

A SEAT AT THE TABLE:

Children as the Architects of
Today & Tomorrow



ChildFund
Alliance

PLAN
INTERNATIONAL

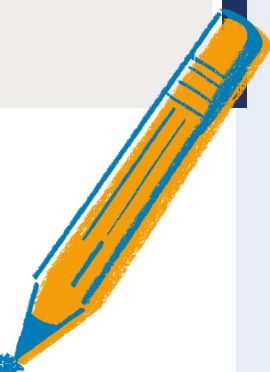
Save the Children

SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES
INTERNATIONAL

Terre des Hommes
International Federation

World Vision

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"The ability to see beyond traditional is the superpower that we, children and young people, have."

Jimena, Young Leader in Peru

WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT?

All over the world, more and more children like us want to take action on issues that matter to them. There are now more places where we can speak up, in person and online, and more adults are listening.

Sadly, lots of children still don't get a say in big decisions that affect their countries. One of the main reasons for this is that governments don't provide enough money for us to participate in ways that work for us.

Joining Forces* wanted to understand how government spending, also called public budgeting, affects children's participation.

They talked to children in different countries to find out what keeps them from taking part in making public decisions and what could be improved.



More and more children and young people are making their voices heard in spaces where decisions are made. This is the result of many people and organisations demanding our place at the decision-making table.

As more children and young people get involved in society, we also face challenges that stop us from participating and being listened to.

I see a bright future ahead because I know many children and young people who, through their leadership, have transformed their communities.

We'll keep working towards the day when the barriers fall, and all children and young people can freely share their opinions and ideas without being treated as less important or talked down to.

*Jimena, aged 17, in Peru
Representative of the National Alliance of
Leaders of Transformation (ANALIT)*



WHO IS JOINING FORCES?



Joining Forces is a group of the six largest international NGOs working around the world to secure children's rights. They support children's safe and meaningful participation at local, national, regional and global levels.

WHO JOINED IN?

FOR THIS REPORT,
JOINING FORCES SPOKE TO...



150+
CHILDREN

AGED
12 - 17

IN 7 COUNTRIES

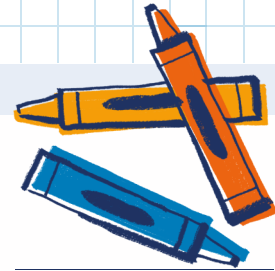
- El Salvador
- Indonesia
- Kenya
- Peru
- Philippines
- Senegal
- Uganda

CHILDREN WERE ASKED:

- How do you and your peers want to take part in making decisions?
- Are your voices heard like they should be in your country?
- What needs to change to give you more chances to get involved?



WHAT DO YOU THINK?



How does your country listen to children?

.....

.....

.....

What would your country score on the participation thermometer?
Circle the right temperature:

LOW

MODERATE

HIGH



LAYING FOUNDATIONS : PARTICIPATION IS A RIGHT



WHAT ARE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS?

In 1989, the world came together and agreed that we, as children, have our own rights. These were written down in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). You can read all of them [here](#).

Our rights make sure all children everywhere are treated fairly and looked after properly. Every child has the right to grow up in a happy, healthy, fair, and safe way and be an active part of society.

All human rights are connected, and equally important and they can never be taken away from us. Every country should take special action to protect children's rights.



**Every child has the right to be listened to and taken seriously.
Article 12, UNCRC**

WHAT IS CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION?



We are supported to give our views in a way that is best for us.

Children's participation is not a one-off event.

Children's participation is not an option.

When adults make decisions that impact children, they always ask us what we think.

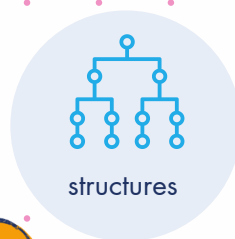
Children's participation is our right, which governments have a responsibility to respect and protect.

SHAPING OUR WORLD

Ever since the UNCRC was made in 1989, children have started taking part in making decisions. Now, we're involved in campaigns, policies, and decisions at every level.

As experts in our own lives, we can offer experiences and ideas that adults don't always think of. Listening to us can make today and tomorrow better for everyone!

To support our participation in decision-making at local, national, regional and global levels, many countries have developed:



These are some of the different spaces where we can share our views:

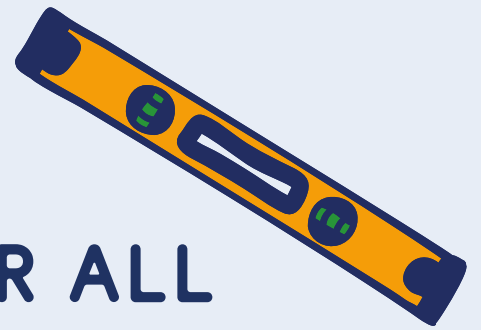
- **Children and adolescent councils** like the City Council for the Protection of Children in the Philippines.
- **Children's parliaments** at regional, sub-regional, national or local levels.
- **Structures where children can influence law reform.**
- **Local government committees** like Defence Offices for Children and Adolescents in Peru.
- National and international **Child Day celebrations** and other events.



"I live in Chorrillos. I participate in an environmental organization in the wetlands. We talk to the mayors of Chorrillos and Lima to propose ways to make the wetlands better."
Girl in Peru



LEVELLING OUT: PARTICIPATION IS FOR ALL



*"Finding a space for participation has not gone well...
My village does not involve children in Musrenbang [participatory
planning process]. There is no forum for us to join. All we've heard
so far are promises that we'll be invited to Musrenbang."
Girl in Indonesia*



CHILDREN NOT HEARD

A key rule for meaningful participation is that all children should be able to participate no matter who they are or where they come from...

..but marginalised and discriminated children are most often excluded from making decisions about their lives.



Girls



Displaced
children



Children living
in rural areas



Children without
parental care



Children with
disabilities



Children living
in poverty

- They are often not invited to join in, and even when they are, they're not given the extra help they might need to participate like other children.
- They also often don't have the same access to information, resources, and chances to get involved.



In **El Salvador**, children with disabilities, working children, migrants, and indigenous children are among the children least likely to participate in children's councils.



In **Uganda**, adults have more power than children, which stops children from participating fully. Families and communities don't think children's voices are important or worth listening to.

In **Peru**, many people believe that children's councils are just for show and don't influence decision-making.



"We often hear adults say: 'You're young, you don't know anything about the world.' It's the opposite: children are more aware of the issues that concern them."

Girl in the Philippines



"The fear of being rejected or judged for our opinion stops us from expressing what we feel or think about a subject."

Boy in El Salvador



"There should be a fair way to choose children who represent others in forums. Right now, our teachers pick who goes, but we want to be able to choose the children who speak for us."

Boy in Kenya



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Can you think of anything that stops you from taking part in important decisions in your country?

.....

What could your country do to help you participate better?

.....



SOLUTIONS WHEEL

Governments don't give enough money over a long period for participation structures and mechanisms

Not enough financial support to attend decision-making events

Limited digital and internet access to take part in decision-making online

Adults think we aren't mature enough

Formal and adult-directed participation spaces

Lack of confidence, knowledge or information

Poor quality participation mechanisms

Decision-makers who listen to us

Financial and practical support

Support from adults who know how to help children

To be free to speak out about issues important to us

Child-friendly in-person and online spaces

Fair selection processes to include all children

Training to gain knowledge, skills and confidence

Feedback about what happens after we participate




BRICK BY BRICK: BUILDING GOOD PARTICIPATION



THE 9 RULES OF MEANINGFUL AND ETHICAL PARTICIPATION

AND WHAT YOU NEED TO DO...

Transparent and informative:

- 1**  We clearly understand our right to express our views and that they will be heard.

Provide child-friendly information in appropriate and accessible languages/ formats so we can understand why we are involved, and how we can make a difference.

Voluntary:

- 2**  We decide to participate, or not.

- Always ask for our permission, making sure we understand what we're agreeing to.
- Never pressure us into participating.

Respectful:

- 3**  Our views are valued by adults and children.

Support us to express our views freely without judging us or treating us differently.

Relevant:

- 4**  We discuss issues that matter to us and we know why our views are important.

Help us understand what we can expect from participating and what the limits are.

Child-friendly:

- 5**  We participate in ways appropriate to our age and abilities, with information and materials that we understand.

- Give us enough time and child-friendly resources.
- Engage us in ways that build our confidence to speak out.

Inclusive:

6



Children of all genders, ages, backgrounds and abilities are encouraged to participate and are treated equally without discrimination.

- Support all children to participate.
- Make sure the children who are most affected by discrimination and unfairness are listened to and valued.

Supported by training:

7



All facilitators are trained and able to work effectively with us.

- Train adults, including decision-makers, to engage with all of us, especially children facing extra challenges to participate.
- Give us access to child rights training, useful knowledge and skills.

Safe and sensitive to risk:

8



We know actions have been taken to keep us as safe as possible.

- Identify risks early, such as abuse, exploitation or any other danger that could happen when children participate.
- Have clear 'risk management' plans to keep us safe.

Accountable:

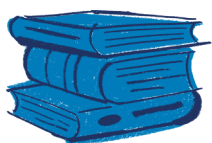
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We receive feedback about how our views have been used or influenced developments.

- Tell us how we impacted decisions quickly in a way we can easily understand.
- Make sure we can reach out to important people involved, ask questions and share feedback.

OUR SAFETY SHOULD ALWAYS BE PRIORITISED WHEN WE PARTICIPATE IN PERSON OR ONLINE!



These Nine Basic Requirements for Meaningful and Ethical Children's Participation were agreed in 2009 by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the experts that monitor the UNCRC.

*You can find them **here**.*

PAYING FOR CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

Investing in all the things we need to make children's participation meaningful and ethical!



BUDGETS



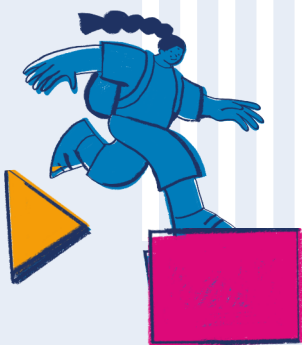
Government decision-makers need to put children's participation first by budgeting for various activities that support us at national, regional, and local levels.

These budgets should be protected from any sudden financial problems or unexpected changes.

Governments should...

BE STRATEGIC!

Promote and strengthen children's participation structures in laws, policies, strategies and plans.



MOBILISE!

Support children to participate, spread the word about children's right to influence decisions affecting them, and train adults so they know how to support children.



RESOURCES!

Make sure children have the services, materials, equipment and everything they need to be part of decision-making.



BUILDING PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT



LAWS AND POLICIES ✓

Governments must record their country's commitment to involve children in decision-making in laws and policies.

Governments should...

GUARANTEE

we can meet with other children, join groups, express our views freely, and access information in different ways.

EXPLAIN

how we can participate in committees, children's parliaments, assemblies, student councils, online platforms and other structures.

MAKE SURE

there are different and accessible opportunities for all our voices to be heard by decision-makers.



"As children, we need to be informed on different laws and policies that protect us so we can speak from an informed point of view."
Girl in Kenya





PLANS AND PROGRAMMES



National Plans and Strategies for children's participation can help governments put laws and policies into practice with activities to explain what will happen and when.



COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION



Different government departments from national to local levels, must work together to make children's participation a reality. Civil society organisations, the private sector and, of course, children should also be involved!

To help us participate fully, everyone should communicate clearly and listen to each other. This might mean using different languages and ways of presenting information.



"Every child and adolescent is very different and we have different ways to communicate. For example, we need to think about how persons with visual or hearing disabilities can communicate and participate."

Girl in Peru



CALL TO ACTION

To make our right to be heard a reality,
we ask that governments:



1

Make sure that national laws and policies guarantee that children can take part in decisions that affect them and that the people making decisions pay attention to what children have to say.

2

Make safe, accessible and child-friendly spaces that allow all children to choose to share their concerns, opinions, and ideas, in-person or online.

3

Provide all government departments with enough money to make sure that spaces where children participate are integrated into existing processes, are effective, and can continue to function well for a long time.

4

Train children with the knowledge and skills they need to participate in decision-making.

5

Train adults with the knowledge and skills they need to support children to have a meaningful role in public decision-making.



“

I call on governments, donors, and civil society to create genuine and safe spaces for us to participate in public decision-making.

Jimena, Young Leader, Peru

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