Alliance members must reorient their child participation work to go beyond individual projects and opportunities to strive for and adhere to the four tenets of a rights-based approach to children’s participation for sustained systemic change and ongoing respect and support for children’s rights.



The Four Tenets of the Rights-based Approach to Children's Participation are:

1. Policy, Legislation, Budget, and Systems Strengthening:

- Ensuring children's civil rights are not simply reliant on the goodwill of adults by influencing and strengthening legislative and policy measures that set standards for the right of every child to be heard.
- Providing the necessary budget and resources to enable children's participation.
- Strengthening systems and policies at all levels including at the local level (e.g., family, school, community, NGOs, and local duty-bearers) as well as broader application (national policies, child protection systems, etc.).

2. Social Conditions and Attitudes that Respect All Children and their Rights

- Challenging negative attitudes and addressing the ill perceptions and norms many adults still have toward children and childhood in general as well as specific groups of children such as girls, minorities, and children with disabilities.
- Understanding the obstacles to participation in various settings.
- Exploring how certain groups of children face greater discrimination and challenges.
- Strengthening the participation of children of different ages, genders, abilities, and backgrounds.
- Exploring how accessibility or lack of accessibility may hinder equal participation.

3. Capacity Building with Children and Adults

- Ensuring that children are aware of their rights, can exercise their right to be heard, and know how to hold duty-bearers to account.
- Empowering children with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to claim their rights.
- Engaging and preparing adults to listen to and share power with children.

4. Activities and Programs that Provide Space and Opportunity for Children's Participation

- Creating and institutionalizing spaces and opportunities for children to participate, form opinions, act, and have their voices heard, respected, and taken into account.
- Improving the reach, accessibility, and sustainability of existing systems and structures to make children's participation easy.

B. Principles of Children's Participation

- 1. Children's Participation should be voluntary:** children should be given enough time to make informed decisions about their involvement in the activity and should be able to withdraw at any time.
- 2. Children's Participation should be transparent and informative:** children should be provided with child-friendly information in appropriate and accessible language and formats for easy comprehension.
- 3. Children's Participation should be respectful:** children's other commitments and rights such as school, work, and play must be taken into account when planning activities with children. Organizers must ensure ways of working with children are both culture and gender sensitive. Organizers must address child/adult power imbalances for a truly voluntary and respectful process with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, opportunities, and limitations.
- 4. Children's Participation should be relevant:** organizers must ensure that the issues to be addressed are of real relevance to the children, support child-defined initiatives and topics and ensure that adults have not pressured children to adopt their issues.
- 5. Children's Participation should be child-friendly:** it is imperative that methods and approaches are child-friendly and that meeting places are safe, accessible, and child-friendly.
- 6. Children's Participation should be inclusive:** activities must be organized in a way that engages children of different ages, genders, backgrounds, and abilities while providing safe spaces for different groups of children to explore issues relevant to them such as girls working separately from boys if needed. Organizers must ensure that the process is non-discriminatory and inclusive, making sure that those most impacted by discrimination and inequality have equal access. All tools and methods must be accessible and promote equal access.
- 7. Children's Participation should be supported by training:** all partners and staff working with the children must have the confidence and skills to facilitate all relevant processes. This includes specific emphasis on ensuring that children and other vulnerable and marginalized groups are able to engage in public and social accountability mechanisms¹.
- 8. Children's Participation should be safe and sensitive to risk:** organizers are required to undertake conflict sensitivity and risk assessments, develop a child-safeguarding plan and ensure all children know where to go for help if needed.
- 9. Children's Participation should be accountable:** all projects working with children should develop a monitoring and evaluation strategy, engage children in MEL processes, define communication and follow-up mechanisms with the children, and ensure children see the results of their participation.
- 10. Code of Conduct and Confidentiality:** all organizers and facilitators working with children should be required to sign a code of conduct before engaging in activities. Children's participation must be conducted in adherence to national and international laws and following the best interests of the child. A data protection system must be put in place to make sure that all information related to child protection cases remains confidential.

Organizers should always ensure that children receive feedback on how their contributions have advised, informed, or influenced developments. Children's participation is not a singular event, it is an ongoing process. Accountability processes should be integrated throughout the project cycle to ensure children's views and concerns are incorporated and that they are able to challenge actions, influence recommendations, and ensure continuous quality feedback and improvement.

¹ Child-to-child, Children International, ChildFund Alliance, Plan, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages International, World Vision (2016) "Child Sensitive Accountability and the Post-2015 Agenda."

C. Forms of Children’s Participation

“Participation is defined as ‘the opportunity to express a view, influence decision-making and achieve change’². Children’s participation is the informed and willing involvement of all children, including the most marginalized and those of different ages and abilities, in any matter concerning them. Participation is a way of working and an essential principle that cuts across all arenas – from homes to government and from local to international levels.

The different forms of children’s participation are as follows:

- 1. Consultative processes:** Consultative processes are adult initiated, led, and managed. Children have minimal control over the outcomes but may have the opportunity to organize, learn new skills, acquire confidence, and make small contributions. During a consultative process, there is no structural change in the relationship between adults and children and, as such, the imbalance of power remains.
- 2. Collaborative processes:** Collaborative initiatives are initiated by adults but involve collaboration with children. This process includes structures through which children can challenge or validate outcomes. Often, they include children taking self-directed action once the project has started. Participative initiatives may seek to involve children as partners in the project. In a setting, power is shared evenly between children and adults.
- 3. Child-led processes:** Child-led initiatives are processes of empowerment by which children themselves take action to address issues that they see as important. In this category of participation, children identify their areas of concern for themselves. Adults are involved as facilitators, advisers, administrators, and fundraisers, not as leaders. The process is controlled by children.

All three levels of engagement are valid and can be appropriate depending on the goals of the project or advocacy initiative, the age and capacity of the children, and the context in which the activities are taking place.

To ensure quality, the principles of children’s participation must be realized and applied within each approach. Further, projects and initiatives involving children’s participation may not necessarily remain at one level. There is usually a dynamic and interconnected relationship between them. Initiatives can, for example, start as a consultative process, move on to become collaborative, and then create the space for children to initiate their agenda as they acquire the necessary confidence and skills.

The approaches are not a measure of quality. Instead, they provide a useful tool for defining a methodology, required resources, and setting up clear expectations with children and partners.

Key Message:

The UN describes participatory accountability as “inclusive and transparent practices used to monitor the effectiveness and usefulness of local, regional, national and international policies, providing the evidence to improve those policies”. In general, accountability spans three aspects (a) the obligation of decision-makers to take responsibility for their actions (b) the obligation of decision-makers to answer to those affected, and (c) some form of enforceable sanction of decision-makers’ conduct if they do not meet their obligations.

² Save the Children (2007) Child Participation, Save the Children Canada.

III. Where to Focus

“While there is great diversity in the range of activities and areas in which the role of children as agents of change can be manifest, they can be particularly influential in motivating others to change their behaviors in their communities and around the world, in richer and poorer countries alike.

The impact of children’s actions have been felt in the following areas of focus which can be amended over time to bring in different themes as they come into focus or as defined by children themselves.

A. Themes to Focus On

1. Climate Activism: In March 2019, around one million students from over 100 countries went on strike to demand action against global warming and climate change, knowing they could be punished for doing so³. Children across the globe are finding their voice for activism and often imperil their lives and livelihoods to fight injustice and champion change. Even though their activism can take decades or longer to come to fruition, they press on with global climate activism because they know they are doing the right thing.

2. Participation of Children in the Digital Space: The internet influences the reality of billions of people every day including children and has thus become an integral part of the reality of children’s participation.

Digitization has greatly increased children’s participation and there is no doubt that digital technology has expanded opportunities for children to directly engage with adults on political and social issues⁴. As never before, children have been using the internet to exchange concerns, support their actions, disseminate their messages, and create communities that reach millions of other children, presenting both benefits and risks and reinforcing the need for online protection and digital safety, and awareness raising. Online access, however, provides a platform for children to engage with decision-makers and local leaders allowing them to be a part of national and global discussions. Digital access also facilitates violence prevention and response including through children’s helplines.

B. Who Might Be the Agents of Change

1. All Children: There is so much about children’s lived experience that is diverse yet universal. Children’s ideas and lived experience can be applied to do new things or do things differently in the community and around the world. All boys and girls can be agents of change as long as they know how to listen to others, reason and argue their position, and write and speak in a thoughtful and compelling way.

2. Participation of Children with Disabilities: Like all children, children with disabilities are entitled to all the rights within the Convention on the Rights of the Child including the right to play and leisure, education, family support, and non-discrimination. Article 23 speaks specifically to the rights of children with disabilities and assures “active participation in the community” and “the fullest possible social integration” which are goals ordinarily associated with civil rights and freedoms⁵.

C. How to Engage

1. Participation of Children via Peer-to-Peer Engagement: Children’s participation through peer-to-peer engagement is powerful. Children can engage with other children in all areas of their lives and build trust with other children. Through peer-to-peer engagements, children can help bring about change with their peers and help scale-up projects. Children also build their knowledge, self-confidence, and communication skills which helps them to speak out and engage in evidence-informed advocacy activities.

³ BBC News. (2019) Climate strikes: Students worldwide protest over global warming.

⁴ UNICEF (March 2015) “Accountability for Children’s Rights, With Special Attention to Social Accountability and its Potential to Achieve Results and Equality for Children.”

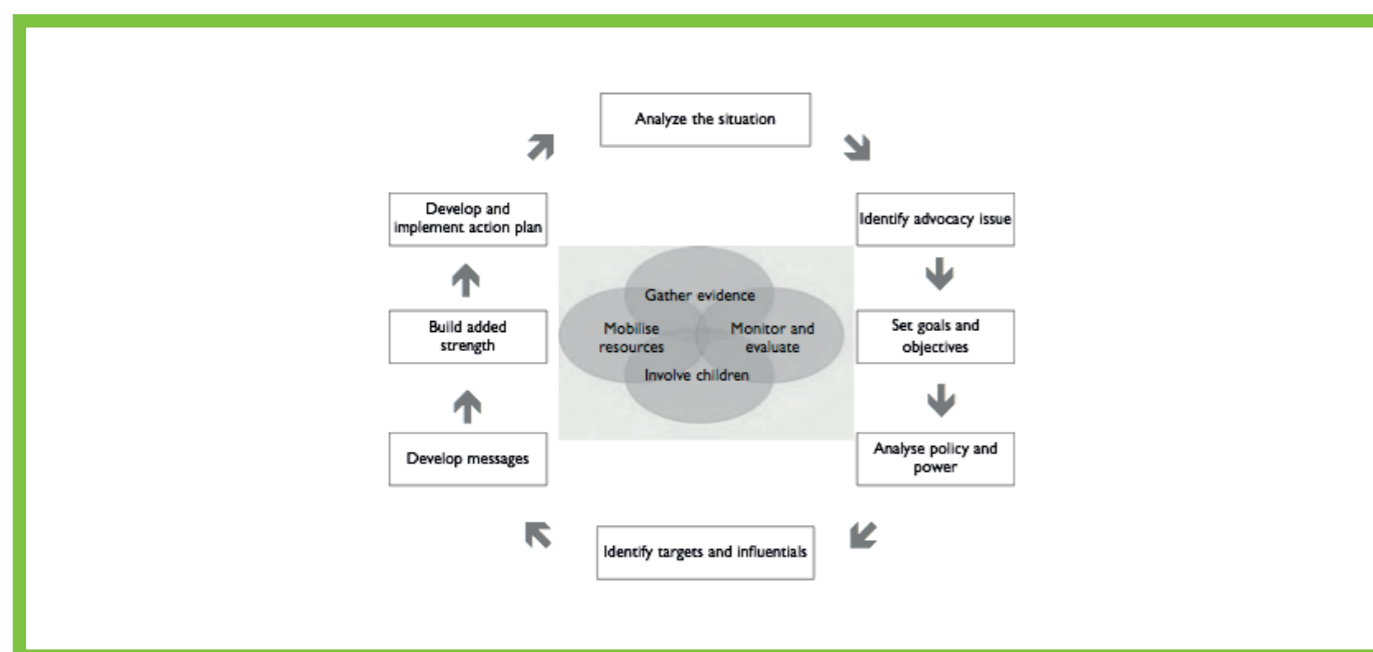
⁵ Convention on the Rights of the Child, art.23, Nov.20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3

Peer-to-peer engagement is proving to be effective particularly in scaling-up interventions, reaching the hardest-to-reach, raising awareness, and addressing issues of protection, mental health, education, and childhood poverty.

2 Advocacy: Children’s advocacy activities can be both inspiring and highly effective in mobilizing other children, decision-makers, teachers and parent-teacher associations, and political leaders to act. In the context of children’s participation, advocacy is defined as a process that seeks to influence the policies and actions of governments, policy and decision makers, international institutions, and the private sector to support and implement actions that contribute to the realization of children’s rights and to achieve positive change in the lives of children.

Once the children identify concrete ways to improve the situation of children in their communities they can work with relevant duty-bearers to bring about changes for the better. Children’s participation – in this context signifies more than merely listening to children and youth. It implies children deploying their considerable agency, emotions, and determination to get to know the facts, engaging the community, and building relationships to help improve the situation.

Under the guidance of a facilitator, participating children can review the stages of the advocacy cycle⁶:



The facilitator would provide action training to the children as they develop the advocacy campaign and implement the advocacy action plan. For example, the facilitator should support the children while they prepare for meetings with duty bearers, prepare media spots or make presentations to policy-makers. The children must be allowed to see the positive effects of their participation since experience shows that children and youth frequently disengage from projects if they are not able to see tangible results.

3. Direct Action: When planning direct action as part of children’s participation, the children work to analyze available information on the situation, comparing how systems ought to work with how they are working while identifying actions they can take that will swiftly improve their performance and the situation of children in the community. They make alliances with supportive adults and duty-bearers and work with other children to implement the changes they wish to see and publish regular reports summarizing the outcome of their efforts and ongoing bottlenecks and weaknesses. Like advocacy, direct action can also include media events such as radio and comic strips, videos, and postings on social media and others.

⁶ Save the Children (2007), “Participant’s Manual, Advocacy Matters: Helping children change their world, An International Save the Children Alliance guide to advocacy.”

4. Reporting: Relevant authorities and duty-bearers are contacted by the facilitators working with the children to ensure they support the activities of the children before they publish their findings and before advocacy and direct action by the children begins. Adult facilitators provide the necessary guidance to the children to ensure that their chosen advocacy issue and approach do not put the children at undue risk and that they follow basic child protection principles regarding children and the media.

D. The Critical Enabler

Child Safeguarding: When children exercise their right to be heard and peaceful assembly, adult collaborators and facilitators have a critical role to play in guaranteeing the children’s right to participate and ensuring they are protected while doing so, physically and online. This includes when children choose to exercise their rights peacefully on the streets and in public gatherings. A rights-based approach to children’s participation should prioritize children’s best interests and avoid arrests and any form of violence.

IV. Resources and Examples of Children’s Participation: what is working

“ There are many different approaches to children’s participation that are available to ChildFund Alliance members for field-level application that have succeeded in guiding and shaping programs and policies and have helped to prevent or report different forms of abuse of children’s rights.

Below are a few examples of initiatives that have kept pace with the evolving experience of children’s participation:

1. Case study: India – Balahitha Initiative:

The Balahitha initiative is a children’s participation project through which Children Believe established the Child-friendly Accountability methodology in the Markapur division of the Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh, India. Balahitha means “things which favor children”. The project seeks to create a protective environment by reducing the wide gap between the promise and performance of policies, legislation, and programs. Children Believe implemented the Balahitha initiative in partnership with Social Activities for Rural Development Society (SARDS).

2. Case study: Elevate Children Funders Group:

The Elevate Children Funders Group conducted a research study to better understand child and youth participatory models used by Funders. A Funders toolkit for child and youth participation was co-created by young leaders with the guidance of an advisory committee and ECFG child and youth participation working group. The toolkit offers advice and guidance on the “how to” of child and youth participation tailored specifically to Funders.

3. Project: What Children Have to Say–Conversations with Policymakers on COVID-19 Lockdown

In September 2020, ChildFund Alliance organized a virtual event to explore the pandemic through the eyes of children. Four children selected from ChildFund Alliance country offices spoke about their experience and gave highlights from the field on effective protection measures. The children interacted with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Violence against Children, representatives from UNICEF, and two Permanent representatives at the United Nations. The CEO of Educo moderated the session.

4. Project 16.2: Child-friendly Accountability Methodology:

The Child-friendly accountability initiative is ChildFund Alliance’s flagship methodology for Children’s participation. It enables children and their communities to monitor and strengthen child-protection systems locally and internationally as part of the Alliance’s work to ensure that SDG Target 16.2 is implemented. SDG Target 16.2 aims to end all forms of violence against children⁷.

⁷ United Nations. (2015). Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Key Message:

- 30% of the world's population is under 18, increasing to nearly 50% in developing countries.
- More than 1 billion children experience violence every year⁸.
- Violence against children is devastating the lives of children across the world and impacting the future of communities and the world at large.
- This violence takes place in the home and family, in schools and care homes, in the justice system, at work, and in the community.

A. Milestones in Children's Participation

1. Pilot Testing

The CFA methodology was piloted in India, Paraguay, Vietnam, and Mexico in 2017 and adopted by ChildFund Alliance members for field-level application. The methodology has been under implementation in Burkina Faso and Ghana, India, Nepal, and the Philippines, Vietnam, Uganda and Tanzania, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, and South Korea, and Papua New Guinea and Australia.

2. CFA Preparatory Activities

CFA focuses primarily on monitoring the performance and accountability in child safeguarding and the different levels of the child protection system. It does not monitor individual incidents of violence. CFA builds on a Triple-A cycle of 3 pillars namely: assessment, analysis, and action in defining the scope and reach of its implementation.

The CFA process is preceded by a set of preparatory activities and child safeguarding measures.

Pillar 1: Assessment – focused on knowledge building and fostering understanding.

Pillar 2: Analysis and Accountability – centered on mapping and analyzing the performance of the child safeguarding and protection system.

Pillar 3: Advocacy and Direct Action for social mobilization and corrective action on gaps and bottlenecks identified by the children.

Capacity Building is mainstreamed across the three pillars. Together, they foster social change and accountability and gradually feed into local and international participatory and accountability processes.

B. Practical Steps to Meaningful Children's Participation

1. The CFA Methodology

The Child-friendly Accountability methodology is the main approach recommended in this Position Paper to drive children's participation. Although children make up a significant percentage of the population, they are generally excluded from decision-making on child protection and other matters concerning them. They also usually do not have access to accountability mechanisms such as courts and complaints procedures and practices designed to ensure the protection and well-being of children or to safeguard against abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence. Child-friendly Accountability is the methodology through which children can exercise the right to have their opinions considered in decision-making procedures that affect their lives, according to their level of maturity.

The following steps and resources are related and complement each other in organizing children's participation using the Child-friendly Accountability methodology:

2. Empowering Children Through Action Training

Through the Free from Violence campaign, ChildFund Alliance played a key role initially in positioning a standalone target on ending violence against children in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and managed to get SDG Target 16.2 adopted calling for the end of abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against, and torture of children.

Increased children's participation and bottom-up accountability for the SDGs come from the UN Member States themselves and is a key feature of action-training for children's participation. In addition to empowering children to hold duty-bearers accountable, action-training through the Child-friendly Accountability methodology helps children to develop good leadership and citizenship skills. By bringing children into discussions on decisions that impact their lives, children's participation acknowledges children as key stakeholders who must have a permanent seat at the decision-making table⁹.

3. Action Training Modules for Children's Participation

The Child-friendly Accountability toolkit comprises twenty modules that provide practical guidance and tools to implement the methodology. The toolkit contains specific modules that guide the organization and implementation of the Child-friendly Accountability preparatory activities as well as tools to support facilitators in preparing action-training sessions and templates for monitoring and reporting on action workshops.

There are also specific modules that support the implementation of the activities to be undertaken by the children and a series of training materials including those for organizing advocacy, direct action, and public information campaigns.

If implemented sequentially, the toolkit modules will take the user through the complete set of Child-friendly Accountability activities.

Below is a list of the Child-friendly Accountability Toolkit modules and their purpose:

4. CFA Toolbox Modules

The CFA Toolbox is for facilitators who work directly with children running action-training workshops. It is specifically structured to be used sequentially as it guides the full series of activities for children's participation in the context of CFA (See Infographics in Annex 2).

The Toolbox is divided into 20 modules meant to be adapted to the local context and applied flexibly to the local culture using available local materials. Each module provides the purpose, expected output, and practical guidance for each action-training activity, suggested handouts, checklists, case studies, and examples to guide the children in their work. The Toolbox also provides "Information Sheets" that outline background information related to the content of each activity.

Because the CFA methodology uses a cyclical approach to children's participation, the children will likely need to go through the activities in the Toolbox numerous times. The expectation is that as the children become familiar with the concepts and activities in the Toolbox, some aspects may be shortened or left out altogether ensuring nevertheless that the activities meet the evolving needs and objectives of the children.

Over time, the children should be able to lead some of the activities with minimal adult involvement. Ultimately, the success of all children's participation activities depends largely on the capacity of the facilitators and project staff to unleash the agency of children and deliver well-prepared and high-quality training activities.

5. Training of Trainers and Facilitators

The purpose of training trainers and facilitators in the context of children's participation is to prepare them to orchestrate action-training activities with children. The trainers and facilitators first go through the 10-step preparatory process which is a critical step in the success of any CFA initiative. These preparatory steps are designed primarily to minimize any form of risk to the children.

8 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

9 Lansdown, Gerison (2011) "Every Child's Right to be Heard: A Resource Guide on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12" UNICEF and Save the Children.

There is no time limit to these preparatory steps which should be fully in place before children's participation begins.

The preparatory steps consist of (a) conducting a context analysis (b) selecting the project setting and local partners (c) undertaking a risk assessment (d) connecting with key adult stakeholders (e) identifying a referral support network (f) identifying psychosocial support (g) selecting the child participants (h) signing up for support from ChildFund Alliance (i) establishing an internal feedback and complaints mechanism and (j) confirming child safeguarding and safety measures (See infographic in Annex 3).

Through this initial preparatory process, all involved in the activities about children's participation understand the principles and methodology and the goals of the activity, in particular, that children's participation is not meant to be adversarial or conflictual, but rather collaborative in seeking solutions to problems of concern to the children.

This initial process also ensures that all facilitators who will be working with the children and any other project staff are trained in child safeguarding, understand the methodology and have signed a code of conduct, completed a careful risk assessment, and have designed appropriate risk mitigation measures. At this point, a referral network should also be in place and the respective members adequately trained. Participating children are also required to understand the project methodology and provide informed consent.

The next series of Toolbox modules cover the three main pillars of the CFA methodology and their respective action-training activities focusing on:

(a) Pillar 1: Assessment – building knowledge and fostering understanding of child rights and the obligations of duty-bearers. Action-training activities under this pillar aim to raise awareness among the children and improve understanding among the children and their communities and duty-bearers about child rights and child protection, challenging negative social norms and practices (see relevant modules in the CFA Toolbox).

(b) Pillar 2: Analysis – monitoring the performance of key duty-bearers in discharging their obligations on child rights focusing on mapping child rights actors, analyzing local and national child rights oversight systems, sharing findings, and soliciting inputs. Action-training activities under this pillar introduce children to child rights and child protection systems, helping them to identify informal and formal rights actors and duty-bearers. The children interview these actors and understand their roles and mandates while identifying bottlenecks and gaps in the performance of the child rights system. The children compile and share their findings with their peers and in their community (See relevant modules in the CFA Toolbox).

(c) Pillar 3: Action – the objective of pillar 3 is to enable the children to work with duty bearers to improve the child rights system in their communities and at the national level. Here, with adult facilitation, the children focus on identifying the changes they would like to see happen and create action plans to implement them. Working in groups, the children identify tangible gaps or bottlenecks in both practice and policies that need remedial action and work out a plan to address these gaps, thus creating change. These actions, as a rule of thumb, are specific to their 'setting' and should begin at the local level and only in later iterations begin to expand nationwide.

Capacity Building – capacity development is mainstreamed across the three pillars. The Toolbox contains guidelines on how to prepare action-training workshops and organize activities for children's participation moving the children from knowledge-building to learning, to realizing activities. It refers to an approach to training in which participants are presented with new information, encouraged to discuss, debate, and describe the information in their own words, and supported to directly apply the information to their work during the training session. During this process, the term "accompaniment" is used to describe sustained assistance and support through the implementation of activities, meaning that support is not limited only to the workshop setting but continues in practical ways during the day-to-day activities of children's participation.

Action-learning assumes that the children come to the training with a set of knowledge and skills that should be shared with the group and built upon.

Modules 7 - 18 in the Toolbox provide facilitators with training materials covering a diverse range of topics such as talking to children about child rights and violence against children, assessing the risk of children's participation, setting up a referral and psychological support network, guidelines for training adults and children, and how to organize action-training workshops with children.

The training materials in the Toolbox are "generic" and can be easily adapted by the facilitators for application in different contexts. The facilitators will need to use the tools in Module 4 of the Toolbox to prepare each action-workshop and choose activities from the Toolbox to adapt to the local context, adjust the timing, find any missing information, etc. The training materials and activities must be adapted to the capacities of the children including whether they are literate. Children's participation through the CFA methodology is conducted in a series of expanding cycles and not a one-off project.

Once all training modules have been completed, the children begin new activities to address another set of gaps and bottlenecks expanding progressively from local issues to national ones, broadening the scope of the 'settings' addressed, increasing the number of participating children, etc. It is expected that over time, the children will become accustomed to the training materials and activities and will be able to focus more on refining the content of their action plans.

The training materials and activities in the CFA Toolbox need to be particularly adapted for use with certain groups of children with specific vulnerabilities such as illiterate children, children with disabilities, or in situations of humanitarian crisis requiring that the activities be modified to ensure that they are fully able to engage. (Module 6 of the CFA Toolbox provides guidance on training, particularly for vulnerable children.) The training materials also need to be adapted for adult stakeholders (see Module 5 for guidance).

V. Lessons Learned in Engaging Children as Agents of Change

1. Children's participation is contingent upon children's access to child-friendly information, data, and analytical insights.
2. The approach that worked best for children as agents of change has been a child-friendly and participatory methodology but not necessarily a fully child-led approach.
3. Children as agents of change are most effective when working as a part of an accountability methodology that can be used globally to monitor SDG Target 16.2.
4. It is best not to put the children in an adversarial position vis-à-vis power holders.
5. A modular approach to action-training and project activities worked best because it allowed the methodology to be implemented at a different pace and to varying degrees of engagement.
6. As a child safeguarding measure, it is best to focus on engaging the children in helping to improve the child protection system as opposed to monitoring incidents of violence to ensure that children are not put at undue risk as a result of their participation.
7. Children welcome the inclusion of the most vulnerable children in all activities.
8. It is a good practice to ensure all adults working with children be trained on how to talk about violence and other sensitive matters with children, and that appropriate measures are put in place to assure confidentiality.
9. A referral system must be established to provide support to individual children who experience any adverse interactions, in particular if violence is encountered.
10. Although it may take time to negotiate with local leaders and duty-bearers, it is imperative to secure their commitment to activities involving children's participation; this process can be seen in itself as progress in realizing the rights of children.
11. There should be an internal accountability mechanism built into any children's participation project to ensure that participating children can voice complaints and concerns to ChildFund.
12. It is vital that children see the direct and tangible results of their actions.

VI. Resources Necessary for Children's Participation

“ To be effective, Children's participation needs to be integrated into a strong network of people and institutions that directly or indirectly support children in their actions as agents of change. This network might include their peers, teachers and parents, local authorities, politicians and funding agencies, and the local community who all have a stake in helping to realize the rights of children.

To make children's participation effective, it is important to use all available resources and structures, contacts, and cooperative work among adults and build upon past positive experiences with other children's participation projects, ultimately recognizing that the benefits of encouraging children's participation far outweigh any extra resources and time invested.

The following resources are needed for children's participation activities to be successful:

- 1. School resources:** The four kinds of resources available through the school system that make children's participation possible are: (a) a safe environment (b) personalized time with teachers and teachers as role models (c) material resources such as organized classrooms and laboratories, books, internet access and software and (d) school budget.
- 2. Financing:** Financial resources to support children's participation projects may be sourced from (a) government resources (b) local business partners (c) international donors (c) parent-teacher associations.
- 3. Human resources and experts:** In addition to teachers and parents, other experts available to support children's participation projects are (a) guidance counselors (b) psychosocial support experts, and (c) trained safe-spaces specialists.

The Child-friendly Accountability methodology, field manual, child safeguarding protocols, and other resources for children's participation can be found on the ChildFund Alliance website in the form of action-training modules, child-friendly materials, and monitoring and reporting formats. The Alliance regularly provides children who are engaged in children's participation projects with awards and certificates, t-shirts, stickers, badges, and other symbols of recognition in appreciation of their activism.



VII. Developing and/or Integrating a Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation Plan for Children's Participation

“ Planning for the MEL process is an integral part of the quality assurance mechanism in children's participation and the effective engagement of children as agents of change in the CFA methodology. As such, it is important for the facilitator to introduce, as early as possible, the purpose and the methodology for the MEL process and guide the children in formulating their MEL plan and budget.

Whether developing a standalone MEL plan and budget or integrating it into an existing monitoring and evaluation plan, it is vital that sources of data and the methodology for gathering such data is settled and known to the project team. Each ChildFund Alliance member's MEL process, plan and budget will be different depending on the nature of the program, the range of duty-bearers and stakeholders available to the program, the country context, budgetary requirements, and the type of participation that is planned.

The key elements in the MEL plan and budget should include the objectives, period to be covered, indicators for the program, data sources, and what methods will be used to gather the data, how often the data will be collected, who will collect the data and from whom, and the materials needed for MEL work. If the MEL plan and budget are to be integrated into an existing M&E plan, the indicators on children's participation will need to be harmonized with existing indicators and consolidated.

It is important to present the MEL plan and budget to peers, key stakeholders and the community to gain their support and understanding and the permission to undertake participatory monitoring and evaluation at the required level of action. If possible, all participating children should be involved in the process of presenting and reviewing the MEL plan with duty-bearers and the community. Participating adults should support the process by providing the private space for the children – including marginalized children and those with disabilities, to speak freely and to share their views and experiences without interference or fear of negative repercussions¹⁰.

ChildFund Alliance encourages all its members to consider the country context, background and age range of the children who will be involved as agents of change in projects for children's participation and to involve them in planning from the earliest stages of the MEL process. This will help ensure that the monitoring, learning and evaluation approach can be adapted to suit their needs. The wider group of children should be oriented on the methodology to help them make informed choices about their role and who will lead the MEL process.

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¹⁰ Save the Children: A 10-step guide to monitoring and evaluating children's participation – 2014: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/me_toolkit_booklet_4_low_res1.pdf/

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