



A seat at the table

Investing in children's participation as a cornerstone of children's rights
Policy brief



JOINING FORCES
For All Children

ChildFund
Alliance



 **Save the Children**

 **SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES INTERNATIONAL**

Terre des Hommes
International Federation

World Vision 

Executive Summary

In the three and a half decades since the adoption of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), there has been a fundamental shift in how children are perceived and recognised - as people with their own rights, including, crucially, civil and political rights.

International law says that children have a right to be heard and adults have a duty to listen. The right to be heard is fundamental to fulfilling the full spectrum of children's rights, including children's civil and political rights, and is no less important than adult's right to express themselves freely about matters that affect them. Yet, against a backdrop of declining political rights and civil liberties, these rights are increasingly under threat.

Children consistently tell us – and show us - that they want to participate and take action on issues that concern them. Across the globe, children are contributing to the resilience of their communities, advancing their own protection, driving social progress, inspiring political change, and proposing innovative solutions.

Children's participation is a right in itself, but also a catalyst for the realisation of their rights more widely. Strengthening children's voice can increase their ability to claim other rights, provided that it is complemented with an enabling environment, where adult decision makers play a key role as a responsive and influential audience.¹

With only six years remaining to achieve the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, there is an urgent need to focus on, and invest in, children's participation. Doing so will not only help to address stalling progress on advancing children's rights, but also holds the promise of wider societal benefits. Empowered and informed children grow up to become civically active and responsible members of society. Conversely, at a time of declining trust in public institutions – particularly among young people² – and weakening social cohesion, there is a risk that

not supporting and encouraging children's participation will contribute to a generation of adults that are disengaged from active citizenship and civic life.

The state of children's participation

Since the adoption of the UNCRC, there has been a growing understanding of, and commitment among decision makers to the value of children's civic participation. There are many documented examples, from across the world, of children's active participation in campaigns, policy processes and decision making at all levels.³

Many countries have developed legal, policy and programmatic frameworks, and mechanisms have been established to support children's participation in decision making at local, national, regional and global levels. These efforts have not, however, guaranteed effective and systematic implementation of children's participation. Even where child participation policies are in place, they are often not backed by sufficient and sustainable public investments in structures and systems. Advances are not translating into meaningful opportunities for all children to be heard.

This policy brief seeks to address this barrier to the systematic, meaningful and equitable participation of children in public decision making. Building on Joining Forces' 2021 report [We're Talking, Are You Listening](#), this brief aims to shed light on public budgeting of children's participation. Informed by consultations with children in seven countries, and a legal, policy and budgetary analysis of child participation in three of these countries, it presents insights and recommendations for governments on how children's participation can be embedded in structures and systems, and how legal and policy commitments can be translated into public budgets in ways which promote meaningful and ethical child participation.

Guided and inspired by what children have told us, Joining Forces agencies are mobilising around a Call to Action to demand greater financial investments and political will by

governments and the wider international community for children's systematic participation in decision-making processes.

Specifically, we are calling on governments to:

- **Strengthen legal and policy frameworks guaranteeing children's right to be heard as well as their civil and political rights, as enshrined in the UNCRC.**
- **Establish and institutionalise structures and mechanisms for equitable and inclusive child participation.**
- **Invest in child participation mechanisms, across sectors and at all levels of government.**
- **Strengthen children's capacity, confidence and knowledge to participate in decision making.**
- **Support the capacity and willingness of adults to facilitate and enable children's meaningful and ethical participation.**

Joining Forces



As an alliance of the six largest international NGOs working with and for children to secure their rights and end violence against them, Joining Forces puts children at the centre of what we do; supporting children to raise their voices, take action as agents of change and hold us and duty bearers to account, ensuring children's experiences and views shape the solutions for the problems they face.

Child-focused organisations have played a critical role in promoting practical ways for children to be heard in different settings, and in fostering learning about how this can happen safely and meaningfully. We are working with children themselves, to build a wave of support for children's participation at local, national and regional levels that will carry through to global forums and complement global initiatives.

Foreword

It is a great honour and privilege to introduce this important report. The growing participation of children and young people as active citizens is highly positive and transformative. This reflects an evolution in the perception of our role in society and potentially the world. This not only enables us to influence decisions that directly affect us but also empowers us to take a vital role in building a better world.

Children and young people, through their participation, bring a wealth of different perspectives and experiences, and diversity of voices is essential to address complex problems and find innovative solutions to the issues we face. We observe that 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 that have advocated for change and demanded our place at the decision-making table.

As more children and young people become involved in society, we also face various difficulties that can hinder the practical realisation of our right to participate and to be listened to. I believe that existing systems in most countries are not designed to involve us in a friendly, representative, and inclusive way.

Sadly, many adults perceive that we are too young or immature to participate fully in decision-making. This barrier prevents us from being listened to carefully; thus, our ideas and views are often disregarded. This lack of opportunity to learn about democratic life and civic participation makes us less informed and disengaged citizens.

The participation of children and young people is not only a right but also a core principle; thus, our opinions must be considered. I call on governments, donors, and civil society to create genuine and safe spaces for us to participate in public decision-making. Of course, this needs to include all the information required so we can exercise our right to participation with confidence and safety.

I look at the future with optimism because I have seen the work of many children and young people who, with their leadership capacity, have transformed their communities.

Therefore, I am more than convinced that children and young people are the protagonists of the change that our countries need. We will continue working towards the day when the barriers fall, and all children and young people can give their opinions and express their ideas without being diminished or patronised.

By writing this foreword, I urge countries and their authorities to provide us with the tools and opportunities to engage in the implementation of the necessary policies to ensure that children and young people can develop and fully exercise their right to participate. The ability to see beyond traditional is the superpower that we, children and young people, have and is something that adults must recognise and enhance.

Jimena, aged 16.

Young Leader, Peru⁴

Representative of the Alianza Nacional de Líderes de Transformación -National Alliance of Transformation Leaders (ANALIT)



Introduction

In the three and a half decades since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), there has been a fundamental shift in how children⁵ are perceived and recognised - as people with their own rights, including, crucially, civil and political rights.

The UNCRC enshrined in international law that children have the right to be heard. In signing and ratifying the UNCRC, States have affirmed that all children have a right to participate in decisions that affect them and to expect that decision makers will listen to and consider their views.⁶ Under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, States further committed to recognize children as 'agents of change'.

While child participation⁷ is a right in itself, it is also a catalyst for the realisation of children's rights more widely. Strengthening children's voice can increase their ability to claim other rights, provided that it is complemented with an enabling environment where adult decision makers play a key role as a responsive and influential audience.⁸

Children consistently tell us – and show us - that they want to participate and take action on issues that concern them. Across the world, children are taking a lead in global and national-level campaigns. Over recent years, child activists have been prominently campaigning on issues including the climate crisis, anti-racism and gun control. They are contributing to the resilience of their communities, advancing their own protection, driving social progress, inspiring political change, and proposing innovative solutions.

Evidence also shows that listening to children contributes to better policies and decision



making.⁹ As the UNCRC acknowledges, children possess valuable insights, perspectives, and ideas.¹⁰ When they have meaningful opportunities to voice their opinions, children can contribute to better solutions and services for children and to more child-responsive processes and decisions. Participation in decision making processes is also beneficial for children themselves, enabling them to develop critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills.¹¹

Engaging children in the development of their communities not only supports their rights now but can also have long terms benefits for

society as a whole. Empowered and informed children grow up to become active and responsible members of society, contributing to the overall development and well-being of their communities and nations. Conversely, at a time of declining trust in public institutions – particularly among young people¹² – and weakening social cohesion, there is a risk that not supporting and encouraging children's participation will contribute to a generation of adults that are disengaged from active citizenship and civic life.

Against a backdrop of declining political rights and civil liberties, stalling progress on advancing children's rights and the urgent need to galvanise and accelerate efforts towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the importance of focusing on, and investing in, children's participation is clear.



Save the Children

The state of children's participation

Since the adoption of the UNCRC, considerable progress has been made in promoting children's right to be heard. There is growing understanding of and commitment among decision makers to the value of children's civic participation. Many countries have developed legal, policy and programmatic frameworks, and mechanisms have been established to support children's participation in decision making at local, national, regional and global levels.

These advances are not, however, always translating into meaningful opportunities for all children to be heard. Children are often not taken seriously or given space to have their views heard in policy making processes that affect them. Mechanisms for children's participation are often not available, accessible or child-friendly; children may lack the support to engage; and adults often lack the skills and capacity to facilitate meaningful child participation. Many children face challenges and barriers to exercising their civil and political rights. This is particularly the case for children who face additional inequality and discrimination because of disability, family status, gender, language or racial/ethnic identities.¹³

The efforts of governments have not, therefore, guaranteed effective and systematic implementation of children's participation. Even where child participation policies are in place, they are often not backed by sufficient and sustainable public investments in structures and systems.

Adequate resourcing and funding are critical for child participation. Availability and sustainability of funding has been found to be a significant factor in determining whether platforms to ensure children's participation are continued once established.¹⁴ Despite States' obligations to ensure that public budgets support the fulfilment of all children's rights under the UNCRC¹⁵, it is often the case that insufficient resources are allocated to children's participation. Mechanisms which

are supposed to enable children to participate are not properly budgeted for by public institutions, meaning that they are unable to function effectively and inclusively and in ways which ensure that participation is meaningful.

“We want adults and us to make the decisions that affect us together!”

Girl, Senegal, focus group discussion.

This policy brief seeks to address this barrier to the systematic, meaningful and ethical participation of children in public decision making. Building on *Joining Forces' 2021 report [We're Talking, Are You Listening](#)*, which set out the barriers and opportunities for children's participation based on the

recommendations of children, this brief aims to shed light on public budgeting of children's participation. It is informed by consultations with children in seven countries, and a legal, policy and budgetary analysis of child participation in three of these countries. This brief presents insights and recommendations for governments on how children's participation can be embedded in structures and systems and how legal and policy commitments can be translated into public budgets in ways which promote meaningful and ethical child participation.

“Well, one of the most important things we have been repeating... is that we want to be heard.”

Girl, Peru, focus group discussion.

1

Joining Forces Call to Action

As an alliance of the six largest international NGOs working with and for children to secure their rights and end violence against them, *Joining Forces* puts children at the centre of what we do - supporting children to raise their voices, take action as agents of change and hold us and duty bearers to account, ensuring children's experiences and views shape the solutions for the problems they face.

Joining Forces agencies are mobilising around a Call to Action to demand greater financial investments and political will by governments and the wider international community for children's systematic participation in decision-making processes.

Child-focused organisations have played a critical role in promoting practical ways for children to be heard in different settings, and in fostering learning about how this can happen safely and meaningfully. We are working with children themselves to build a wave of support for children's participation at local, national and regional levels that will carry through to global forums and complement global initiatives.



What children have told us

Consultations with children, undertaken to inform this brief, sought to hear how children want to engage in decision making and to understand their perspectives on the extent to which their right to be heard is being fulfilled (or not) through existing child participation mechanisms.

Consultations were conducted with more than 150 children aged 12-17 in seven countries (El Salvador, Indonesia, Kenya, Peru, Philippines, Senegal, and Uganda). The consultation findings consider existing mechanisms that are available to children, the challenges and barriers children face in accessing these, and their vision for change. More information about the consultations can be found in the annex.

Differing opportunities for participation

Children were able to identify a range of child participation structures and opportunities to share their views. They referenced, for example, children and adolescent consultative councils and children's parliaments that docked into governments at regional, sub-regional, national or local levels. Children in some countries mentioned that they engage with committees established by local governments to prevent and respond to cases of child abuse, such as City Council for the Protection of Children in the Philippines, and Defence Offices for Children and Adolescents in Peru. In some countries, such as Indonesia, children were aware of mechanisms to engage children in legislative reforms. In addition to these systematic forms of child participation, children also described a variety of ad hoc opportunities to participate in civic life, such as celebrations of national and international child days.

"I live in Chorrillos. I participate in an environmental organization in the wetlands. We, as children, usually talk with the mayors from Chorrillos and Lima, where we propose solutions that can improve the wetlands. I have also participated in several environmental organizations done by the Lima Municipality."

Girl, Peru, focus group discussion.

Some children, however, voiced their frustration with how children are sidelined within decision making, including within participatory processes intended to incorporate community perspectives.



Regarding space for participation, in my village.. it has not gone well. For example, the village does not involve children in Musrenbang [participatory planning process]. This does not rule out the possibility of villages involving children, but in my own village there is no forum or space to accommodate our aspirations in Musrenbang meetings, so far it is still limited to promises that we can be invited to Musrenbang"

Girl, Indonesia, focus group discussion.

Reflecting on their experiences of engaging with participation opportunities, children's perceptions of the impact of their engagement differed. In Indonesia, for example, children were invited to hearings of draft legislation as part of public consultation, and yet they were not involved in the review and revision stages and in the enforcement of the new laws. Some children felt that the views or suggestions they shared during these processes were not always considered, but others felt that their views had been incorporated, generating positive outcomes.

"When the previous Children's Act was being reviewed, we were asked to provide our contributions towards the new act. When it was finalised, it was evident our views had been considered in the new Act."

Boy, Kenya, focus group discussion.



Schools were specifically identified as spaces that can foster child participation by involving students in school related policy decisions through student councils, forums and children's clubs. These mechanisms often go beyond school policies - they build children's confidence and leadership skills and create platforms to share their views on other issues that concern them. Local governments and districts in some countries, such as Peru, also engage with these school-based mechanisms to include children's perspectives in programming and policy making for children.

“Teachers teach children so that they can participate. They play a big role in children’s participation.”

Girl, Uganda, focus group discussion.

Barriers to participation

Children engaged in the consultations identified a range of barriers at household, community, institutional and national levels which prevent them, and other children, from participating in and having their views considered in decision making processes. These barriers stem from social, economic and political factors.

Some children for example, described beliefs held by their parents or communities that children don't know much about the world and do not need to be consulted, even when issues are important to them. Social norms dictating that children must stay quiet when adults are speaking or that children should accept decisions made by adults were apparent through many of the consultations.

“Some parents do not understand the benefit of child participation, whenever children try to speak up, they shut them down.”

Boy, Uganda, focus group discussion.

“We often hear the adults say, ‘You’re young, you don’t know anything about the world.’ On the contrary, the children are more aware of the issues that concern them.”

Girl, Philippines, focus group discussion.

“We have adults who think that children cannot make decisions, and therefore there is no need for them to hold forums and participate in them.”

Boy, Kenya, focus group discussion.



Children themselves may feel that they lack the agency, confidence, and knowledge to engage in a meaningful way. Some children expressed worries about their proposals being rejected, or their fear of being harmed, ridiculed, bullied or judged after voicing their views, explaining that these concerns were deterrents to their participation.

“Fear of rejection.. would also be something that stops us as children expressing what we feel, our opinion on a subject, to be rejected or judged for our opinion.”

Boy, El Salvador, focus group discussion.

“Some children don't participate because they fear that their photos taken during these events might be used wrongly on social media and they may experience cyber bullying.”

Girl, Uganda, focus group discussion.

Other children talked about inadequate financial resources to ensure equitable and inclusive access to the meetings they were invited to; for example, fares for transport and the other expenses. The lack of or inadequate financial resources allocated to child participation creates further barriers to meaningful and inclusive participation.

‘Some children are not given the opportunity to participate due to financial constraints in the barangay...’

Girl, Philippines, focus group discussion.

Ensuring that the voices of all children are heard, especially those most affected by inequality and discrimination is a significant challenge. The participation barriers faced by children with disabilities emerged as a particular concern for some of the children consulted.

“Children who are deaf or blind are not usually included to participate in activities at school and in the communities.”

Girl, Uganda, focus group discussion.

“I think that particularly we need to strengthen the area of communication. Every child and adolescent is very different and we have different ways to communicate. For example, there are persons with visual or hearing disability, and deaf and dumb persons and we need to think how they can communicate and participate.”

Girl, Peru, focus group discussion.



Participation can also be more challenging for children living in remote rural areas where securing transportation to places where child participation meetings are held can be difficult and expensive. Children in these settings have limited access to services, poor internet connections and often do not own or use devices which could foster connection and participation via digital means.

“I think one barrier for free participation in some places, not everywhere, is that in the rural areas we have an internet shortage.”

Girl, Peru, focus group discussion.

Girls, displaced children, children without parental care, and those living in poverty have very little access to their participation rights, with limited access to information, resources, and opportunities. Children are particularly concerned about how these factors influence the selection of children to participate in different mechanisms.

‘I think that every child or adolescent should participate because the voices are from everyone not only a small group and we also need to take into account persons with special circumstances. People with disabilities. It should be all of us, both men and women.’

Boy, Peru, focus group discussion.

Children's vision for change

When asked about what needs to change to ensure that all children are able to meaningfully participate, children made a range of recommendations.

Across all the countries, children highlighted the importance of **strengthening their and others' capacity to be able to participate with confidence** and the need for them to have a strong understanding of the issues they are engaging with. They called for capacity strengthening, skills trainings, and mentorship programmes to enhance their leadership and communication skills and use of technology for virtual meetings. Many children felt that this type of support was essential for informing their points of view, developing their critical thinking, self-expression, and confidence. They also called for increasing funding and support for logistics to enable children's mobility and increase access to participation mechanisms.

“As children, we need to be sensitized on different laws and policies that protect us so that we can speak from an informed point of view.”

Girl, Kenya, focus group discussion.



“The organizations where we participate should provide us with in depth training on the topic and leadership and oratory workshops, for us to express ourselves in a better way before authorities and during meetings.”

Girl, Peru, focus group discussion.

The importance of **adults' awareness, support for and championing of children's participation** was also stressed. Children identified a need for increased understanding amongst adults of children's rights, including their right to participate, and the associated benefits of upholding them. They called for decision makers to show leadership, to support and encourage children to participate in decision-making. They wanted decision makers themselves to engage with children from all backgrounds.

“It is important that the main authority see the reality directly and socialize with the children and adolescents in order to understand the reality.”

Girl, Peru, focus group discussion.

Children cared about both **the subject and the format of participation mechanisms**. They wanted to prioritise topics or areas of debate which match their interests, address their rights and responsibilities, or concern the day-to-day challenges facing children and their families. They also stressed the importance of child-friendly and child-centred approaches and spaces, both physical and virtual, and of receiving feedback and follow up on decisions taken.

“Discussion forums already exist, but they must be balanced with a more conducive system and there

must be more systematic updates and follow-up. Sometimes, the issues raised are just the same and do not match the concerns of young people”

Girl, Indonesia, focus group discussion.

Finally, children emphasised the importance of ensuring that **child participation is equitable**. They called for equal opportunities and non-discriminatory opportunities to ensure that all children are able to participate, regardless of their identity or other factors which can make children vulnerable to exclusion.

Children also called for fair processes to select representatives, such as free and fair election of delegates to represent their views during workshops and in other platforms.

“Children with disabilities should also be allowed to participate; they should be embraced so that they feel like they are not left out in the forums. Their suggestions should also be incorporated into policies that address violence against children.”

Boy, Kenya, focus group discussion.

‘There should be a free and fair selection of members representing other children in the forums. Our teachers are the ones who decide who goes to the forums, but we would like to select the ones who will represent us, not our teachers.’

Boy, Kenya, focus group discussion.



Save the Children

2 Child participation and safeguarding

Safe and ethical child participation requires putting the best interests and welfare of children first, and creating safe, meaningful and equal opportunities and environments for all children to share their views and engage in issues and decisions which affect them. It requires minimising the risk to children from involvement in participatory practice in person and online.

Children's participation and their protection are interdependent and should be considered together. When involving children, their safety and protection is a paramount consideration. This entails careful, detailed, and rigorous planning and preparation, along with meeting the highest practice standards when it comes to safe and inclusive child participation – right from the point of selection of the child through to post participation-feedback and follow up.



ChildFund

It is the duty of all organisations and entities to ensure events involving children are safe and they have the resources and capacity to meet safeguarding standards and manage risks.

What our analysis tells us

Since the adoption of the UNCRC, many countries have taken important steps towards embedding children's participation within governance at national and local levels. And yet children tell us - and other evidence shows us - that their right to be heard is not being systematically guaranteed. Child participation in practice is frequently tokenistic and ad hoc, excludes vulnerable groups, and evidence of its impact is often limited.¹⁶

Laws, policies, strategies and plans are crucial components for guaranteeing children's right to participate. Yet without sufficient and sustained resourcing, child participation mechanisms are unable to function effectively or inclusively, in ways which enable children's safe, meaningful and ethical participation in decision making.

The analysis conducted for this brief aimed to understand how resources are being allocated to child participation mechanisms in order to shed light on where there has been progress and where gaps remain. The three countries selected for this analysis -

El Salvador, Peru and Uganda - have all instituted child participation mechanisms. As such, they do not offer a representative view of governments' progress in implementing children's participation. Rather, they provide an opportunity to highlight aspects of good practice but also gaps and opportunities to strengthen the institutionalisation of child participation in public decision making.

Laws and policies

Under the UNCRC, states have an obligation to enact laws and policies that make provision for children to be heard in all matters affecting them. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has emphasised that enshrining child participation in law and policy is an important building block towards implementing children's right to be heard.¹⁷

This was clearly reiterated in the Guidance Note of the United Nations Secretary-General on Child Rights Mainstreaming.¹⁸



All three countries analysed have made provisions for children's participation in law, although the level of specificity varied from country to country. All have a national policy, plan or strategy which addresses children's participation. In each country, the relevant national law or policy makes reference to specific child participation mechanisms.

Good practice shows that co-ordination of child participation should be assigned to a lead authority so that it is institutionalised at all levels.¹⁹ In each of the three countries analysed, several government bodies and multiple levels of government have responsibilities for child participation. Each of the countries has a designated lead agency for children's participation, although analysis of coordination was beyond the scope of this study.

Child participation mechanisms

Governments have established a wide range of mechanisms and other initiatives to facilitate child participation. These include Ombudspersons for Children's offices, children and youth councils and parliaments, child-friendly complaint and feedback systems, and educational programs that aim to empower

children with knowledge about their rights and responsibilities. Schools are increasingly adopting student councils and forums to involve students in decisions about school policies and curricula. While evidence suggests that the effectiveness of different types of mechanisms varies,²⁰ in general, participatory processes and mechanisms should be consistent and ongoing in order to move beyond tokenism.²¹

Child participation mechanisms were identified in all three countries studied, although their format and structure varied. In both El Salvador and Peru, a structure of children's councils has been put in place at district, provincial, regional and national levels, focused on consulting children and adolescents through a representative process. The multiple level structure allows for the local demands to be conveyed to decision makers at regional and national levels. In both cases, children's councils are referenced in national laws or policies, although the level of detail regarding the formation, responsibilities, structure and operation of these participation mechanisms varies between countries.

In Uganda, a much wider range of participation mechanisms at school, local, district, regional and national levels and across sectors are referenced in the country's National Child



Participation Strategy. However, these are not clearly structured to ensure representation of children's views at local, regional or national levels, and have been criticised for being fragmented and often short lived.²²

Budgets

Availability of funding has been found to be a significant factor in determining the sustainability of children's participation mechanisms.²³ The analysis of how children's participation mechanisms are funded and budgeted for revealed several challenges, which have implications for their functioning, and in turn for children's opportunities to participate meaningfully in decision making. Despite the presence of plans and strategies for children's participation with objectives, prioritised actions, and responsibilities of institutions at different government levels, the national level institutional budgets analysed did not reflect differentiated allocations to support the organisation of child participation mechanisms or to guarantee their operation. Without disaggregation of budgets, identifying and tracking public spending on children's participation is challenging.

A common finding across the three countries was that resource allocations for child participation were included in wider budget categories or programmes. For example, in Peru, funding for child participation is included under 'Strengthening the participation of civil society in education' in the budget of the Ministry of Education and under 'Playful intervention and safe spaces to strengthen the capacities of girls, boys and adolescents' in the budget of the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations.²⁴

At the subnational level, determining the size of the child participation budget in the countries analysed was even more challenging, in part because of the number of institutions at each government level. While regulatory frameworks may establish the responsibility of sub-national authorities for child participation, not all local governments prioritise it in policies and plans and not all have 'visible' allocations for child participation in their budgets. In the case of Uganda, it was also noted that budgets of local governments are heavily dependent on transfers from the central government, linked to priority objectives - which do not include child participation. These restrictions limit the inclusion of specific activities for children's participation within local governments' budgets.

Analysis of the types of expenditure associated with child participation related budgets provides an indication of how resources are being spent. In all three countries, it was found that expenditure was mostly on 'goods and services'. In Peru, for example, expenditure was mostly on food and beverages for the participation spaces. This finding suggests that child participation funding is not necessarily being spent in ways which enable child participation structures and mechanisms to be strengthened and to operate effectively. It was not possible, for example, to identify specific budget allocations for capacity building of children, adults and public officials, developing methodologies and tools, information sharing or and technical assistance - all of which are essential for effective, ethical and meaningful child participation.



There were some indications that insufficient and poorly allocated resources were having an impact on the coverage, functioning and inclusiveness of child participation mechanisms in the countries analysed. For example, in Peru, resource limitations – among other factors - appear to have contributed to the fact that some municipalities have not set up children's councils. This limited coverage affects opportunities for many children to participate, especially in rural municipalities.

Challenges beyond budgets

Even when child participation mechanisms are in place and have sufficient resources to function, they may be of poor quality and not offer meaningfully opportunities for all children to be heard. As the children consulted for this brief stressed, the quality as well as the presence of child participation mechanisms and processes matters. All child participation must be safe (see box 2), and mechanisms, spaces and processes should be designed and implemented in a way which ensures meaningful and ethical participation (see box 3). While it was beyond the scope of this study to assess the quality, effectiveness, or inclusiveness of child participation mechanisms in the countries analysed, some insights did emerge.

Lack of representation of children from marginalised communities and identities was identified as a concern by key informants in both El Salvador and Peru, echoing the concerns expressed by children. Despite some recent improvements in the regulations governing the election of children to participation mechanisms,²⁵ children who encounter the most barriers to participation were underrepresented. In El Salvador, children with disabilities, working children, migrants, and indigenous children, among others, were reported to be less likely to participate in children's councils.²⁶ In Peru, key informants highlighted the importance of ensuring that the children's councils, at all levels, are informed

and not manipulated by political actors, and that the election of representatives is democratic, and representative.²⁷

The quality and impact of children's participation were also questioned in some cases. In Peru, there was a perception that children's councils still play a symbolic rather than a substantive role in decision-making, and participation spaces operate in a formal, adult-directed manner rather than being child-led or child-friendly.²⁸ In Uganda, the issue of power relations between adults and children in all settings was highlighted as a key barrier to the meaningful participation of children, with families and communities undermining children's participation and resisting taking their opinions into account.²⁹

Examples were also identified of how measures to limit freedom of association have impacted child participation. These observations are indicative of wider trends impacting children's right to participate. Measures taken by governments across the world to restrict civic space present particular challenges for child and youth-led organisations and restrict children's civic rights and freedoms more widely.³⁰

Some of these wider issues with child participation mechanisms, which echo some of the concerns expressed by children during the consultations, may be addressed in part by increased and better allocated resourcing. For example, by facilitating increased geographical coverage, overcoming financial barriers to children's participation, or through investment in capacity building for adult facilitators. However, these findings highlight the importance of the political, social and cultural environment, including social norms surrounding children's participation and the state of civic space, and of the need to ensure that the design of and methodology used within child participation mechanisms is conducive to meaningful, ethical participation.

Case study 1: Peru

Legal and policy frameworks

Peru has adopted strong laws and policies regarding children's participation, including the **Multisectoral National Policy for Girls, Boys and Adolescents (PNMNNA)**, which includes a specific objective related to the participation of children and adolescents: "Strengthen the participation of children and adolescents in the different decision-making spaces related to their daily lives". PNMNNA is implemented through budgetary programs aligned to it, which in turn have a regulatory framework.

A number of State entities are involved in implementing the PNMNNA, coordinated by the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations. However, in the case of adolescents from 15 years of age, their participation is also promoted by the National Youth Secretariat (SENAJU) within the framework of the National Youth Policy. This structure can undermine the efficiency of coordination with other sectors.

Child Participation Mechanisms

The primary mechanism for children's participation in Peru are **Consultative Councils for Girls, Boys and Adolescents (CCONNA)**, which are consultative participation spaces at the district, province, regional and national levels. Functions of CCONNA include the formulation of public policies, consulting on regulatory proposals, issuing opinions on public policies that involve children, and monitoring respect for children's rights. The organization of CCONNA is supported by regional, provincial and district governments. The multiple levels of CCONNA allow for the transmission of local demands to regional and even national levels of discussion. Provincial and regional level CCONNA, which are spaces for dialogue, debate and proposal of ideas,³¹ are made up of representatives of district level CCONNA who apply to participate at the next level. The National Assembly of CCONNA is a space for the prioritisation of issues affecting children and adolescents nationally to inform public policy making.

Budget

Implementation of PNMNNA involves multiple sectors, each of which must allocate resources to children's participation in their institutional budgets. Analysis of institutional budgets identified three openings related to, but not specific to child participation ('Strengthening the participation of civil society in education' in the Ministry of Education budget; 'Playful intervention and safe

spaces to strengthen the capacities of girls, boys and adolescents' in the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations budget; and 'Support for children and adolescents' in the regional level budget).

The lack of differentiation within these budget lines therefore limits our ability to determine the allocation of resources specifically to child participation. However, from the information that is available it can be established that funding for child participation constitutes a minimal proportion of institutional budgets. Moreover, the budget related to child participation appears to be allocated to expenditure on goods and services, mainly food and beverages for the CCONNA participation spaces. This composition of spending represents a limitation



for strengthening the participation structure and its operation, as resources are not allocated to institutional strengthening and advocacy on public policy.

Resource limitations appear to be a significant factor affecting the functionality, effectiveness, and impact capacity of CCONNA.³² At the subnational level, the organization of CCONNA has been limited, and there are some municipalities where CCONNA have not been formed. This limited coverage affects opportunities for many children to participate, especially in rural municipalities.

Case study 2: El Salvador

Legal and policy frameworks

El Salvador has put in place a raft of legislation and policies related to the participation of children. Central among these is the **'Grow Together' law**, which was adopted in 2023. Under this new law, El Salvador has begun to implement a new regulatory framework: the **Comprehensive Protection of Early Childhood, Children and Adolescence National System**.

The Grow Together Law emphasizes the prioritisation of early childhood, childhood and adolescence, and the need to provide resources for this population. This law establishes the mechanism to guarantee the participation of children in both judicial processes and protection decisions that involve them. It also indicates the mechanism for children's participation at the municipal and community levels and defines roles and functions of different entities. The Grow Together Law provides an opportunity for the protection system in El Salvador to define the regulations and normative bodies necessary to ensure the mechanisms and funding for children's participation.

Child participation programmes and mechanisms

A key mechanism for children's participation in El Salvador is the **Consultative Council for Children and Adolescents (CCNA)**. The CCNA is intended to facilitate consultation with children and adolescents and enable transmission of their views to decision makers through

a representative process. The CCNA is referenced in the Grow Together law, but this law does not detail the formation, responsibilities, structure or operation of this participation mechanism.

A second platform for children's participation in El Salvador are **Youth Units**. One of the reported achievements of the Youth Units was a consultation process and construction of the children's human rights platform.

The **education sector** has made important efforts to strengthen the exercise of children's right to participation schools. In a national survey carried out in 2020 over a third of children and young people reported that the education sector was the space where they've had the highest level of participation.³³

Budgeting for children's participation

Analysis of budgets identified openings for resourcing children's participation under relevant objectives in the budgets of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the Attorney General for the Defence of Human Rights and the National Council for Early Childhood, Children and Adolescence. However, no detail was available of the allocation of resources specifically for child participation, only for resources allocated to relevant objectives. What can be established is that allocations in institutional budgets for objectives relevant to child participation are very limited and are concentrated in expenditure items for the purchase of goods and services.



Case study 3: Uganda



Save the Children

Legal and policy frameworks

Uganda has taken important steps towards strengthening children's right to participate, putting in place an extensive legal and policy framework relating to child participation. The National Child Policy and the National Child Participation Strategy (NCPS) is the cornerstone of Uganda's efforts and includes clear goals, objectives and results for the exercise of child participation. However, as this strategy is not systematically monitored and has not been evaluated, the level of progress against strategic objectives cannot be determined.

A wide range of government bodies have responsibilities for child participation, under the coordination and leadership of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD). The MGLSD houses the National Children's Authority, which provides advice, oversight and coordination and tracks the status of child participation in the country.

Child participation programmes and mechanisms

The NCPS sets out a wide and comprehensive range of child participation mechanisms at school, local, district, regional and national levels and across sectors. While it is unclear how many of the mechanisms it refers to are being implemented, some achievements have been reported, such as the formation of child rights clubs in 40 schools across seven districts, child rights governance capacity building, activities commemorating the Day of the African Child and production of a Child Rights Score

Card monitoring the responsiveness of nine selected districts on their responsiveness to children's issues.³⁴

Nevertheless, evidence suggests that child participation in Uganda is still characterized by fragmented and short-lived initiatives and that child participation mechanisms are not clearly structured to ensure representation of children's views at local, regional or national levels.³⁵

Budget analysis

The NCPS states that the government should ensure that key sectors, including education, protection, health and social development, are allocated sufficient resources for child participation. However, challenges remain in articulating clear and sufficient budget allocations for specific child participation interventions in national and sub-national budgets.³⁶

The National Children Authority (NCA) is the main agency with specific responsibilities for tracking and advising on child participation, yet there is no detail of the specific allocation of resources for child participation in its institutional budget. It has also seen a significant reduction in its 2023/24 budget related to child participation compared to the previous year.³⁷

Budgets at the subnational level also do not have a specific allocation for child participation. Budgets of local governments are heavily dependent on transfers from the central government, linked to priority objectives - which do not include child participation. These restrictions limit the inclusion of specific activities for children's participation with local government budgeting.

3

What does meaningful and ethical child participation look like?

In its General Comment No.12, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child presented nine basic requirements for for effective, ethical and meaningful child participation:³⁸

Child participation should:

1) be transparent and informative with full, accessible, diversity-sensitive, and age-appropriate information to children about their right to express their views freely and their views to be given due weight.

2) be voluntary, so that children are never coerced and that they can cease involvement at any stage.

3) be respectful towards children's views.

4) be relevant to children's lives,

experiences, knowledge, and capabilities.

5) be child-friendly and ensure adequate time and resources are provided for children to be sufficiently prepared.

6) be inclusive, encouraging opportunities for marginalised children to be involved and avoiding discrimination.

7) be supported by training of adults to provide them with the skills to facilitate children's participation.

8) be safe and sensitive to risk, taking every precaution to minimize the risk to children of abuse, exploitation, and other negative consequences of participation.

9) be accountable, with a commitment to follow-up and evaluate.



Core elements of a child participation system



Integrating child participation into existing structures and systems is a critical aspect of creating an enabling environment for the realisation of children's rights. Equitable and inclusive child participation ensures that all the rights of all children are represented. When child participation is a sustained and integral part of governance and decision-making structures, rather than a sporadic or ad hoc effort, children have a seat at the decision-making table on all matters affecting them. Embedding children's participation in structures and systems sends a clear message that it is not an optional or expendable component of policy and governance but a fundamental right, which must be upheld and respected.³⁹

Sufficient and sustainable investment is also essential to ensure the effective and ongoing functioning of child participation mechanisms. Moreover, for children's participation to be meaningful and inclusive, duty bearers must also pay attention how resources are allocated. This includes addressing the barriers to participation faced by many children; ensuring children have support to engage;

and strengthening the skills and capacities of adults, including those of decision makers.

Building on the analysis and examples of how child participation is currently being built into laws, policies, programmes, and budgets, and drawing on the insights from children about how they want to participate and the types of barriers they experience, this section sets out the core institutional elements that need to be in place for a state to guarantee children's meaningful and inclusive participation, together with guidelines for holistically integrating children's participation within government budgets

Legal and policy frameworks

Children's right to participate needs to be guaranteed in national – and, where relevant, sub-national legal and policy frameworks, which implement and uphold children's right to freedom of association, peaceful assembly, expression and access to information. Laws and policies should specify the format, structure, operation and evaluation of mechanisms for

children's participation and should be supported by National Strategies or Action Plans on child participation, which provide for the development and reinforcement of child participation structures at all levels. These structures and mechanisms could include committees, children's parliaments, assemblies, student councils, and online platforms and should provide for a range of opportunities for children to participate, and channels for their voices to be heard by decision makers, and provide for accessibility for a wide diversity of children.

“There is a need to create more forums for participatory engagements, especially with different stakeholders at different levels and with both the county and national governments.”

FGD Boys Kenya

Programmatic framework with clearly articulated budget

Legal and policy frameworks, strategies and plans need to be translated into a clear programmatic framework in order to ensure that children's participation is budgeted for. This should link strategic objectives to programmes and projects with clear budget lines. Sufficient funds must be allocated to deliver participation priorities at different levels.

It is important that funding to these programmes is tracked throughout budget cycles. Even strong allocations can fall short if budgets are not fully executed. Funding should be evaluated for effectiveness to ensure resources are spent on programmes that make a difference to the lives of children.⁴⁰

Budgets with specific and differentiated actions

Funding to support children's participation must be clearly visible and differentiated within the budget classification system, linked clearly to the programmatic framework for child participation and to the budget principles.



This will provide the basis for governments to manage allocations and expenditures on child participation, in line with other budget lines and codes.

If the activities to achieve strategic objectives are not included in specific budget lines and codes, and instead added in generally or included within broad administrative units, it becomes extremely challenging to track the effectiveness and efficacy of spending on child participation. This is particularly the case at local government levels where, if child participation has not been prioritised, it is unlikely that activities - and allocations - for child participation will be visible in budgets. The 'Components of a Child Participation Budget' exemplifies the types of activities and allocations required to support meaningful and inclusive children's participation.

Prioritisation and coordination between and across authorities at all levels

Delivery - and resourcing - of child participation mechanisms and structures requires strong commitments from key government decision-makers to prioritise budgeting and planning for child participation at all levels of government, including protecting allocations against budget cuts or economic austerity.

To be successful, efforts also require efficient and well-coordinated institutional engagement from national to local government levels, with a mandated lead agency, and with the active involvement of stakeholders across relevant line ministries, along with national and local government administrative officials, technical teams, civil society organisations, the private sector, and children themselves.

Processes and capacities for operationalisation

Mechanisms and structures, while critical, do not in themselves guarantee that child participation will be inclusive and meaningful. The process by which child participation is facilitated is also important. This requires child-friendly and child-led methodologies, sharing accessible, child-friendly information, providing technical

assistance, and building capacities of relevant stakeholders to foster exchange and inter-generational dialogue with all children, including those who face additional barriers to their participation. It is critical that these activities are budgeted for (see 'Components of a Child Participation Budget').

“The organisations ... should provide us with in depth training on the topic and leadership and oratory workshops, for us to express ourselves in a better way before authorities and during meetings.”

Girl, Peru, focus group discussion.

4

Financing children's participation

Mobilisation of domestic resources is the most reliable, sustainable, and locally accountable source of investment in children and their participation. Funds for government budgets are generally sourced from a combination of domestic and donor resources, civil society, private sector, multi-national development bank grants or loans and/or a combination of these through blended or innovative financing.

Achieving meaningful and ethical participation of children requires sustainable sources of funding built from dedicated political and financial support of governments.

The realisation of children's right to participation and the broader spectrum of their rights are unlikely to be achieved without two core components:

- A clear prioritisation of children and their participation across all ministries and all levels of government; and
- A steady increase of such resources in low- and middle-income countries.

Progressive taxation is a means of addressing inequalities faced by children and families within countries and can support revenue to ensure more equitable and inclusive child participation. Efforts to reform and enhance tax policy and administration is a critical component of generating robust budgets for children.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) is an important international source of financing for many countries, particularly for low-income and fragile economies.

There is an urgent need to increase the volume, quality and impact of international public finance, if we are to realise children's rights, meeting and scaling up international commitments on public finance, including for ODA. ODA must be spent with heightened sensitivity of its impact and contributed in a way which fosters and strengthens capacity for local ownership of child centred fiscal and investment policy for children's participation and children's rights more broadly.

Components of a child participation budget

Realising children's right to meaningful and ethical participation requires a holistic range of interventions, which in turn should be reflected in budgets at national, departmental/regional and local levels of government. Budgets should include allocations for child participation interventions in three categories: 'strategic', 'mobilisation' and 'administrative'. The three component categories serve as helpful guidelines for comprehensively and holistically including children's participation within government budgets.

Strategic component

This category of interventions is designed to promote and strengthen child participation structures, consistent with a country's legal and policy frameworks, strategies and plans.

Examples of interventions under this component might include:

- Development and reinforcement of child participation structures at all levels
- Development of tools or instruments for operationalising child participation mechanisms, such as safeguarding policies and procedures and risk assessments.
- Development of strategies for the inclusion of children most impacted by discrimination and inequality

Mobilisation component

This category of interventions contributes to supporting children to exercise their right to participate, promoting understanding of the importance of children's participation amongst decision makers and communities, and to strengthening the capacities of adults to support and facilitate meaningful child participation.

Interventions under this component were prioritised by children. Examples might include:

- Development of child-friendly information about children's rights, laws, and policies.
- Strengthening the capacities of adults, including public officials and other decision-makers, teachers, faith leaders and caregivers to create and facilitate spaces and opportunities for meaningful child participation.
- Awareness raising campaigns about the importance of children's participation.

Administrative component

This component relates to costs associated with providing the services, materials and equipment required to ensure that child participation mechanisms can function in inclusive, accessible and meaningful ways.

Examples of interventions under this component might include:

- Funding support for equipment and services such as digital tools and technologies and interpretation services, which support inclusive participation.
- Transportation, insurance and accommodation costs
- Provision of or improvement of physical spaces for meetings based on the perspectives and needs of children.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen legal and policy frameworks guaranteeing children's right to be heard as well as their civil and political rights, as enshrined in the UNCRC

Enacting and enforcing laws that explicitly recognise children's right to participate in matters that affect them is critical. Children's participation can be recognised and integrated into national constitutions, mandated through general policies supporting realisation of child rights or through specific national policies and strategies focusing on child participation. Laws and policies should specify the format, structure, operation and evaluation of mechanisms for children's participation.

More broadly, governments should remove restrictive laws and regulatory measures that impede the civil and political rights of children, including the rights to freedom of peacefully assembly, association, and expression and access to information.

2. Establish and institutionalise structures and mechanisms for equitable and inclusive child participation

Formal, inclusive structures and mechanisms should be established that allow children, in all their diversity, to express their opinions, ideas, and concerns in various settings. This should include the creation of child friendly online mechanisms for virtual participation, in addition to creating physical platforms such as local level children's forums, children's parliaments and children's councils in schools. These mechanisms should be child-led, equitable and non-discriminatory with a fair election of delegates to represent their views, (where applicable), enabling all children to participate, including those children who face barriers to participation because of their identities or communities.

Governments should also establish effective child friendly complaint mechanisms, beginning with the setting up independent human rights institutions such as children's ombudsperson or commissioners.

Governments should also champion children's participation internationally, encouraging regional and international bodies to put in place and resource child participation structures.

3. Invest in child participation mechanisms, across sectors and at all levels of government

Sufficient and sustainable investment is essential to ensure the effective and ongoing functioning of child participation mechanisms. Funding to support children's participation must be clearly visible and differentiated within the budget classification system.

For children's participation to be meaningful and inclusive, duty bearers must also pay attention how resources are allocated. This includes ensuring that budgets for child participation address the barriers to participation faced by many children, and that resources are allocated to enabling children whose voices may otherwise not be heard to participate.

4. Strengthen children's capacity, confidence and knowledge to participate in decision making

Building the capacity of all children to gain the requisite skills, knowledge, and confidence to share their views and ensuring that children are provided with necessary information are important prerequisites for promoting effective participation. Resourcing should be allocated to interventions designed to strengthen children's capacity, in addition to including children's rights education as part of national curricula and establishing school-based mechanisms for participation, such as student councils.

5. Support the capacity and willingness of adults to facilitate and enable children's meaningful and ethical participation

Providing training to strengthen the skills and capacities of adults who engage with children, and sensitising decision makers to the importance of including children's voices - including facilitating direct contact between children and decision-makers – are essential for ensuring that children's views are heard.

Attention should be given to addressing adult mindsets that perpetuate barriers to children's participation and more widely to creating a culture of respect for children's opinions. This includes supporting adults to understand the importance of children's participation, to meaningfully engage with children in a child-friendly manner and to foster an environment where children feel safe to express themselves.

Annex: Methodology

This policy brief is based on two complementary methods of data collection and analysis:

Consultations with children were undertaken with 154 children in seven countries for the purposes of informing this brief. Consultations were conducted by country teams from Joining Forces agencies in El Salvador, Indonesia, Kenya, Peru, Philippines, Senegal, and Uganda. Two focus group discussions (FGDs) of between 10-12 children aged 12-17 years were conducted in each of the seven countries. The groups included both girls and boys from a range of different backgrounds, including children from both rural and urban areas, children with varied experiences in participation and children with disabilities. In all countries except Indonesia the focus groups were divided by gender.

A variety of child-friendly tools and activities were used to promote dynamic, creative and inclusive discussion. Children were asked a range of guiding questions about the mechanisms they engage in, how they want to participate, the barriers children may face to their participation and the solutions and actions they propose to improve their participation.

All children were informed about the purpose of the consultation and asked to give their assent, alongside parents' / caregivers' informed consent to their participation. The consultations followed ethical research guidelines to ensure the safety, rights, dignity and well-being of participants.

Legal, policy and budgetary analysis of child participation was undertaken in three of the

countries in which children were consulted (El Salvador, Peru, and Uganda), with the aim of shedding light on how children's participation is budgeted for in practice, highlighting good practice and identifying gaps and weaknesses. Countries were selected based on the following criteria:

- Availability of legal and policy frameworks regarding child participation
- Availability of information on governments' costs and budgets for child participation
- Child Participation Mechanisms formed or outlined

The analysis was based on a range of data sources in each country including interviews with public officials and NGO staff, online official statistics (national and subnational approved budget when available), legal and policy frameworks and secondary literature. Analysis was conducted at national and subnational levels, and included 1) analysis of laws, policies and public plans 2) analysis of child participation structures, and 3) budget analysis based on each countries policy framework and structures for child participation.

Limitations included the lack of disaggregated budgets or detailed data, which meant it was not possible to conduct a detailed costing analysis, identify or track public spending on children's participation, both at national and subnational level. There was also a lack of data and reports on the implementation progress of normative and policy frameworks.



Endnotes

- ¹ L. Lundy, 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', *British Educational Research Journal*, 33:6, 2007, 927-942.
- ² R.S. Foa, A. Klassen, D. Wenger, A. Rand, A. and M. Slade. 'Youth and Satisfaction with Democracy: Reversing the Democratic Disconnect?' 2020, *Youth_and_Satisfaction_with_Democracy-lite.pdf* (cam.ac.uk).
- ³ See for example: Joining Forces, 'Joining Forces for Africa Summary Report', 2023, *Final-Evaluation-Summary-Report-October-2023-1.pdf* (joining-forces.org); Joining Forces, 'Joining Forces for Africa Project Thematic Review: Joint national level advocacy to change or approve laws and policies', 2023 *JOFA-Project-THEMATIC-REVIEW-Joint-national-level-advocacy-to-change-or-approve-laws-and-policies-1.pdf* (joining-forces.org), European Commission, *Study on child participation in EU political and democratic life*, 2021, Microsoft Word - *Child Participation Final Report Revised 28.04.2021 FINAL.docx* (europa.eu)
- ⁴ Participant in children's consultations in Peru
- ⁵ This policy brief uses the term children to refer to the age group under 18 years of age, as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- ⁶ Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out children's right to be heard as a fundamental principle
- ⁷ Joining Forces defines children's participation according to Article 12 of the CRC where "States Parties shall assure to the child ...the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child... in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." It supports the guidance of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its General Comment No. 12 on the nine basic requirements for meaningful and ethical children's participation.
- ⁸ L. Lundy, 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', *British Educational Research Journal*, 33:6, 2007, 927-942.
- ⁹ F. Gottschalk and H. Borhan, *Child participation in decision making: implications for education and beyond*, 2023, *a37eba6c-en.pdf* (oecd-ilibrary.org)
- ¹⁰ R. A. Hart, *Children's Participation: From tokenism to citizenship*, Innocenti Essay, no. 4, 1992, International Child Development Centre, Florence
- ¹¹ G. Lansdown G, *Children Participation in Democratic Decision Making*, 2001, UNICEF Innocenti Insight 6, <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/insight6.pdf>
- ¹² R.S. Foa, A. Klassen, D. Wenger, A. Rand, A. and M. Slade. 'Youth and Satisfaction with Democracy: Reversing the Democratic Disconnect?' 2020, *Youth_and_Satisfaction_with_Democracy-lite.pdf* (cam.ac.uk).
- ¹³ Joining Forces Alliance, 'We are Talking, are you Listening', 2021, https://joining-forces.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/policy_brief-We_re_Talking-Are_You_Listening-EN.pdf
- ¹⁴ Save the Children, 'The Right of children to participate in public decision making processes, 2020, *The Right of Children to Participate in Public Decision-Making Processes* | Save the Children's Resource Centre
- ¹⁵ UNCRC Article 4 and General Comment 19
- ¹⁶ UNICEF, *Child participation in local governance: a UNICEF guidance note*, 2017, *UNICEF-Child-Participation-in-Local-Governance.pdf*
- ¹⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'General Comment No.12: The right of the child to be heard' 2009. *CRC/C/GC/12* at para.49
- ¹⁸ UN Secretary General, 2023, *Guidance Note of the Secretary-General on Child Rights Mainstreaming*, July 2023
- ¹⁹ G. Lansdown, 'Every Child's Right to be Heard: A Resource Guide on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No.12', 2011
- ²⁰ For example, Youth Councils have allowed youth to shape policies and decisions at the local level in many contexts; Youth Parliaments, however, have typically had less direct impact on policy-making. See, M. Collins, A. Augsberger & W. Gecker, 'Youth Councils in Municipal Government: Examination of Activities, Impact and Barriers', *Children and Youth Services Review* 65, 2016: 140-47, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.04.007>; M. Shephard & S. Patrikios, 'Making Democracy Work by Early Formal Engagement? A Comparative Exploration of Youth Parliaments in the EU', *Parliamentary Affairs* 66:4, 2013: 752-71: <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/ggs017>
- ²¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No.12: The right of the child to be heard*, 2009, *CRC/C/GC/12* at paras.132-133
- ²² SWSA, 'The State of the Ugandan Child: an analytical overview', <https://swsa.mak.ac.ug/reports/state-ugandan-child-analytical-overview> (accessed 11th March 2023)
- ²³ Save the Children, 'The Right of children to participate in public decision making processes, 2020, *The Right of Children to Participate in Public Decision-Making Processes* | Save the Children's Resource Centre
- ²⁴ Peru's Public Sector Budget Law 2023 (31639)
- ²⁵ In 2023, new regulations were brought in in Peru for the election of the CONNA which specified the inclusion migrant population, children and adolescents from 8 years old.
- ²⁶ Observatorio de la niñez y adolescencia, 'Balance de la situación de los derechos de la niñez y la adolescencia 2021 - 2022', 2002, <https://observatoriodelaninezadolescencia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BALANCE-NIN%CC%83EZ-Y-ADOLESCENCIA-2022.pdf>
- ²⁷ Key informant interviews, with staff from Joining Forces agency, Peru



Endnotes

²⁸ Key informant interviews with staff from Joining Forces agency, Peru

²⁹ FGD Girls, Uganda. Children's Consultation

³⁰ Plan International, 'How to better support children and youth affected by shrinking civic space: approaches to navigate risks with young activists', 2021, policy-brief3-children-youth-and-civic-space-eng.pdf (plansverige.org)

³¹ FGD Girls, Perú. Children's Consultation

³² Inference based on analysis of institutional and municipal/district budgets.

³³ Save the Children, 'Young Voice El Salvador survey report'. 2020, https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/informe_young_voice_el_salvador.pdf/

³⁴ <https://mglsd.go.ug/national-children-authority/> (accessed 15th November 2023)

³⁵ SWSA, 'The State of the Ugandan Child: an analytical overview',

<https://swsa.mak.ac.ug/reports/state-ugandan-child-analytical-overview> (accessed 11th March 2023)

³⁶ SWSA, 'The State of the Ugandan Child: an analytical overview', <https://swsa.mak.ac.ug/reports/state-ugandan-child-analytical-overview> (accessed 11th March 2023)

³⁷ Uganda Government; Approved National Budget Estimates 2023/2024.

³⁸ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.12: The right of the child to be heard, 2009, CRC/C/GC/12. See also Save the Children, 'The Nine Basic Requirements for Meaningful and Ethical Children's Participation', 2021, Microsoft Word - Basic Requirements-English-Final.docx (savethechildren.org.uk)

³⁹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.12: The right of the child to be heard, 2009, CRC/C/GC/12

⁴⁰ Note that the annual Auditor General's report of a Government audit outlines what was actually spent and is a useful resource for tracking actual spend.



Save the Children

“A Seat at the Table: Investing in children’s participation as a cornerstone of children’s rights” is a product of Joining Forces.

Joining Forces is an alliance of the six largest international NGOs working with and for children to secure their rights and end violence against them.

The development of this policy brief was led by Amanda Brydon and Alison Wright from Save the Children, with the support of

all Joining Forces agencies and the Joining Forces Secretariat. Analysis was conducted by Ludmila Santa Cruz, an independent consultant.

Special thanks go to country teams from Joining Forces agencies in El Salvador, Indonesia, Kenya, Peru, Philippines, Senegal, and Uganda for facilitating consultations with children, and most of all to the children themselves for their time and for sharing their views and experiences.

Cover photo: Plan International



JOINING FORCES
For All Children

ChildFund
Alliance

