



# Child Rights Governance

## **Children in politics**

A collection of 11 inspiring, motivating and suggestive case studies on children's engagement in governance



**Save the Children**

# Preface

Why is it important to involve children in governance? First of all, children are citizens from the moment they are born. Evidence from involving children in Save the Children's work over the past 20 years has clearly demonstrated that children have a great deal to contribute in terms of problem analysis and ideas for solutions and hence the relevance and effectiveness of interventions targeting children.

We know that even though child rights realisation is an obligation of States who are parties to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, political willingness and allocation of adequate resources to back public investment in children are needed. But who is advancing children's causes when budgets are planned, debated and enacted by parliaments? Who monitors whether or not the execution of budget allocations reaches the intended children and addresses equity?

As children cannot vote, other platforms for their political influence are needed in order to give them **voice**.

The Child Rights Governance Global Initiative is keen to encourage Save the Children Members, country programmes and partners working with us to promote children's engagement in governance bodies that influence the everyday lives of children.

The foundation of the analytical framework of Child Rights Governance is based on:

1. The General Measures of Implementation are the structures and mechanisms governments need to put in place to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, e.g. cooperation with civil society.
2. Key governance factors such as economic governance and children's citizenship.
3. The capacity of key actors in child rights to engage in quality relationships.

The aim of this publication is to share **innovations** from Save the Children Members and country programmes along with examples from UNICEF Nepal and Plan Kenya on how to successfully engage children in governance.

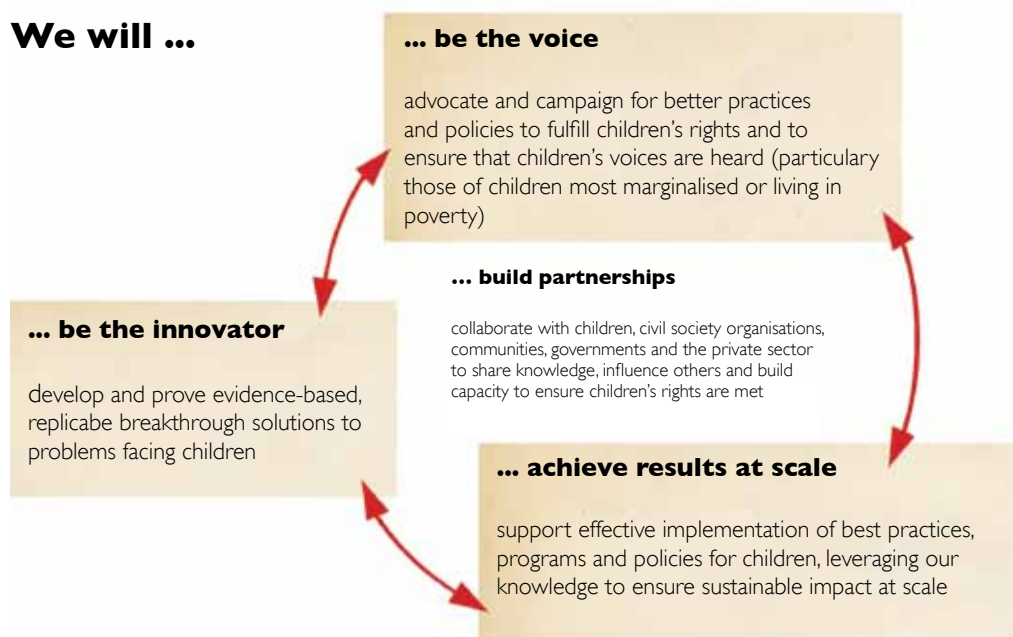
As the cases in *Children in politics: A collection of 11 inspiring, motivating and suggestive case studies on children's engagement in governance* demonstrate, the three different aspects of the foundation of the analytical framework come together nicely in the various efforts to include children in governance. This publication, in addition to addressing the governments' obligation to involve civil society, which of course also includes children, children's civil and political rights and good governance for children, also strengthens the capacity of key actors to engage in quality relationships.

Some of the cases in this publication already show great **impact** and have been **scaled** up, while others are still in their initial stages. Common for all cases is that important **partnerships** between local governments, civil society and children have been formed and the quality of the relationships has gradually improved as trust has been built and adults have recognised what children can contribute. At the same time, children have experienced their views being taken seriously and that democratic negotiation processes genuinely provide them with influence.

Enjoy your reading!

Lene Christina Steffen  
Director Child Rights Governance Global Initiative  
Save the Children

## We will ...





# Introduction

## Children and good governance

Children remain invisible in the debates about how countries are governed. By ignoring children, the governance community is missing a trick. Involving children in discussions about governance and ensuring that the realisation of their rights is a measure of good governance can help improve government performance and build more effective states, especially in challenging environments.

*Save the Children policy brief 2010*

"Talking to adults is something new, and other children are surprised. But I think we have to inspire other children and help others gain strength and make them understand that it is possible. We have to fight for children and the welfare of children. We have to be role models. We will change society," explains 16-year-old Clent, who has spent half of his life engaging in governance in the Philippines.

Clent is just one out of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands or millions of children who combat age old traditions of silencing children and rigid governance systems keeping children out of real influence and decision-making processes in their homes, organisations, institutions, local communities, countries and regions. You can meet some of these courageous children in the 11 case studies from the 10 countries included in *Children in politics: A collection of 11 inspiring, motivating and suggestive case studies on children's engagement in governance*.

The results are obvious at many levels. When Sunita Tamang's club noticed that a large group of Muslim girls were dropping out of school, the club members found out that the parents did not like their girls wearing school uniforms with skirts. Sunita's club went to the Municipality Education Office, and the Muslim girls were granted permission to wear the traditional South Asian dress salwar kameez with long shirts and baggy trousers; they returned to school.

Sunita's example comes from Nepal, where a Child Friendly Local Governance Strategy recently has been approved by the Cabinet of Nepal. "This is a major achievement, because it makes the strategy a part of a system which will remain beyond UNICEF," explains Anjali Pradhan, UNICEF Child Participation Specialist, who has been supporting Sunita and her classmates throughout the process.

### No assurance of real participation

Although Anjali Pradhan later in this booklet praises the Philippines for being a good example of a country that has developed formal structures for children's engagement in governance, children in the Philippines are not so convinced. "We have comprehensive rules and regulations for child participation in the Philippines, but inside the government these platforms are violated, and we have no assurance of real participation," says Raven, a member of the Children and Youth Organisation, CYO.



He is seconded by Guatemalan Lilibeth Adayansi, 16 years of age, "Children don't have voices here, but they're affected by the decisions made by adults. Young people have great ideas about how to develop their communities. And if you let us, we can be the engines that push for this development."

Despite the hardship in getting heard, children do manage to influence governance in some of the world's most impoverished and democratically starved countries. In Zimbabwe, the continued demand by children's organisations to participate in issues that affect them has resulted in the budgeting process being reviewed and democratised.

In Guraghe in Ethiopia children and adults have joined forces to push the authorities to deliver. Wondimu, director of a new school in Cheha Woreda, states, "The children wished for a preschool, and when the preschool was built by contributions from the community, we used this proof of our keen interest in education to put pressure on the government for a primary school. Finally, after four years, they gave in and provided us with this primary school."

Being a child in a developed country is not a guarantee for getting access to decision-making bodies, as a case from Denmark shows. "All the children I've met in Denmark have one thing in common: They do not feel that they are being heard by the adults. However, you cannot meet the requirements of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child without involving the children," concluded Marta Mauras, the Vice President of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and rapporteur for Denmark, when she visited Denmark in March 2012.

### **A high degree of responsibility**

The majority of children want to be involved in decisions that affect them. They value opportunities to access information and to have their say. Children have different perspectives than adults and know their own situation best. Many children would also like the opportunity to help make the world a better place.

Children show a high degree of responsibility in the way they use the opportunities to engage, because they are as concerned as the adults about making a real difference. When adults understand and appreciate children's capacities, their attitudes toward children also change.

When children exercise their rights and responsibilities, they become more able to hold organisations, institutions and governments accountable, as participation enables them to become active members of civil society. This civic engagement increases the visibility of children and children's issues, ensuring that they are included in the economic, social and political agendas that affect them. This compensates for children's exclusion from formal political processes.

What's more, it is unrealistic to expect children to grow into responsible, participating adults if the skills involved in a democratic process have not been introduced to them at an earlier stage. Individuals need to practice to understand the true nature of democracy and to develop the competence and confidence needed to participate. Participation helps children to exercise citizenship, and children's participation in governance ultimately plays an important part in establishing and maintaining a healthy democracy.

### **The ground is laid by the UNCRC**

Although the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UNCRC, does not explicitly refer to governance, and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child rarely mentions this concept, the convention lays the ground for the integration of governance concerns in its implementation.

The Convention's Article 4 provides for States Parties' obligation to "undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the convention." Moreover, Article 12 spells out that the child has a right to express his or her views freely in all matters affect-

CHILDREN TALKING TO AND BEING HEARD BY ADULTS IS SOMETHING NEW, AS MANY CHILDREN CONCLUDED IN THIS BOOKLET, ALSO IN ETHIOPIA WHERE CHILDREN PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS.



ing the child, and that those views be given due weight. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child also underlines that children have civil and political rights, including the right to assembly, to freedom of thought and to information.

Last, but not least, Article 4 states, “States Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation”.

The Committee emphasises in the *General Comment No. 5. General measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child* that the, “implementation of the human rights of children must not be seen as a charitable process, bestowing favours on children,” and “opening government decision-making processes to children is a positive challenge which the Committee finds States are increasingly responding to. Given that few States as yet have reduced the voting age below 18, there is all the more reason to ensure respect for the views of un-enfranchised children in Government and parliament.”

*General Comment No. 5* also outlines that if consultations with children are to be meaningful, documents as well as processes need to be made accessible for children. “But appearing to ‘listen’ to children is relatively unchallenging; giving due weight to their views requires real change. Listening to children should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather as a means by which States make their interactions with children and their actions on behalf of children ever more sensitive to the implementation of children’s rights.”

“It is important that Governments develop a direct relationship with children, not simply one mediated through non-governmental organisations or human rights institutions. In the early years of the Convention, NGOs had played a notable role in pioneering participatory approaches with children, but it is in the interests of both Governments and children to have appropriate direct contact,” concludes the Committee.

Yet, the leading agencies in the governance debate are largely silent about the relevance of children and their rights to engage in improving governance and building effective states.

The United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, offers no guidance on addressing the rights and needs of children in its user guides on governance assessment. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee’s series on governance, taxation and accountability does not make reference to children at all. And there is no evidence that the World Bank’s widely used World Governance Indicators take into account the status of children’s rights in the assessed countries.

Often, children are also invisible in governmental development departments.

## **Competent agents of change**

While children constitute 34 per cent of the global population, children’s rights all too often fail to be included. Save the Children’s own analysis shows that children’s well-being does not automatically follow nor equate to adults’ well-being, and that good governance is not necessarily the same as governance that is good for children.

As children do not have the right to vote and do not play a significant role in the conventional political process, there is a massive need for children to be engaged in governance if they are to influence the huge impact that governments and other governing institutions have on their lives.

That the children are highly competent as agents of social change in a wide range of contexts is demonstrated by all of the cases in this publication. Bosnian-Herzegovinian Mile Aljetic puts it like this, “I wanted to participate actively in my community and contribute to the team with all my abilities. The time spent on the team was time spent acquiring certain skills and experiences, which you can hardly, or not even, find in the formal education process.”

## **A process with many milestones**

Although not always the case, it is often the countries that most need better governance that have governments that are least inclined to deliver it. Children engaged in governance may help break this deadlock. Good governance is by nature participatory, in that it aims to link the governing and the governed more closely. The demand-side of governance implies empowering rights’ holders to claim their rights and hold governing bodies accountable for their actions.

Engaging children in governance requires building partnerships with children, giving them the opportunity to participate in governance and recognising that children are agents of change. It is important to ensure that their presence is not token or time-bound as working with children and supporting them to engage in governance is a lengthy process, as illustrated by the cases in this publication.

It is in fact a process with many milestones. The initial output may be that a platform is created for children’s voices to be heard, and that children gain access to governance structures. However, if the children’s voices are not taken seriously, these steps remain mere decoration without any outcome or impact.

Only when adults gradually start recognising children as citizens, and when children get to influence governance structures and receive funding for e.g. schools, playgrounds and child rights activities, can one talk about the outcome of children’s engagement in governance.

The real impact is when the children’s engagement has become systematic and leads to fundamental, structural and lasting changes in policies and practices.

This process may take years and lots of patience, but is mutually enriching when the children truly get to engage in governance.

## **Easier to engage at local level**

The obligation to meet the needs and fulfil the rights of children lies with the state. However, if the children are not heard and their needs are not catered for locally, state-level commitments risk remaining mere declarations of intent. Local governments are often best positioned to translate national-level commitments into practice suitable to local conditions.

Engaging at a local level is also easier. The children feel the direct consequences of governance where they live. At the same time, the physical and mental distance between decision makers and “normal” people is much shorter in a clearly defined loca-





Photo: Lotte Ladegard

THE UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE OF CHILDREN HAS TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN DECISIONS MADE BY THE AUTHORITIES.

tion. If you live in a village, the local mayor may live next door, and you may meet the local government officials at the market. Everyone is part of the same community and therefore more likely to share interests.

At the level of national and regional governance, decision makers may come from far away, are often protected by security measures, and have to deal with many people and – often conflicting – interests. However, engagement in local level governance may gradually lead to national and regional level child engagement in governance.

## Greater budget transparency

Civil societies around the world focus on the opportunities offered by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in order to develop local systems of governance that include children as a primary concern, and even as players. In the context of building a child-inclusive governance system, some municipalities have focused on making the budget development process more participatory, inclusive and transparent.

In Nicaragua, for example, the annual average of municipal investment in children has increased 70 per cent over a four-year period thanks to the legally-established Network of Municipal Government Friends of Children, whose sole purpose is to promote the fulfilment of children's rights at the municipal level. The network currently includes 76 per cent of Nicaragua's municipalities.

On a smaller scale, at least measured in dollars, hundreds of Kenyan youth from civil society organisations were trained by Plan, a global children's charity and aid organisation, in resource mobilisation. The training included project proposal writing skills

and information on how to access funding from different donors. One group was granted USD 626 from the Ministry of Gender and Social Services for their tree seedling project.

## A practice and a method

The engagement of children in decision-making processes makes them partners in governance. It entails more than providing for letting children participate in meetings and expressing their views. The unique perspective of children has to be taken into account in the decisions made by the authorities. This imposes a shift in the way political planning processes normally take place. Involving children is not just another activity or step in the planning process but a practice and method informing all levels of the process.

When children engage in governance, the core elements of good governance are retained. Their engagement supports government accountability, creates an enabling environment for positive thinking and understanding among adults on child rights issues, and underpins the development and implementation of child-focused plans and programmes. Children engaged in governance enhances the capacity of local governing bodies and service providers to improve service delivery, and it fosters responsiveness by enabling a better understanding and coordination of actions between central government, local governments and rural and urban communities.

The cases in *Children in politics: A collection of 11 inspiring, motivating and suggestive case studies on children's engagement in governance* may inspire child rights practitioners, peers and professionals to learn from past experiences, to continue expanding well-established achievements, and to take new and innovative steps towards the further engagement of children in governance.

## Definitions of governance

Governance is a multifaceted concept that focuses on the interactions between those who govern in its various forms and those who are governed. Exact definitions vary depending on the organisation.

According to UNDP, "governance can be seen as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences."

The World Bank defines governance as "the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good. This includes the process by which those in authority are selected, monitored and replaced, the capacity of the government to effectively manage its resources and implement sound policies, and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them."

A common element of all definitions is that governance is broader than government and state actors. It also encompasses the functions of private and social actors in the definition and implementation of societal goals and public policies.

Save the Children understands good governance as a process which is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimised, that the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society.

*Adapted from UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific,  
Child Rights and Governance Roundtable: Report and Conclusions, and  
UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2011*

APPEARING TO 'LISTEN' TO CHILDREN IS RELATIVELY UNCHALLENGING;  
GIVING DUE WEIGHT TO THEIR VIEWS REQUIRES REAL CHANGE.





## Save the Children practice standards

Save the Children developed a set of practice standards and criteria for children's participation. These practice standards are based on years of experience in supporting children's participation at local, national and global levels and can be employed as a key tool and framework by practitioners preparing for, implementing and monitoring safe, meaningful and ethical participation.

**Standard 1:** An ethical approach. Transparency, honesty and accountability. Adult organisations and workers are committed to ethical participatory practice and to the primacy of children's best interests.

**Standard 2:** Children's participation is relevant and voluntary. Children participate in processes and address issues that affect them – either directly or indirectly – and have the choice as to whether to participate or not.

**Standard 3:** A child-friendly, enabling environment. Children experience a safe, welcoming and encouraging environment for their participation.

**Standard 4:** Equality of opportunity. Child participation challenges and does not reinforce existing patterns of discrimination and exclusion. It encourages those groups of children who typically suffer discrimination and who are often excluded from activities and participatory processes.

**Standard 5:** Staffs are effective and confident. Adult staffs and managers involved in supporting and facilitating children's participation are trained and supported to do their jobs to a high standard.

**Standard 6:** Participation promotes the safety and protection of children. Child protection policies and procedures form an essential part of participatory work with children.

**Standard 7:** Ensuring follow-up and evaluation. Respect for children's involvement is indicated by a commitment to provide feedback and follow-up and to evaluate the quality and impact of children's participation.

*These standards were adopted as basic requirements in the General Comment on Article 12.*





## Partners and targets for children engaged in governance

Many different institutions take decisions affecting the lives of children. Therefore, children engaged in governance may work with a range of actors and target groups, e.g.:

- Government – including local and national level ministries and departments
- Parliament – i.e. law-making, oversight, budgeting and representation
- Judiciary – a critical factor for the accountability of governments and the ability of rights' holders to claim their rights
- Independent human rights institutions, including ombudspersons – act as monitoring mechanisms and facilitators of processes
- Civil society – decisive in articulating people's views, promoting children's issues and participation, monitoring the actions of governments and others, providing services etc.
- Media – contributes to shaping attitudes and public opinion and plays a significant role in awareness
- Private sector – addresses and remediates possible harm and abuses resulting from their actions
- Donors – increasingly incorporate governance into their work
- Religious bodies – play a prominent role in how children and child rights are viewed
- Armed groups – may influence the extent to which child rights can be realised
- Children engaged in governance – implies the active participation of children

IN GURAGHE, ETHIOPIA, CHILDREN AND ADULTS HAVE JOINED FORCES TO PUSH THE AUTHORITIES TO DELIVER.

### The use of photos & the inclusion of children

While the aim was to include photos from each of the cases in *Children in politics: A collection of 11 inspiring, motivating and suggestive case studies on children's engagement in governance*, doing so turned out to be practically impossible, because some of the organisations enabling this publication did not have access to quality photos, or they lacked the permission to re-use the photos they were in possession of.

The original idea was also to have children's own voices dominate the entire publication. Questionnaires for children were sent and numerous attempts made to set up meetings, but theory and what happens in practice often turn out to differ. Organisational bustle, children who had moved to new areas and change of staffs in some instances prevented access to the children. However, wherever there is a lack of direct input from the children, their voices are deduced from existing case studies, reports and, on one occasion, a video.

Then, the cases – Guatemala, Nicaragua, Ethiopia and the Philippines – which have been re-researched and photo documented thoroughly on the ground by the authors of *Children in politics*, mirror the children's own views. Consequently, the photos from these cases also feature prominently.





# Children have changed the internal audit procedures



## One definition of accountability

Accountability is an alarm bell ringing that makes everyone stand up and be responsible for their actions.

*Maidinam, China, member of Global Children's Panel*

agree its objectives with them; establish benchmarks against which progress can be measured; report on that progress; discuss the outcomes with them; and publish and disseminate lessons learned.

In recent years, there has been a growing demand for international NGOs to be more accountable to the constituencies they claim to represent. The UN Convention on the Rights of the

## Another definition of accountability

Accountability requires participation, but goes beyond it. Through the process of children's participation we become answerable for our actions and their consequences. We open ourselves up to increased scrutiny by children and give them a greater say in what the organisation does, and how it does it. In order to create accountability we therefore need to establish systems, standards, and widespread good practice of child participation and accountability to children.

When an organisation commits to being accountable to children it undertakes to: recognise children as stakeholders in what the organisation does; acknowledge the legitimacy of their views;

## Accountability is about...

- Recognising our power
- Responsible use of that power
- Handing over some of that power to the beneficiaries of our work
- "Doing the right thing, doing it right"

*Save the Children UK*



## The Global Children's Panel is to...

- Offer its ideas on policy and decisions being discussed by the Save the Children UK Board which are important to children and young people
- Identify issues of importance to children and young people, including Save the Children UK's performance, its approaches to work, and its choice of priorities or countries
- Monitor and support Save the Children UK's efforts to increase the direct and meaningful participation of children in all its work
- Monitor how Save the Children UK listens to children and reports back
- Be a channel for wider accountability to children by Save the Children UK through formal reporting and dialogue with Trustees and senior managers and feedback the results of this dialogue to children round the world

*Save the Children UK*

Child also states the right of children to be listened to, and to have their views taken seriously in decisions that affect their lives.

To ensure that children are engaged in governance of Save the Children UK, a Global Children's Panel (GCP) was initiated. The 12 members of the Global Children's Panel are all below 18 years of age, selected by their peers in their own country for a maximum of three years and represent each of the six regions around the world where Save the Children UK works. Two additional panel members are selected from a network of young campaigners in the UK.

In their own countries the panel members are linked to groups of children with whom they consult and report to. All the panel members have experienced Save the Children UK's work as beneficiaries, as partners within e.g. child-led organisations, as fundraisers, as campaigners or as advocates.

The Global Children's Panel is co-ordinated by Save the Children UK's Child Participation Adviser, and each of the panel members is supported by a local focal point that facilitates communication between Save the Children UK's headquarters and panel members, before, during and after the annual meetings. The focal points accompany panel members to London for the annual meeting and are also expected to support the members to communicate and consult with groups of children and young people in their own country.

### First meeting: Understanding accountability

During all of the meetings the focus has been the theme of 'accountability to children'. The panel members were asked to consult with the groups of children they work with in their own countries and to give their opinions about how Save the Children UK can be more accountable to children. Accountability is not an easy word to understand so the panel members spent some time thinking about this before they came up with their own definitions:

- When Save the Children UK says it is going to do something, it should keep its promise.
- Save the Children UK should think of creative ways to communicate with children about what it is choosing to do and why. It should be easy for children to access information about Save the Children's work and to ask questions about it.

- It is about a positive and trusting relationship between Save the Children UK and children, based on the knowledge that children are its main stakeholders and have views that should be taken into account.
- Children should be able to give feedback and ideas as well as make complaints about Save the Children UK.
- Children should meaningfully participate in planning, doing and evaluations.

### Second meeting: Focus on communication

The second year the panel members met with the Board of Trustees and Directors and presented their ideas, recommendations and feedback about how Save the Children UK can be more accountable to children. The children found that although they come from very different parts of the globe, they actually had lots in common, since they were all preoccupied with education, poverty, money, protection and health. They planned the structure and content of the meeting themselves and then rehearsed their plans, before they presented their thoughts to the Trustees and Directors. The CEO and the Chair of the Board of Trustees gave their feedback and approved many of the recommendations and ideas.



Among many other issues the children suggested that Save the Children UK be more accountable by keeping promises made to children, monitoring targets and providing feedback to children regularly, as well as by creating a children's panel in each of the countries Save the Children UK works in. In addition, Save the Children UK should also be sure to consult children about the closure of any programmes, and Save the Children UK country programmes should report annually to children and jointly develop future programmes with them.

The children also prepared a Global Children's Charter and film for the G-20 Summit so that world leaders would not forget about children when discussing the global economic crisis, and they attended an event at Buckingham Palace where they spoke about Save the Children's work to potential donors.

They also met with the Fundraising Teams to advise them on their work, did a lunchtime talk for staff, advised the web team about how the website can be improved for children, provided ideas for Save the Children UK's Annual Report and met with a theatre company to contribute to a script for a drama marking the 20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The children also requested that there be a Link Trustee for the Global Children's Panel and improved communications; that all panel members should have access to the Internet; that solar-powered computers could be used for cheaper access to the Internet; more feedback by e-mail; and an Internet site or blog to discuss issues.



### **Suddenly a programme closes**

The communication should have started earlier – Mongolian children were getting involved in the programme, but all of a sudden the programme closes and children are now angry.

*Ulzii, Mongolia*

### **Third meeting: Issues set in advance by the Board**

Three priority issues that the Board wished to discuss with the Global Children's Panel were set in advance and the members were encouraged and supported to consult with other children and young people in their countries about the EVERY ONE Campaign, accountability to children and strategic reviews of Save the Children UK's work in education, emergencies and child poverty in UK.

The panel members also worked with their focal points to develop action plans and proposals to address how they could improve children's participation and accountability mechanisms at the country level.

## Recommendations from the Child Participation Adviser

"Watching the way the children are during the Global Children's Panel meetings is very powerful. They facilitate some meetings themselves, and they develop confidence. They are well aware that this is an incredible opportunity, and at the end of the week everyone was crying, because they did not want to leave each other.

However, there are of course also challenges. Throughout the process, language is a real problem. Then, the panel gathers only once a year, so it is not easy to maintain close contact, because everyone gets involved in different things, leaving little time for meeting preparations and follow-up.

I also realised that the Save the Children UK Head Office is not always that child-friendly, and sometimes the topics become too academic, although more specific issues are much easier to understand and influence.

You need months of preparations for a successful meeting, but ultimately it is the quality of the country programme preparations that really matters. Due to different contexts and constraints, some provide less time and support, and communication is tough. You may send mails to the young people, which due to language problems have to be sent via the local focal point and cause delays. Some country programmes are more set up to support the process as they already engage children in every part of their programming.

If children are going to become truly engaged in governance, we have to focus on creating space at local, national and regional levels for children's involvement in programming and decision making. This would strengthen the impact, as the governance model would be more bottom-up in approach and children will be empowered by seeing how the change they can make in their own communities can translate to the national, regional and global levels.

Then, it is crucial to ensure that staffs, even in the UK, are trained, and that children's influence is integrated into the organisation. Otherwise, there is a risk that this becomes a one-off event instead of true child rights governance."

*Hannah Metha, Child Participation Adviser,  
Save the Children UK*



## We just wanted you to think about issues that are important to us

“We know that you have already decided which areas Save the Children UK will work on over the coming years. We just wanted to make you think about the issues that are important to us and other children and young people around the world right now. You might consider working these things into your plans and it's good for you to be aware of what children think,” concluded panel members.

Among the areas suggested by the children and not covered by Save the Children UK were drug use and how this affects young people, mental health and a stronger emphasis on disability.

During the third meeting, the Global Children's Panel met with representatives from the Board of Trustees, Director's Group and other staff related to the topics they would be discussing. During these meetings the children, among others, suggested that Save the Children UK communicate better with children about what it is doing and why; that Save the Children UK should report back to children about how well it is doing at keeping the promises it has made to them; that children should be able to give their feedback about how well they think Save the Children UK is doing, as well as complain if they want to; that there should be

more ways for children to come together and ways they can let Save the Children UK know what they think and influence decision making; and that people who work at Save the Children UK should respect children's opinions and be honest with children about how their ideas might be put into practice.

The children were also asked about what activities they would suggest for the MDG Review Summit as well as the EVERY ONE Campaign.

Save the Children UK explained that, “There are some things that we sadly won't be able to do,” such as:

- We have already decided how we will be working in this area, and it is too late to change the plan now. We have already been developing it for too long.
- Sometimes, the people who give us money to do our work tell us how we should be spending it and on what, and sadly your ideas do not fit with what they want.
- We don't have a lot of experience doing what you suggested and it would make more sense for another organisation to do this work instead.

### Fourth meeting: Meeting with specific teams

The fourth meeting of the Global Children's Panel took place in July 2011. Based on prior experience, the format of the annual meeting was changed to enable the children to meet with rep-



Photo: Lotte Ladegaard



representatives of specific teams working on particular policies or global strategies in order to influence decision making. Feedback on these meetings has been unanimously positive. The young people reported feeling listened to and respected and believe their views will be taken seriously.

### **Positive reflections from the members**

All of the 25 young people who had been members of the GCP since 2008 were able to reflect on their experiences of being a member during an evaluation in 2011.

According to the evaluation, being a member of the Global Children's Panel had been of great benefit to all of the children. Dominic, a member of the panel for three years, said the membership had provided him with a valuable opportunity to learn about leadership skills, which he used for gaining employment and running a community arts project in his home town in South Africa.

Another member from the Central and Southern Asia region is now president of a national Children's Task Force in Bangladesh. She talked of how her courage and her confidence had increased.

### **Impact on Save the Children UK**

In the evaluation from 2011, staff and management gave a number of examples of policy changes which they saw as resulting from the Global Children's Panel meetings:

- Changes to the internal audit procedures for country programmes to involve children's reflections and feedback.
- Changes to the design and use of a children's fundraising pack.
- An increase in resources and a strengthening of policies to support children's participation in the governance of Save the Children UK at the country programme level.

Managers involved in developing proposals and steering it through Save the Children UK's internal decision-making processes found that the organisation really had learned to think about what children's participation in the governance of Save the Children actually meant when they were taken to task by the panel for failing to consult with children over the decision to close a country programme.

This led to the recognition by the Board that dedicated resources must be directed towards establishing structures and mechanisms for children's involvement at the country programme level of governance.



EVEN CHILDREN IN THE MOST REMOTE AREAS HAVE A RIGHT TO ENGAGE IN THE GOVERNANCE OF THEIR ORGANISATIONS AND COMMUNITIES, AS THESE CHILDREN FROM ETHIOPIA LATER DESCRIBE IN THIS BOOKLET.



## What's to be learned from this case?

**How does this case demonstrate children's engagement in governance?** The Global Children's Panel has offered its ideas on policy and decisions being discussed by the Save the Children UK Board as well as looked into Save the Children UK's performance, its approaches, and its choice of priorities, not to mention monitored and supported direct and meaningful participation of children in all Save the Children UK's work.

**What is the impact of the children's engagement in governance?** Changes to the internal audit procedures for country programmes and the design and use of fundraising materials have been made.

**What are the lessons learned and recommendations?** Although the children did manage to influence decision-making processes to some extent, not all processes readily changed. Most organisations have long-term planning and donor expectations to live up to, and they have certain specific expertise.

To avoid disappointment among the children these limitations should be made very clear from the beginning, and to limit the limitations, the children's access to influencing decision-making processes should be built into all future planning, policies, strategies, projects and programmes.



# Children's views fused into all key municipal policies

## Definition of Child Friendly Local Governance (CFLG)

Child Friendly Local Governance, as articulated in the National Strategy and approved by the Cabinet of Nepal, is to provide "overall guidance to the government in realising and mainstreaming the rights of children (survival, development, protection and participation) into the local government system, structure, policies and process."

CFLG seeks to put children at the core of the development agenda of local bodies, line agencies and civil society. Child-friendly local government and improved service delivery for children is the ultimate outcome of CFLG.

*Child Friendly Local Governance Initiative, Nepal  
Implemented by the Ministry of Local Development with technical support from UNICEF/Nepal*

"My club is called Suryodaya Working Children's Club. Our club has helped to make this municipality child friendly. We have been supporting birth registration and immunisation campaigns. We have also formed child clubs in all the schools. We conducted two days of orientation for all the child clubs in Biratnagar and explained about the benefits of child-friendly local governance and the negative effects on children when a community is not child friendly," explains Sunita Tamang, who lives in Biratnagar, Nepal.

When her government announced an immunisation campaign, her club went to all the nooks and crannies of her municipality to identify even the poorest worker children, who are normally never found by government officials. Sunita and her friends took these children to the immunisation centres, and the municipality department of health had to admit that the immunisation rates were higher than ever.

Today, Sunita advises other children on the Child Friendly Local Governance Strategy, which is implemented by the Ministry of Local Development with UNICEF providing technical support

### Children at the core of development

The Child Friendly Local Governance Strategy seeks to put children at the core of the development agenda of local bodies, line agencies and civil society, with the Ministry of Local Development responsible for developing policy guidelines, facilitating their implementation, allocating resources and coordinating with line ministries and civil society.

"Child-friendly local governance is a key indicator of governance under the National Programme of Decentralisation, the Local Government and Community Development Programme. It's included in the Three-Year Interim Plan of the government of Nepal and was approved by the Cabinet in July 2011. A manda-

tory provision for the allocation of 10 per cent of the capital grant in the guidelines for the District Development Committees and Village Development Committee capital block grant funds have been included for child-related programmes as well as 15 per cent for local bodies supporting and encouraging child-friendly local governance," says Ganesh Prd. Pandey, Ministry of Local Development.

### Local bodies are nearest

Local bodies are selected to carry out the strategy, because they are in the best position to provide and sustain basic services for families and to protect children, as they are the government units nearest to families and children. This is also in line with Nepal's principles of decentralisation, which state that e.g. local bodies are mandated with the responsibility of the development of districts.

By having the local bodies in charge, an enabling environment that will support the development of positive thinking amongst adults and a clearer understanding on child rights issues is being built right there where the children live. This is leading to less violence, abuse and discrimination against children as well as improved availability of quality services for children.

The results are obvious at a very practical level. When Sunita Tamang's club noticed that a large group of Muslim girls were dropping out of school, they went straight to the girls' houses to find out why. The parents explained that since they were Muslims, they did not like their girls wearing school uniforms with skirts. They would rather have their girls wear the traditional South Asian dress Salwar Kameez with long shirts and baggy trousers. When the club went to the municipality education office to explain the situation, the Muslim girls were instantly granted the permission to wear Salwar Kamees, and they returned to school.





YOUNG CHILDREN, CHILD LABOURERS AND ALL OTHER CHILDREN IN NEPAL BENEFIT FROM THE CHILD FRIENDLY LOCAL GOVERNANCE STRATEGY.

## Constant consultations

As this example proves, one of the most important parts of this initiative has been the children's easy access to the municipality. The Working Children's Club was invited to key consultations in Biratnagar from the beginning. The municipality also ensured that children had broader consultations with other child club members before they came to the meetings and workshops. The voices, views and recommendations of the children have been incorporated in all the key policy documents developed by the municipality.

The Working Children's Club of Biratnagar has 2,100 members based in all of the 22 wards of the municipality, and the club is facilitated by a deeply committed human rights NGO, Forum for Human Rights and Environment (FOHREN). A partnership has also been established by the municipality with donors, NGOs, and the Morang Chambers of Commerce and Industry in order to take the Child Friendly Local Governance Strategy forward. The municipality has committed almost USD 3,000 to investment plans for the initiative for the next five years. Biratnagar Municipality has also oriented politicians, media personnel and the municipal building construction network about the Child Friendly Local Governance Strategy.

## Mobilisation of children


While the initiatives include a long list of indicators concerning child survival, child protection and child development, participatory mechanisms for children are also spelled out, e.g. the development and mobilisation of child networks and child clubs like that of Sunita Tamang. This includes the participation of at least one child and generally a boy and a girl in all local body mechanisms, in district level committees, in the Integrated Planning Committees, Village Development Committees and in every Ward Citizen Forum.

The explicitness is crucial, as it is the foundation for the allocation of block grants and the automatic inclusion of children in all planning and decision-making procedures.

"In 2012, guidelines for ensuring meaningful participation in local governance are to be worked out by the government, because it's of course a challenge to avoid tokenism," explains Anjali Pradhan, UNICEF Basic Service Specialist and child participation focal person.

At the same time, UNICEF works hard to build the children's own capacity for meaningful participation in governance. This includes, for example child rights awareness, knowledge about the importance of participation, leadership courses and life skills training. It is a huge task, since the number of municipalities applying the approach is growing every day.





THE PHILIPPINES, WHERE THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN, ACTS AS INSPIRATION FOR THE CHILD FRIENDLY LOCAL GOVERNANCE STRATEGY.

## An empowering exercise

Khila Nath Niraula from the NGO Forum for Human Rights and Environment says that the child clubs have been instrumental in the transformation of his community, Biratnagar, into a child-friendly municipality for all children, even the most excluded.

An issue raised by the Working Children's Club was the disrespect shown by school-going children towards child workers. The working children suggested forming child clubs in government schools, and the municipality provided funds to initiate child clubs in nine out of 89 schools in 2009. This was a very empowering exercise, with working children not only helping to form child clubs in formal schools but also providing an opportunity for them to orient school children on child rights from their perspective.

Based on the positive response from the nine schools, the municipality has expanded child clubs to all remaining government schools in the municipality in 2010 and 2011.

Child clubs and networks are now formed and active in each ward and network at the Village Development Committee level, and mechanisms for children age 12-18 to participate in the decision-making process of local bodies are in place. Although the Education Act does not have the mandatory representation of children in the School Management Committees, the district education officers in some districts have started inviting children to the committees, because the officers have understood the value of listening to the children.

The Child Friendly Local Governance Strategy clearly mentions the participation of children in the districts, municipal and Village Development Committees, and the children are now invited to participate in the development of the district plans. Child club representatives are also members of the Ward Citizen Forums of the Ministry of Local Development's National Programme on Decentralisation and Local Governance and in the very important Integrated Planning Committee, which is responsible for allocating block grants at the Village Development Committee level.

UNICEF is also in the process of testing a participatory assessment tool developed by the child participation expert Roger Hart. "The assessment tool will be used for measuring child-friendliness. We tested it at field level last week," says Anjali Pradhan from UNICEF.

She explains that even young children are heard when measuring child-friendliness. During the test young children made drawings and collages of what they like and dislike, of domestic violence, child abuse, children breaking brick and other kinds of child labour, clean versus dirty schools etc.



## Civil society safeguards child rights

Thanks to the strategy, Child Friendly Local Governance focal units at the District Development Committees have been established along with identification, coordination and networking of stakeholders. Thus, women's groups such as paralegal committees are active at local level to protect and promote children's rights along with other civil society organisations.

As a part of the effort to make local bodies child friendly, adult capacity building takes place and a tool kit has been prepared. This includes a five-minute video on children's participation in local governance showing the case of Biratnagar Municipality. A training of trainers manual underlines the necessity of reaching the most disadvantaged. In order to make the participants internalise the ideas, a game on discrimination and stigma is also included.

Tara Nath Niraula, the head of the Social Development Division in Biratnagar sub-Metropolitan, likes the idea of meaningful, ethical and systematic participation of children. "Before planning any activities for children or taking decisions we send our agenda to the child club members. Then, they discuss among themselves and send their representatives with their suggestions and recommendations. The important thing is that when the children come to the meetings they do not represent individuals but the collective voices of children," explains Tara Nath Niraula.

Despite the generally warm welcome to the Child Friendly Local Governance Strategy at local level, Anjali Pradhan also encourages full commitment from line ministries, "As it is, the local bodies are not yet experts. They need the support from the line ministries. But it has been a challenge to get them on board. In 2007, we took some government representatives on a study tour to the Philippines, where they are really good at creating child-friendly governance. Experiencing the Philippine practices encouraged our government representatives a lot. Now, the Child Friendly Local Governance Strategy has been approved by the Cabinet of Nepal. That is a major achievement, because it makes the strategy a part of a system which will remain beyond UNICEF. It is THEIR strategy now."

## Facts about the strategy

- The Child Friendly Local Governance Strategy aims to mainstream child rights into policies, systems, structures, mechanism and working processes at local government level in Nepal.
- With technical support from UNICEF, the Ministry of Local Development took the lead in piloting the Child Friendly Local Governance Strategy in 2007.
- The strategy was endorsed by the Cabinet on 5 July 2011 and is included in the Three-Year Interim Plan of the government of Nepal.
- Technical input was provided by key line ministries.
- Child Friendly Local Governance is a key indicator of decentralised governance in the Ministry of Local Government's National Programme on Decentralisation and governance.
- A provision for 10 per cent to be spent on children and child-friendly local governance is included in the block grant guidelines, while 15 per cent of the resources are allocated to block grant guidelines for districts adopting the Child Friendly Local Governance Strategy.
- It is founded on the positive lessons learned from the "Decentralized Action for Children and Women" programme and lessons learned from the Philippines. The strategy was piloted in five districts and one municipality. At this point, it has been initiated in 34 districts and 156 Village Development Committees.
- Other organisations, e.g. World Vision International, Save the Children, Plan International, Consortium and Inlogos, have joined the initiative.
- The framework aims at bringing consistency amongst international, national and local policies related to child rights, uniformity in the working processes of local government and support to enhance institutional capacity and human resources for child-friendly local governance.
- A local body cannot just call itself "child-friendly." It has to comply with certain steps, including orientation, commitment to investment and the development of minimum indicators. This ensures integrated planning and is reinforced by investments in children.





Photo: Lotte Ladegaard

## What's to be learned from this case?

**How does this case demonstrate children's engagement in governance?** The Child Friendly Local Governance Strategy puts children at the core of the development agenda of local bodies, line agencies and civil society. This includes the participation of at least one child and generally a boy and a girl in all local body mechanisms, in district level committees, in the Integrated Planning Committees, Village Development Committees, and in every Ward Citizen Forum.

**What is the impact of the children's engagement in governance?** By providing children with easy access to the local government, children's voices, views and recommendations are being incorporated in all key policy documents. Child-friendly local governance has become a key indicator of governance under the National Programme of Decentralisation, Local Government and Community Development Programme. It is included in the Three-Year Interim Plan of the government of Nepal, and it was approved by the Cabinet in July 2011. Resources have been allocated via the block grant guidelines.

**What are the lessons learned and recommendations?** By having the local bodies in charge, an enabling environment that will support the development of positive thinking among adults and a clearer understanding on child rights issues is being built where the children live. This is leading to less violence, abuse and discrimination against children as well as improved availability of quality services.

*The quotations by Sunita Tamang, Ganesh Prd. Pandey, Khila Nath Niraula and Tara Nath Niraula are from the video "Child Friendly Local Governance and Child Rights." UNICEF, 2010.*

# Civil society helps secure meaningful child engagement in governance

“We have comprehensive rules and regulations for child and youth participation in the Philippines, but inside the government these platforms are violated, and we have no assurance of real participation,” says Raven, a member of the Filipino child group Children and Youth Organisation, also called CYO.

The Philippines is in many ways a pioneer when it comes to the promotion of children and young people's participation in child rights governance, according to the *State of the Filipino Children Report 2010: Child-Friendly Governance with Focus on the Allocation of Resources for Children*, issued by the governmental Council for the Welfare of Children.

Prepared by adults and children, the National Framework on Child Participation was approved as a policy by the Board of the Council for the Welfare of Children in November 2004 to enhance opportunities for increased visibility for young people in decision making as well as their involvement in issues that affect them in local governance and social development.

## Accessible but with a twist

The establishment of local youth councils, the so-called SK Councils or Sangguniang Kabataan, is among the efforts of the government to engage young people in influencing matters concerning them.

Being at the very local level, the SK Council is probably the most accessible unit for children. Established in 1991 to develop the next generation of leaders who could promote the best interests of the Filipinos and work for the welfare of the youth, SKs have been set up in all the 42,000 barangays, community units of administration generally consisting of 50 to 100 families.

However, a common perception is that the SKs are heavily influenced by adult politicians and that a disproportionate percentage of members are drawn from the higher socioeconomic classes and political families. At the same time, civil society organisations find that the funds allocated to the SKs are used for the wrong purposes, like basketball courts used by adults, roads and buildings.

Also to be found within physical proximity of the children is the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children, a unit that is part of the local government but often just an empty shell.

“While there are structures and mechanisms for child participation, apparently these fail because there are no clear child rights based ethical guidelines on how these should operate. At the same time, the National Framework on Child Participation is not being adopted and implemented. This could be because

the framework is not backed by legislation, and it is not well disseminated among government officials,” explains Minerva Cabungcal Cabiles, Policy Advocacy Manager, Save the Children in the

Philippines.

“Low appreciation of children's rights and child participation especially at the community level also implies the need to intensify education and awareness raising on child rights and child participation among adults in the community. We – staffs and partners – who are working on the ground really need to take the initiative to help develop the processes and suggest to local governments that child participation standards are applied within these formal structures,” adds she.

Minerva Cabungcal Cabiles also sees a need to address the legislative and administrative gaps in order to institutionalise meaningful child participation by e.g. amending the provisions on the SK in the Local Government Code and empowering the SK Council via checking who is in control of the SK and by institutionalising a body that will provide guidance for and supervision of the SK. More specific criteria could also be developed for SK candidates, and guidelines for the use of SK funds ought to be worked out along with a new law on SK defining the standards and clarifying the mandate.

## Children as a sector

Another arena where the Filipino children may raise their voices is the National Anti-Poverty Commission, which has the mandate to ensure that marginalised groups are heard in the public policy arena in the Philippines. Commissioners are appointed by the President to represent a specific sector in the National Anti-Poverty Commission, which includes marginalised sectors such as fishermen, farmers, the informal sector, the disabled, the urban poor, senior citizens, women and children. The children's representative is chosen from a General Assembly of the Children's Council comprising representatives of children's organisations throughout the country. The Children's Council prepares the agenda to be presented at National Anti-Poverty Commission meetings.





The National Anti-Poverty Commission Children Basic Sector also monitors government commitments to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals using a monitoring tool developed by the Inter-Agency Working Group on Child Participation, a consortium of Bangkok-based organisations dedicated to promoting and implementing the meaningful and ethical participation of children in decisions made to further children's rights and welfare.

"25 children from different child groups are members of the National Anti-Poverty Commission Children Basic Sector. The same applies to all other sectors. It is a huge set-up. Save the Children lobbies to make the National Anti-Poverty Commission child-friendly, genuine and meaningful, because initially the participation of children was very token and very rigid," explains Shiela Carreon, Project Officer, Children Talk to Children about the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Project, Save the Children in the Philippines.

### **"Children Talk to Children"**

Many civil society and international organisations provide technical and financial support to children engaged in governance in the Philippines, for example, Save the Children, which instigated

the Children Talk to Children about the UNCRC Project, nicknamed the C2C Project, in 2009.

The C2C Project is being implemented in partnership with ZOTO, a national federation of urban poor organisations. ZOTO works directly with two of the involved child groups: the Active Youth Movement (AYM) and the Children and Youth Organisation (CYO). Two other groups, Ang Karapatan ng Kabataan Ating Protektahan, meaning Let Us Protect Children's Rights and abbreviated to AKKAP, and Youth Meets the Children Organisation (YMETCO), are directly facilitated by Save the Children.

A Project Team composed of child representatives from each group ensures coordination and cooperation among the four groups and acts as a platform for the children to engage in advocacy at national and regional level.

### **Deepening the understanding**

During the first couple of the years the children were deepening their understanding of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the monitoring process, and they developed their organisational and leadership skills. New members follow older



members closely in order to learn, and when children turn 18, they can become a member of the Young People's Group and continue to work in support of the children's activities.

The children are exposed to various opportunities to directly engage with national government representatives, legislators and the media. They also network with the Philippine NGO Coalition on the UNCRC, the NGO body that prepares the NGO Supplementary Report on the UNCRC implementation. The children have also initiated cooperation with five other children's groups within Metro Manila and parts of Mindanao in the south.

The project also provides orientations on child rights, child rights monitoring and child participation standards for the groups of adults who have supported the children since the beginning. These adults are staff members and young people, who directly support the projects of the children's organisations in the communities, and they closely follow the children's activities and conduct regular meetings to assess the quality of the support and to learn from one another.

In the case of AYM and CYO, there are existing Adult Support Groups in the community. These groups consist of community members with a special interest in children, e.g. teachers, lawyers, health professionals and priests. Many of them are involved in setting-up child protection and participation mechanisms in the community and they implement activities supporting the overall goals of the child groups.

The adult supporters are selected according to criteria set by the children, who have decided that adult supporters have to be qualified to and interested in working directly with children, they have to be willing to listen to children, they have to know children's issues, and they must feel responsible for children.

At this point, the children are focusing on digging into the formal government structures. More than 30 children from the children's groups are elected members of SKs and about a handful have become SK chairmen. The child groups are also represented in the Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children, and there are C2C child representatives in the National Anti-Poverty Commission Children Basic Sector. The two C2C representatives who participated in the National Anti-Poverty Commission Sectoral Assembly were elected council members and one became part of the Technical Working Committee, a committee composed of children who design and facilitate the next Sectoral Assembly.

A representative of the Project Team has also been participating in the strategic planning of the National Committee on Child and Youth Participation, an inter-agency committee under the umbrella of the Council for the Welfare of Children mandated to ensure and strengthen the participation of children in government processes. The child representative was involved in the development of a child-friendly definition of child participation. He also commented on the goals of the committee and recommended how the committee could improve the participation of children.

Furthermore, the child representative gained first-hand information on the results of the first Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, Children's Forum. The ASEAN Children's Forum serves as the regional voice for children in Southeast Asia and as a channel where children can express their views on urgent regional issues and how these can be resolved by governments with children and young people's participation.

Agreements and children's recommendations derived from the Children's Forum are deliberated at the senior official meeting level and raised to the ministerial level for consideration and action. The First ASEAN Children's

Forum was





## The government officials wore our t-shirts ...

Silang Cavite is a sprawl of narrow lanes lined by simple one-story houses made of porous concrete slabs. Situated 45 kilometres south of Manila, Silang Cavite is mostly inhabited by people who have been more or less forcibly relocated from slum-like urban areas when new highways, shopping malls and tourist hotels sprouted up in Manila. Silang Cavite is a mixed lot of urban poor who struggle with violence against and abuse of children and women, child labour, early pregnancy, juvenile crime and a blaring lack of genuine opportunities to influence the decision-making processes in the barangays.

So – there is plenty for AYM to do. With 435 members aged 12-17, AYM is teaching other children about their rights, identifying the most important issues in consultation with other children and talking to barangay leaders to make them change the status quo into something better.

Launched in 2003, AYM has been growing ever since. “Before, many children became members of criminal gangs, because there was nothing else to do for children in Silang Cavite. Today, children know about child rights, and there are fewer gang wars,” explains 15-year-old Sachie, who is a member of AYM.

The AYM members have divided themselves into committees like Protection, Participation and Advocacy, taking care of the programming, while the Technical committee provides logistic support and the AYM Committee is responsible for branding the organisation. There is also a Younger Children’s Working Group in charge of activities for children as young as four years of age, as well as a Young People’s Group comprising grown-up members who provide technical and practical support. Having many sub-groups ensures wide participation for more children, who can then work according to their interests and skills.

Amongst many other activities, AYM is conducting surveys on corporal punishment and child participation as well as interviewing girls about early pregnancies. The children are also working to influence the 11 SK Councils of the barangays that the AYM currently covers.

For the time being AYM is especially focussing on corporal punishment, “because it affects all children, and because the abolishment of corporal punishment is achievable,” as one AYM member states. “We want the SK Councils to allot budget lines for our activities and campaigns,” explain the children.

During the SK elections in 2010, three AYM members were elected chairmen and 27 became SK Council members. The children point out that, “Adults always use all the barangay basketball courts, although children really needed spaces to play. Now, we have agreed that playgrounds for children will be constructed.”

At the same time, AYM children have become members of five Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children. The children have been advocating a Children’s Welfare Code and mechanisms to protect children against abuse. “The code was passed in 2009, but in 2010 we got a new Councillor, who is not that much in favour of child rights, so we have a lot of lobbying to do,” say the children.

Other things, however, have indeed worked out exceedingly well. The children have been initiating the establishment of proper reporting mechanisms for cases concerning violence against children in Silang Cavite. Today, AYM is a part of the referral system. Any child can report to AYM, who then forwards the problem to the Adult Support Group, who refers the case to the relevant authorities. As corporal punishment is not yet illegal in the Philippines, the action taken is normally in the form of a warning to the parents. In more severe cases of punishable abuse the perpetrators may be fined or put behind bars.

A burning issue is a curfew introduced to protect children against abuse during the night. “Due to the curfew children cannot go outside from 10 PM to 4 AM. But is it really a protection of children? Earlier, when children were caught outside after the curfew because they had to get home from work, they would be fined or put in prison. Now, we have told the police how they should treat the children. Now children will just be provided with an orientation about the curfew and be brought home or asked to wait till their parents pick them up,” explain the children.

The children have also managed to reach out internationally. “Once, Swedish members of parliament came, and we requested them to talk to our government about the passage of the Anti-Corporal Punishment Bill filed in the House of the Representatives, but which has never been passed.”

Working with adults is in fact not easy. “We felt very offended when some government officials claimed to have forgotten who AYM is. We knew them, but when we requested a document, they questioned us a lot and said they didn’t know us. But they wore our t-shirts ...”

held in the Philippines in 2010 and attended by 32 children accompanied by their mentors from ASEAN Member States.

In the Philippines a national children's congress is conducted every two years to prepare for the ASEAN Children's Forum. Child representatives from different organisations based in different regions come together to talk about their issues, develop recommendations to the government, work out criteria for children qualifying to attend the forum and select the representatives.

Then, children from the AYM and CYO deliver their points of view during their first committee hearing of the Anti-Corporal Punishment Bill, which has been filed in the House of the Representatives.

### **Open letter to the President**

Children from AKKAP and YMETCO also wrote an open letter to the President in time for the first State of the Nation Address

when President Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III was elected in 2010.

The letter conveyed the situation and wishes of children to the government, which amongst others include access to free, quality primary and secondary education, equal access to justice and equal opportunities for children across all income groups, access to quality health services and information, particularly on reproductive health, in the community and in schools, access to safe, private housing, availability of jobs for parents and an increase in the minimum wage, passage of the Anti-Corporal Punishment Bill, a peaceful and safe community, the activation of the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children and government support for and cooperation with NGOs working for children.

While they are still waiting for a response, the children are now planning to work out their own supplementary report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.



Photo: Lotte Ladegaard



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**This is not difficult for children**

"I have been a member of AKKAP since I participated in a storytelling workshop three years ago. When you know your rights, you're able to talk to the government and ask about support.

I was representing my organisation in the National Anti-Poverty Commission Children Basic Sector Assembly and elected as a member of the Sectoral Council. We discuss child rights issues from the communities, and we monitor children's rights.

It's not difficult for a child to do this, because you know you are helping other children. I can always ask the adults if I'm in doubt."

*Hannah, 14, who lives with her mother, a rag picker in Pasay*

“

**We will change society**

"I have two siblings. One of them goes to school. The youngest stays with our grandmother. Our dad has left us, and my mother works in a factory. She comes home late, so we are left alone all day. Since I graduated from high school I teach other children to dance. This provides me with an income.

I was invited to become a member of AYM during a community presentation eight years ago. I was very, very young, but I enjoyed it even though I didn't really understand what the organisation worked for till I was 12 years old. But I was instantly interested, because there are very few options in our community. No sports, no scouts. Only school and Bible studies.

Talking to adults is something new, and other children are surprised. But I think we have to inspire other children and help others gain strength and make them understand that it is possible. We have to fight for children and the welfare of children. We have to be role models. We will change society."

*Clent, 16, Silang Cavite*

**We really want security for children**

The children's groups, Ang Karapatan ng Kabataan Ating Protektahan, meaning Let Us Protect Children's Rights and abbreviated to AKKAP, and Youth Meets the Children Organisation, YMETCO are based in Pasay near central Manila and cover two neighbouring squatter communities, separated only by a small stream. Both groups were founded because the children experienced abuse, and they felt that their communities gave no priority to children.

Now, the children's groups have representatives in the Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children and particularly in the Barangay Participation Committees, which is a part of the barangay structure. "We have proposed storytelling for younger children, because there are no activities for them in the barangay," explains 17-year-old Kim.

YMETCO also carried out a Children's Meeting, where almost 200 children drew and made slogans and gave their input in a survey to be presented during public happenings and to calls to local government politicians. Amongst the issues identified were corporal punishment, early pregnancy and out-of-school children, all problems affecting a majority of the children in Pasay.

"During the local elections we called on the politicians to make them put our issues on their election agenda," says 17-year-old Dexter. "In AKKAP we have developed a partnership with SK, and together with SK we carried out a workshop on positive discipline for barangay officials. Two AKKAP members are now also SK members. We put issues to the SK so they can forward these issues to the adults," explains 17-year-old Jastine.

"We try to strengthen the Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children, because the council in our area is not really active. We invited the Councillor for Children in our barangay to visit AKKAP, and we sent representatives to the Municipality Hall when a meeting was held by an NGO network issuing funds for Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children. Unfortunately, AKKAP did not get the funding, but YMETCO did, and now YMETCO has promised to support us and help us report cases of child abuse to their Barangay Council for the Protection of Children," says Jayjay from AKKAP.

The children really want the barangay to strengthen security for children, "because we do not want children to be hurt on the street. We have no safe space to play, and we want to get rid of drunken adults, which is very common in our barangay. We want an ordinance prohibiting adults drinking outside after a certain hour. But AKKAP alone cannot influence Barangay Council for the Protection of Children. We will ask our parents to help us."

## Children are still children, who become victims of adult control and abuse

In Bagong Silang in the City of Caloocan, north of Manila, the child-led group Children and Youth Organisation, CYO, holds its meetings in the barangay office. "We sent a letter to ask for permission. It is difficult to get access to government premises, but we convinced them that we won't do any bad things," explains Sarah, a 17-year-old and member of CYO.

Photo: Lotte Ladegaard



EVEN THOUGH THE PHILIPPINES HAS COMPREHENSIVE RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION, THERE IS A LONG WAY TO GO IN A COUNTRY WHERE MILLIONS OF PEOPLE STILL LIVE IN POVERTY.

Photo: Lotte Ladegaard



THE CHILDREN IN SAVE THE CHILDREN'S C2C PROJECT ARE EXPOSED TO VARIOUS OPPORTUNITIES TO DIRECTLY ENGAGE WITH NATIONAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES AND LEGISLATORS AND WITH THE MEDIA.

With well over a million inhabitants, Bagong Silang is the largest barangay in the Philippines, consisting mainly of people who have been relocated from slums all over Manila.

CYO carries out meetings and consultations with its 178 members in order to generate awareness on child rights, and to strategize and plan the implementation of advocacy. When the Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children carried out a week-long event, CYO took the opportunity to impart its own orientation on child rights. CYO also has members in the councils, and they meet with selected Councillors and lobby for better protection of children in Bagong Silang.

"One Councillor is very nice. She attends our events, and she helps us lobby towards other officials. She requests them to give speeches on child rights. She really opens doors for CYO," says 17-year-old Raven.

When the children lobby, they always formulate their agenda first. Some of the topics on their agenda are corporal punishment, safe streets for children, new schools and safe playgrounds. In 2011, the barangay approved a Children's Code, which ensures protection and welfare for children in Bagong Silang. The code was pushed through by the Adult Support Group based on the children's requests.

CYO members are 10 to 18 years of age and live in different parts of the huge barangay. Initially, the organisation had a president, a vice president and other "adult" structures, but the children decided to create different working groups to ensure wider participation. When children turn 18, they join the Young People's Group and serve as adult companion and fundraiser.

"Save the Children is funding the children's activities, so we fundraise for our own activities, which are always in support of the children's activities. We have made a creative Bingo for mothers focussing on physical abuse of children. In that way, we create awareness while we fundraise," explains Rhoda, a member of the Young People's Group.

But the children are not satisfied with "just" receiving money and support from Save the Children and their older peers: "We are aware of how much money the local government spends, and how it could be spent more wisely. Child rights were totally missing in the barangay budget, and the allocation for children's issues is very small. The money is mainly spent for the promotion of mayors, concrete and iron. We have now managed to get at least one per cent allocated to child rights activities."

One of the direct outcomes of the advocacy for child rights on the barangay budget is a youth centre that will soon open and has to provide offices for different child and youth groups.

When the Philippines celebrated Children's Month in 2011, support from the SK enabled the children to hold three art workshops, and the children cooperated with student councils in spreading child rights awareness in schools. One school administration ordered all of its 700 students to participate in a child rights orientation.





During the national elections in 2010, CYO campaigned among voters to motivate them to vote for child-friendly candidates, and one of the CYO members got elected as the SK chairwoman during the local elections. She has yet to deliver, however. While the CYO children have huge expectations for their fellow SK chairwoman, she is struggling to cope with a system that turned out not to be that child-friendly yet.

“She was one of our leaders, and we supported her election campaign. We never expected her to let us down. We’re her platform,” explains one of the disappointed children.

“Yes, she won,” explains an adult facilitator. “But all the other SK members represent political parties, and adult politicians interfere and prevent the children from having real influence.”

Raven adds thoughtfully, “Supporting children in a government system is called child rights governance. It is a formal system, but children are still children, who become victims of adult control and abuse. People only see physical abuse. They do not see children’s right to protection while they participate, and they do not see that our government lacks this protection. So we will still try to help her.”



FILIPINO CHILD-LED ORGANISATIONS ALSO TRY TO  
CARRY OUT ACTIVITIES FOR THE YOUNGEST CHILDREN.





## What's to be learned from this case?

### How does this case demonstrate children's engagement in governance?

The four child-led organisations are all engaged in governance in their own communities through already-established, official structures enabling child participation in local governance. A Project Team consisting of representatives from all four organisations are taking commonly identified issues to the national and regional ASEAN level, where they are also digging into already existing political structures aimed at ensuring children's engagement in governance.

### What is the impact of the children's engagement in governance?

The four children's organisations supported by Save the Children in Philippines have managed to have children elected into important posts in all relevant national structures. While the impact here is still missing, all the children's organisations have had gains at the local level, e.g. the establishment of proper reporting mechanisms when children are abused and beaten by adults, access to play and meeting facilities, no punishment when curfews are violated, new local government budget allocations for child rights activities and child rights activities in schools and during public occasions. The children also underline the impact the engagement in governance has had on their personal lives. Increased knowledge and self-esteem have led to positive discussions with parents and community members, who gradually understand that children should be protected against harm and that corporal punishment should be avoided.

**What are the lessons learned and recommendations?** Despite comprehensive rules and regulations for child and youth participation in governance in the Philippines, this is no guarantee of real adult commitment at government level if the frameworks and mechanisms are not backed by clear child rights-based and ethical guidelines on how these should operate. When governments do not deliver according to their own rules and regulations, civil society can play a major role. Adult organisations must support the development of truly child-friendly structures, securing genuine, meaningful, ethical and safe child participation in governance and show the way to the government. Education on child rights and awareness about child participation among adults in the local communities are also essential if the children's engagement in governance is to be safe, meaningful, ethical and genuine.

# Children secure birth registration, more teachers, improved classrooms, libraries and playgrounds



**Young people have great ideas about how to develop their community**

“Children don’t have voices here, but they’re affected by the decisions made by adults. Young people have great ideas about how to develop their communities. And if you let us, we can be the engines that push for this development.”

*Lilibeth Adayansi, 16*

The level of children’s engagement in governance varies from area to area even within one country. The importance attached to child rights and the supportiveness of children’s engagement in governance depends on the interests and beliefs of individual politicians and officials, on local agendas and politics, and on the internal power balance in a constituency.

This becomes very clear in Camotán, Guatemala, where the local government is involved in child-friendly governance projects. Here development happens more quickly and smoothly. The previous mayor was highly dedicated to children’s issues and his political will to implement their rights has been adopted by the new mayor too. A clear manifestation of the municipality’s political will is the Public Policy for Children.

CHILD JOURNALISTS LILIBETH ADAYANSI AND MARVIN RAMÍREZ

Photo: Lisbeth Dina Jensen





The Public Policy for Children is a political and social planning instrument designed to create the conditions which allow the fulfilment of children's rights. The political framework that sustains it and is described in the policy includes: the Constitution of Guatemala, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, national child rights laws, de-centralisation laws and the Municipal Code.

## Child rights situation analysis

The Public Policy for Children presents a child rights situation analysis focusing on the sectors of health, nutrition, water and sanitation, education, recreation, participation and protection, which is followed by the specific objectives for each area. The objectives set by the local government for children's participation involve:

Promoting organised participation of children and adolescents, strengthening participatory democracy and creating an equitable society so that children are heard and their opinions taken into account.

Informing adolescents about the proper means to participate and to act appropriately as determining actors in improving their social, political and economic environment.

The objectives are followed by a diagram, which outlines the immediate objectives, indicators, activities, areas of influence, annual budgetary estimates, a five-year budget, responsible actors and possible strategic alliances, where Save the Children is one of the key actors.

According to Elí Elder Méndez Martínez, child rights trainer and former president of the Young People's Network, important changes occur in the community through a Public Policy for Children, as long as there is political will behind it. He explains that the Public Policy for Children was prepared in meetings with the different sectorial departments, the police, children and churches.

The children participated, because, as he states, "You cannot ask an adult about what the children want, simply because they don't know." The children talked about the right to education, health, leisure and citizenship. The different sectors were there to comment on how they could help the children within the area they represented.

Sergio Portillo, First Council Member, provides an example of how the government involved children. First, the children collect information where they live, for instance to find out who the poorest and most needy are. Then, consultations are organised with the children, where they present their projects. Often, the children ask for more books and toys for the schools. The municipality makes sure to provide a meal for the children and pays for the transport so that even the poorest children are able to attend the consultations.

"The children's projects are almost always accepted," says



Photo: Lisbeth Dina Jensen



Photo: Lisbeth Dina Jensen



Photo: Lisbeth Dina Jensen

CHILD JOURNALISTS CAN CHANGE THINGS IN GUATEMALAN COMMUNITIES.



Photo: Lisbeth Dina Jensen

WORKING AS AGENTS OF CHANGE WITHIN A GUATEMALAN COMMUNITY WITH A LESS CHILD-FRIENDLY LOCAL GOVERNMENT REQUIRES TIME AND PATIENCE.



Photo: Lisbeth Dina Jensen

CHILD RIGHTS THEATRE BY MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL CHILD GROUP



Photo: Lisbeth Dina Jensen

Sergio Portillo and affirms that more investment was assigned to children's issues after the initial consultations. These funds are transferred to the Office for Women and Children situated inside the municipal building and in charge of children's issues and children's participation in governance.

## A network for young people

The Young People's Network came into existence in 2008 because the children and young people were not allowed to participate in local governance at that time. The Young People's Network is formed by children and young people up to the age of 18 and has a president, a vice-president, a secretary and a treasurer. The president and the vice-president participate in the Municipal Development Council, where they present the children's demands and projects to the Council. Based on the children's requests the council decides which projects they are willing to support.

Elí Elder Méndez Martínez, 19, was the first president of the Young People's Network. His role was to meet with the presidents of the child groups and listen to their political concerns and the activities they wanted to carry out. Then he wrote and presented projects to the Municipal Development Council. He also commented on whether the Public Policy for Children was being implemented or not.

The president of each child group participates in the Young People's Network, where he or she represents the different child groups. The child groups collectively decide what activities are most relevant to carry out in their communities and then the president of each child group takes their demands to the Young People's Network.

## Transparency and teachers

Not everything promised in the Public Policy for Children has been achieved, but about 60 per cent has been implemented, evaluates Elí Elder Méndez Martínez, former president of the Young People's Network.

He highlights the important developments in the community based on the public policy. For instance, more teachers were hired in the grammar school and the number of nurses rose, the classrooms were improved and libraries were built. The children have learned how to speak up and demand that their rights be fulfilled. Many of their requests have been implemented. Now there are baskets for basketball, football fields, parks and playgrounds. Birth registration for all children was demanded and is now happening to a much greater extent than before the Public Policy for Children was in place. More child groups have been set up than ever before in the three communities within the municipality.

On a personal level, participation has had a very positive impact on the children. "The best things have been all the friendships I've made, and getting to know different places, cultures and customs. It really opens your mind," says Elí Elder Méndez Martínez.

Many former child group members have continued to be engaged in local governance, for instance as members of the Community Development Council. Elí Elder Méndez Martínez is now one of the technicians hired by the municipality, and he car-



ries out capacity building with the children on child rights. He has also continued to participate in local governance as an observer; "I volunteered in the local election to fight for transparency in the process."

## No local government assistance

However, even within a community endowed with a less child-friendly local government, children may work as agents of change and development. It just requires time and patience, as experienced by the children in the small Guatemalan town Sábana Grande. Here, community development is often planned, designed and carried out without the assistance of the local government.

"We have always involved the entire community, because the local government does not support these efforts. The community and the NGOs work together for social development," says the president of the town's Community Development Council, Adán Jiménez Paiz. "In fact, we would like to seek funds ourselves, so that we don't have to involve the local authorities in our social projects at all, because then the money is likely to vanish into the wrong pockets."

The children in the community have formed a child group, where they work in sub-groups focussing on different areas such as child rights, the environment, culture and sports, to demand that community developments are set in motion or improved

in accordance with their rights and wishes. In addition, some of the children work as citizen journalists to inform other children about their rights and to expose the violation of those rights.

The children gather in their groups to talk about which developments they envision will benefit the entire community. Decisions are made collectively and the children develop their own work plans each year. For instance, the environment group plans to write a request for money to put up trash cans on all the streets in town and to include the request in a letter to the Municipal Development Council with support from the Community Development Council.

## Culture festival and kites

In 2011, the child group organised and carried out a culture festival. Save the Children supported the event with materials and the local school allowed the children to assist as part of the curricula. Because the idea behind the festival was to express the different cultures within Guatemala, the child group invited children from other municipalities. During the festival, different songs, outfits and culinary traditions were presented. The idea was to share different cultural expressions and traditions and to remind the children of their own cultural heritage.

On another occasion, the children made kites, drew different child rights on the kites and flew them around the community to inform people about children's rights. As a 16-year-old child rights

CHILD RIGHTS RADIO PRODUCED BY THE CHILDREN IN THE LOCAL CHILD GROUP

## Facts about children's governance in Guatemalan community development

In Guatemala, all communities are required by law to set up a Community Development Council. These councils have neither funds nor the executive power to carry out projects. However, the Community Development Council communicates directly to a local government governance structure, called the Municipal Council of Development, which has the mandate to approve community development projects.

In Chiquimula, a Guatemalan province bordering Honduras, Save the Children supports children's engagement in local governance.

The children are organised across the province in child groups and in a Young People's Network. There is a child group in each community and a representative from each child group, often called the president, participates in the Young People's Network. In Chiquimula province, there are 24 communities, hence, 24 groups of children and 24 members in the Young People's Network.

Capacity building on child rights and on how to participate in local governance is carried out by local trainers. Save the Children pays 100 per cent of the trainers' salary the first year, 50 per cent the second year and so on. By the fifth year the municipality pays the entire salary, because they realise how necessary the trainers are. This makes the project sustainable, because the process will go on even when Save the Children no longer supports the trainers directly.



Photo: Lisbeth Dina Jensen

promoter says, “We don’t only have the right to participate and to be heard. We also have the right – and the duty – to inform other children about our rights.”

“As journalists, we can change things in the community by talking about them,” explains Lilibeth Adayansi, one of the child journalists. One of the things the children choose to speak about in order to initiate a change in people’s perception is children’s right to participate in the community and their ability to take part in decision-making processes.

## Gender and money

The idea that children are capable of discussing political issues and participating in the community is new in the region, especially when it comes to women and girls. This is one of the aspects the children are particularly keen to challenge, “We would mainly like to change people’s mentalities. Change their prejudices, the myths and the sexism. Women and children have not been supposed to raise their voices and participate,” says child journalist Marvin Ramirez, 16.





According to Adán Jiménez Paiz, the president of the Community Development Council, the children who participate in the child groups are poor, which is why time and money are constant challenges. They need to travel to get to the child group's meetings, often on foot, which is time consuming, and many of the children work in addition to going to school.

According to the children, no special capacity is needed to participate in local governance. The only requirement is the willingness to engage in the projects and their local communities. The children also acknowledge the importance of being well organised.



## Participation valued

Although the children in Sábana Grande have not been engaged in governance for long, the children feel that they already have experienced positive changes in the community. According to the children, the most important transformation so far is the participation in decision making, which was not previously accepted by the community.

In the beginning, parents objected to the children's participation. In one case, a girl from the community was not allowed to participate. Her father said, "This is for men. My daughter should not be involved." To take action into their own hands, children from the child group went to the girl's parents to talk about the activities they were doing. The children managed to convince the father, and in the end, the girl was allowed to participate in the workshops and capacity building.

The president of the Community Development Council in Sábana Grande now encourages children's participation. "I would like the children to be formally represented in the Council and for them to have a voice and a vote. We didn't have this opportunity when we were young, so it makes us very proud to see the children participate now. We will continue to support and help them and our biggest hope is that more children will participate," says Adán Jiménez Paiz.

The Community Development Council is now planning to invite two members of the national parliament, so that they can see for themselves how the children participate.

“

### I want my rights fulfilled now

"I often hear that we as children and adolescents are the future of the nation, and we are, but we're also the present, and I want my rights to be fulfilled now."

*Marvin Ramírez, 16*

“

### Because we cannot vote

Some of the social journalists in the area did an analysis of the different candidates' speeches during local elections to see if they even mentioned children's rights – and they did not!

This is probably because we cannot vote,

*says Kevin citizen journalist Ronaldo Gutiérrez Monroy, 16.*

## What's to be learned from this case?

**How does this case demonstrate children's engagement in governance?** Although Guatemala's Community Development Councils do not have executive power or budgets, they are important links to the Municipal Council of Development, which has the mandate to approve and fund community development projects. By organising themselves into child groups and networks and by cooperating with the Community Development Councils, the children have direct access to place their requests to adults who can bring their wishes further to the Municipal Council of Development.

**What is the impact of the children's engagement in governance?** In the area where Save the Children has been present for a long time, and where the local government is in favour of child participation, the children have prompted the development of a Public Policy for Children, which has led to increased birth registration, additional grammar school teachers, and more nurses, as well as improved classrooms and the building of libraries. Baskets for basketball, football fields, parks and playgrounds have also been established. Many former child group members have continued to be engaged in local governance, for instance as members of the Community Development Council.

**What are the lessons learned and recommendations?** The importance attached to child rights and the supportiveness of children's engagement in governance depends on the beliefs and interests of individual politicians and officials, on local agendas and politics, and on the internal power balance in a constituency. In areas where children have been counted in as partners in public policy and governance, the development happens much faster and more smoothly and the impact is much more tangible. Thus, it is important to work to institutionalise children's engagement in governance.



# New budget lines for children and democratised budgeting

## Social accountability – essential and highly challenging

In most countries around the world, people know little about how much money their government has at its disposal, where that money comes from, or how it is managed and accounted for. Public revenue transparency is particularly weak in Sub-Saharan Africa, where there is significant misuse of public resources due to corruption.

That a relatively large proportion of government revenues in Sub-Saharan Africa come from international aid and the export of primary resources (rather than tax revenues) further diminishes people's sense of accountability toward public revenues.

Enhancing social accountability with regard to public revenues is therefore both essential and highly challenging in the African context.

*Adapted from  
Demanding Good Governance: Lessons from Social Accountability Initiatives in Africa.  
Mary McNeil and Carmen Malena, editors. The World Bank, 2010*

For years, budget formulation, implementation and analysis in Zimbabwe were the preserves of government technocrats under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance. However, hardly any evidence shows that national budgets in Zimbabwe address the underlying causes of poverty, marginalisation and exploitation of the needs of vulnerable groups, writes Bob Libert Muchabaiwa in the book *Demanding Good Governance: Lessons from Social Accountability Initiatives in Africa*, issued by the World Bank in 2010.

The national budget is all-important when you want to measure a state's commitment to children. This recognition led nine child-focused organisations in Zimbabwe to join forces already in 1999, and when a multiparty Zimbabwean parliament was instated in 2002, the Child-Friendly National Budget Initiative really took off. Amongst the organisations involved in the initiative are Save the Children and UNICEF, while the National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations, or in brief NANGO, is in charge of coordination.

The Child-Friendly National Budget Initiative wants to introduce mechanisms holding the government accountable for its policies and actions and to find lasting solutions to the structural causes of poverty. The initiative is guided by the key principles of participation, empowerment, fairness, equality, transparency and accountability. Subsequently, children from rural and urban areas and all social classes are involved in analysing and influencing local and national budgets to make these responsive to the requests of children.

## Research based

In the initiative's early years, consultations and studies on the situation were conducted by NANGO, and inequalities, inequities and injustices in resource allocation, distribution and use were revealed. Children's perspectives, concerns and needs were found to be totally missing in the national budgeting.

A comprehensive research report in 2000 showed that children's rights could be upheld by changing national budget expenditures in the education, health and general child welfare sectors.





CHILD-FRIENDLY BUDGETING DOES NOT REFER TO SEPARATE BUDGETS FOR CHILDREN, BUT RATHER TO MAINSTREAMING CHILDREN'S ISSUES INTO NATIONAL POLICIES, PLANS AND BUDGETS, WHICH IS STILL RARE IN ETHIOPIA, WHERE THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN.

The report was widely distributed to ministries, local government bodies, parliament and civil society organisations (CSOs).

To ensure ownership and strengthen NANGO's research, stakeholders from all sectors are involved in the research, including academia and people at grass-root level represented by child welfare CSOs.

As Zimbabwe's parliament has limited research capacity, NANGO also provides research and budget analysis from children's perspectives to the parliamentarians.

### Child-led clubs are the platform

Child-led clubs have been facilitated as a platform for children's engagement in child-friendly budgeting. Although budget formulation, implementation and analysis are complicated to understand for even highly educated adults, the children took up the challenge. Plenty of training was carried out for the children on issues like advocacy, budgeting and expenditure tracking, negotiation and other life skills along with general empowerment. Today, the children participate in planning, analysis, implementation and consultations, and they make proposals.

Then the adults take the decisions and approve or disapprove of the proposals. So both adults and children are involved, be-

cause adults have better decision-making powers. Children need guidance in decision making, explains Donovan Makuzo, one of the youth involved in the initiative.

One of the many child club activities is a Children's Convention promoting dialogue with policy makers in the province. One club held a Children's Gala to sensitise other children on how budgets may be used to alleviate child poverty. This was attended by the local Member of Parliament. Through collaboration with the media children have been airing their views about national resource allocation. For example, children have used the popular local talk show *Mai Chisamba* to express the need for more resources for the education sector, and to ensure that children's education is free for everyone.

A Zimbabwe Child and Youth Budget Network has also been established, so the children can learn about budgeting and legislation, and the children participated in a National Children's Conference on the budget attended by the speaker of parliament and the director of budgets in the Ministry of Finance. Donovan Makuzo cherishes the opportunities, stating, "We have been equipped with leadership qualities that we need in the future, and we have been moulded into responsible citizens. I learnt to be positive in whatever I want to achieve in my life. There exist no more limits. Children are now being engaged in issues to do with the development of our town."



# Healthier relationships between citizens and the state

Some government officials perceive the demands of citizens or civil society for accountability as threatening. Indeed, most social accountability approaches must overcome some initial resistance or reluctance and will frequently involve some level of critical or contentious engagement.

It is therefore striking that social accountability approaches frequently result in stronger and more positive and productive relationships between citizens and the state.

*Adapted from  
Demanding Good Governance. Lessons from Social Accountability Initiatives in Africa.  
Mary McNeil and Carmen Malena, editors. The World Bank, 2010*

## The toolbox

The Child-Friendly National Budget Initiative uses a variety of tools to achieve its aims.

**Action-oriented research** ensures that baseline information is available, that advocacy issues are relevant and that impact is measured. Situation analysis, impact assessment, multi-stakeholder consultative workshops bringing together children and stakeholders, focus groups discussions with children and rapid assessments in situations with limited resources are among the many research activities.

**Independent budget analysis** has been used to identify gaps and opportunities for children in local and national budgets. The analyses are shared with policy makers, government officials and other stakeholders. Policy and programme analysis ensure that policies, laws and programmes reflect children's priorities in line with sustainable and growth-oriented economic policies. Budget inputs, outputs and outcome analysis involve a detailed analysis of resource allocations, including prioritisation, adequacy, equity, ef-

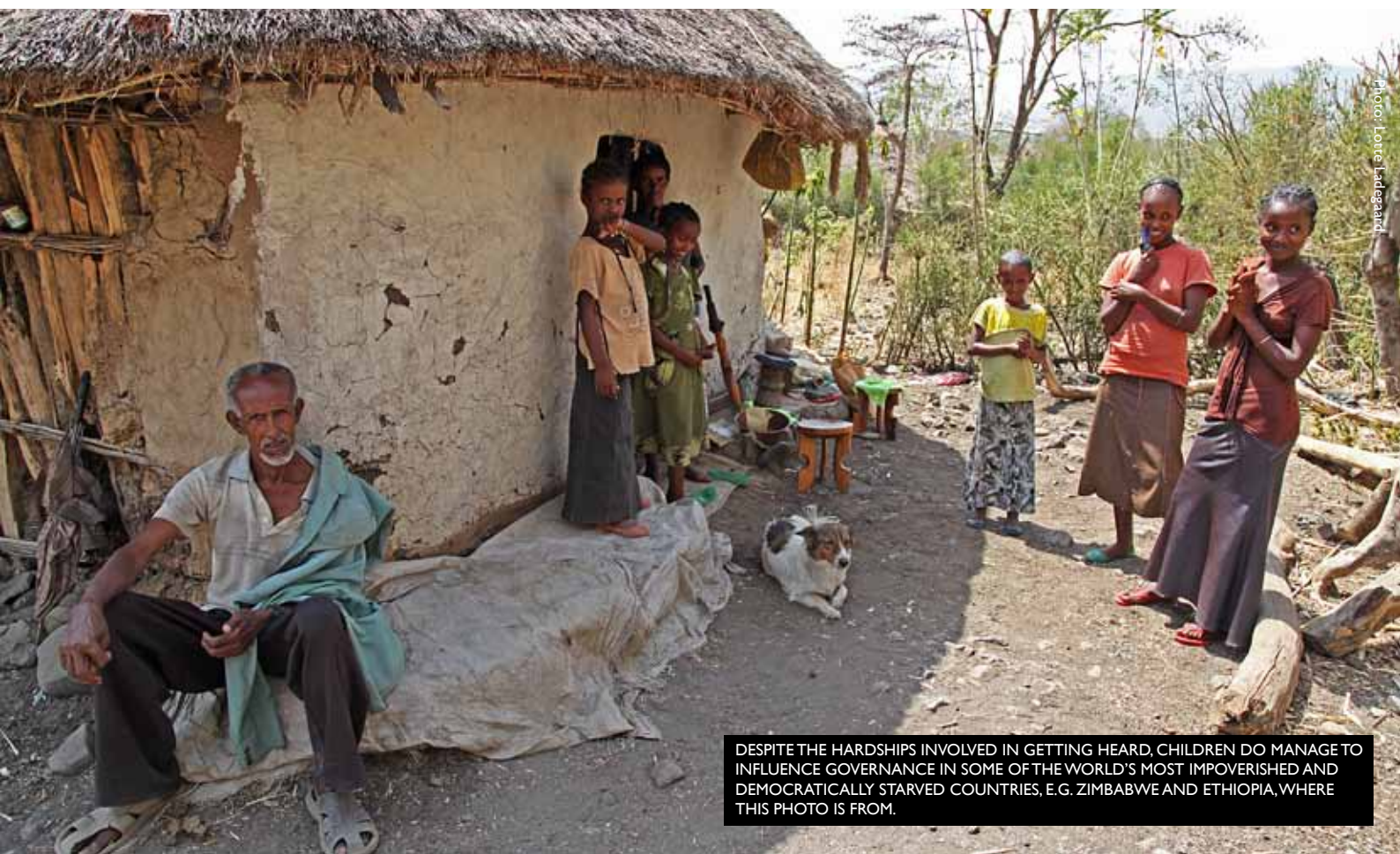
ficiency and results. Budget process analysis looks at how budgets are developed and implemented.

**Lobbying and advocacy** are based on research and target parliamentarians, government officials, the media, the private sector, NGOs and the general public to influence policies and resource allocation. The dissemination is done through meetings and workshops, posters, flyers, press releases, newspaper supplements, electronic newsletters and mails.

**Mass mobilisation and coalition building** make children and young people, academia, churches and others join together to form strong coalitions that further sensitise and involve their constituencies to lobby the public officials they work with.

**Engagement of policy and budget makers** is critical. In addition to making oral and written submissions, NANGO holds meetings with government officials and policy makers to share specific recommendations. The interaction also helps develop mutual trust and confidence. Gradually, a sustained dialogue has developed.

**Community-level capacity development in budget analysis** via workshops with stakeholders at the local level has aided in



DESPITE THE HARDSHIPS INVOLVED IN GETTING HEARD, CHILDREN DO MANAGE TO INFLUENCE GOVERNANCE IN SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST IMPOVERISHED AND DEMOCRATICALLY STARVED COUNTRIES, E.G. ZIMBABWE AND ETHIOPIA, WHERE THIS PHOTO IS FROM.

demystify budgets. The workshops are designed to build consensus and sensitise local authorities on how they can help in the formulation of child-friendly budgets.

**Documentation and dissemination are important components.** Considerable time is spent rewriting research reports into reader-friendly flyers, position papers, newsletters, posters and news articles to be distributed to budget makers, parliamentary portfolio committees, researchers, CSOs, government departments and citizens.

**Media campaigns** influence society's perception of reality and push politicians to deliver. Press statements, news bulletins and TV programmes have been produced, and journalists participate in budget workshops organised by NANGO.

**Exhibitions and other events** such as trade and book fairs as well as agricultural exhibitions help raise public awareness and mobilise support.

**Capacity development** enhances understanding and appreciation of the importance of budgets. NANGO's capacity-development programmes include budget literacy and analysis, as well as educating trainers. Training manuals and education materials are also used outside the workshops.

**Broad stakeholder participation** strengthens the voice and capacity of communities, especially as children learn to expect clear responses from public officials. To ensure that the debate reaches a wider audience, children, traditional chiefs, local authorities, provincial governors and senior citizens raise concerns that need to be addressed during workshops and meetings.

## New budget lines

One of the direct results of on-going advocacy has been increased budgetary allocations for children. New budget lines, e.g. the *Children in Difficult Circumstances* line item under the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, have been introduced. The focus on vulnerable children and orphans has also increased.

The continued demand by children's organisations to participate in issues that affect them has resulted in the budgeting process being reviewed and democratised. One example is the establishment of parliamentary portfolio committees, including a budget committee, which reviews proposals from line ministries.

The Child Friendly National Budget Initiative has trained the budget committee on child rights and child participation in budgeting processes. Interaction between the finance committee and children's groups is taking place now, experience is being shared and children have gained access to influence the budget committee's thinking and decisions.

While parliament and ministries traditionally only discussed budget issues in major cities, if at all, the Child-Friendly National Budget Initiative has piloted decentralisation of budget debates to rural and smaller urban areas. District consultative workshops have been held in 15 out of 62 districts in the country. Local authorities have hailed them as landmark achievements, because they empower communities to participate in the budgeting process.

The initiative has also created increased accountability in other ways. For example, a 2004 evaluation of the *Basic Education Assistance Module* helped to track if resources allocated for educational assistance actually reached the intended beneficiaries. The major finding was that resources to support children took a long time to trickle down to local schools, and eventually some schools could not afford to educate poor children. The initiative managed to raise attention to the problem. A directive from government now forbids schools to chase away children. The government of Zimbabwe is also publishing financial statements on how the National AIDS Trust Fund is used and newspapers now commonly run a full-page list of quarterly beneficiaries.

The initiative has strengthened the parliament's role in shaping budget priorities and holding sector ministries accountable. Parliament members now use research findings to highlight gaps and opportunities in budgets to help achieve children's rights. The members obtain this information through the capacity building workshops held before and after the budgeting process.

A Public Finance Management System has been introduced, and early-childhood education has been made an integral part of primary-level education. Birth registration and the issuance of birth certificates have been decentralised.

Moreover, the budget is being demystified for ordinary people through budget and finance literacy workshops. Children can now use economic terms and concepts with confidence, while the project has created public interest amongst ordinary people, legislators and children, who are now more eager to analyse budgets from a child perspective and to hold governments accountable.



"OPENING GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES TO CHILDREN IS A POSITIVE CHALLENGE WHICH THE COMMITTEE FINDS THAT STATES ARE INCREASINGLY RESPONDING TO," STATES THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD.





THE NATIONAL BUDGET IS ALL-IMPORTANT WHEN YOU WANT TO MEASURE A STATE'S COMMITMENT TO CHILDREN.

## Plenty of challenges

Implementing such an ambitious and complex project in a country like Zimbabwe is not easy. The country is entrenched in a political stalemate, torn by poor economic performance and reeling from the effects of regional and international isolation. The government continues to exert control over CSOs through a combination of restrictive measures and political interference, and restrictive laws have made it increasingly difficult for citizens to freely assemble, associate and express themselves.

Moreover, Zimbabwe is in election mode every two to three years. The acrimonious relationship between the two main po-

litical parties means that CSOs must tread carefully, as they are viewed as "opposition CSOs" by the government. Furthermore, the strategies and methodologies employed by NANGO are not always well received by the government, which has labelled some revealing research as Western viewpoints bent on effecting regime changes in Zimbabwe.

Mistrust between NGOs and government also makes it difficult for NGOs to be allowed access to crucial information, and an irregular parliamentary sitting calendar makes arranging meetings and appointments complicated, thus resulting in plenty of last-minute changes and cancellations. Although the parliament tends to rubber stamp the budget, its oversight role should not be underestimated. Oversight by portfolio committees conducting their work through public hearings holds sector ministries accountable.

Challenges also came from within the CSOs. Skilled staff members are constantly on the move. As a result, CSOs are continuously training people, who then move on, often to international organisations.

Last, but not least, some of the children found the initiative challenging. Seventeen-year-old Innocent Mochangwe explains, "Children's expectations and attitudes towards change for the better were negative, and working with older people was a little harsh and frustrating. It was difficult to cope with both the children and city council and to bring them together. It was not easy to educate the community. This was due to lack of knowledge on what we were really doing in the beginning. Older people felt that working with us was time consuming. But our views are being considered and action was and is still in progress and that makes me feel better than ever."

### What is child-friendly budgeting?

Child-friendly budgeting does not refer to separate budgets for children. Rather, it is an analysis of the government's budgets that measures its varying impact on boys and girls regardless of religion, political affiliation, ethnicity, social and physical status, or geographical location.

Fundamentally, a child-friendly budget is about mainstreaming children's issues and ensuring that they are integrated into all national policies, plans and programmes rather than setting children aside as a special interest group.

*Bob Libert Muchabaiwa in Demanding Good Governance: Lessons from Social Accountability Initiatives in Africa. The World Bank, 2010*

# What's to be learned from this case?

**How does this case demonstrate children's engagement in governance?** Child-led clubs act as a platform for children's engagement in child-friendly budgeting. The children participate in planning, analysis, implementation, consultations and proposal development. The child clubs are part of a Children's Convention promoting dialogue with policy makers in the province. One club held a Children's Gala to sensitise other children on how budgets can be used to alleviate child poverty. This was attended by the local Member of Parliament. Through collaboration with the media children have been airing their views about national resource allocation. A Zimbabwe Child and Youth Budget Network has also been established, and the children participated in a National Children's Conference on the budget attended by the speaker of parliament and the director of budgets within the Ministry of Finance.

**What is the impact of the children's engagement in governance?** Consistent advocacy has led to an increase in budget allocations for issues that benefit children directly. New budget lines, e.g. the Children in Difficult Circumstances line item under the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, have been introduced. The focus on orphans and especially vulnerable children has also increased. At the same time, the budgeting process has been reviewed and democratised to ensure that different stakeholders take part in the process.

The Child-Friendly National Budget Initiative has also piloted decentralisation of budget debates to rural and smaller urban areas, and an evaluation of the Basic Education Assistance Module led to the issuing of a government directive forbidding schools from chasing away children. The government of Zimbabwe has introduced a new policy of publishing financial statements on how the National AIDS Trust Fund is used, and the Public Finance Management System has been introduced. Early-childhood education has been made part of primary education, while birth registration and the issuance of birth certificates have been decentralised.

**What are the lessons learned and recommendations?** The national budget is all-important when you want to measure a state's commitment to children, and when you want to influence a country's development policy. However, as budgeting is tough even for highly educated academics, mobilisation and education is a must for all stakeholders. Otherwise, debates on a technical issue like budgeting do not make sense.

Budget analysis must have the specific purpose of holding governments accountable and to form the basis for policy dialogue, because independent analysis without an effort to influence policies, attitudes and actions through communication and advocacy becomes a mere academic exercise.

Partnerships, networks and coalitions generate greater resources and more knowledge than individual organisations can achieve alone. Civil society organisations must develop media strategies to reach policy makers and citizens and to dig into opportunities created by the media.





Photos: Lisbeth Dina Jensen

# Empowerment protects against abuse and exploitation

All programmes and projects are created by children and youth, with adults from the organisation providing support only for management, planning, budgeting and evaluation. No activities are carried out without children's participation in all phases of the process. Children suggest the subject and the method, in addition to taking responsibility for implementation. Even new members are selected by old members, and not by adult facilitators. Members must be 14-19 years old, an age range also established by the members.

Such is the situation in a youth centre in Banjaluka, Bosnia Herzegovina/Republika Srpska. The youth centre was established by Save the Children's partner organisation Hi Neighbour.

“

Decisions are made within the team, by reaching a consensus. Everyone's opinion is relevant, and everyone is always paid attention to when speaking,

explains Mile Aljetic, who got involved in the youth centre at a friend's recommendation.

## Research on child trafficking

Members of the youth centre, among others, decided to carry out some research on child trafficking, child pornography and prostitution, which is a growing problem in Banja Luka. The research was planned to take place via focus group discussions in 10 schools. Trained in qualitative research and the technique of focus group discussions, the children defined the sample, worked out a detailed agreement and work plan and determined the division of tasks.

Over 60 hours of psychological counselling work were held for members of the group on the development problems young people face. After carrying out the research, the children participated in lectures on the emerging value system that has led to an increase child pornography and prostitution. In all, 350 children have been educated on the protection and recognition of sexually threatening situations.

The members of the youth centre also do theatre shows, preparing their own scripts, scenes, costumes, lighting and performances. Active on Facebook and in the media, they have learned to write reports, carry out workshops and about communication. Moreover, they have written articles for newsletters and interviewed representatives of the police.

## This is all a part of governance

“I wanted to participate actively in my community and contribute to the team with all my abilities. The time spent in the team was time spent acquiring certain skills and experiences, which you can hardly, or not even, find in the formal education process,” says Mile Aljetic. He thinks that children always ought to be involved in the process of decision making when it comes to issues concerning them. “That way they're included in governance.”



FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT IN 10 BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA SCHOOLS AS PART OF RESEARCH BEING DONE ON CHILD TRAFFICKING, CHILD PORNOGRAPHY AND PROSTITUTION.



CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN BANJA LUKA HAVE BEEN PARTICIPATING IN PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING AND LECTURES ON THE EMERGING VALUE SYSTEM THAT HAS LED TO AN INCREASE IN CHILD PORNOGRAPHY AND PROSTITUTION.





THE MEMBERS OF THE YOUTH CENTRE IN BANJA LUKA CELEBRATE THEIR NEW KNOWLEDGE AND LOST SHYNESS.

Another youth centre member, Jovana Vukovic says, "I started seriously considering the idea of studying psychology. I've learned so many new things that I previously knew nothing of, and I made new friends with similar interests. I have become a person with a strong attitude, and I overcame the shyness and stage fright of public speaking. I learned something new during every meeting, starting with emotions, assertiveness, empathy, giving good presentations, creating logos, advertisements, writing reports, researching via focus groups, organising panel discussions, media co-operation, animating people into a street action, writing CVs, motivation letters, and many other things."

### **Constant cooperation between elders and children**

According to Hi Neighbour, the only action initiated by adults was the actual establishment of the youth centre, because adult leadership is required by law in this phase of NGO activities. However, children were of course consulted.

The funding part is also to some extent governed by adults, says Mile Aljetic, "It would be great if the finance report delivered to project donors after some activities would be available to us."

Jovana Vukovic also points out that there other decision makers are also involved, such as the coordinator, Hi Neighbour management and donors. "Donors because they do the financing; management because they have norms that need to be fulfilled; coordinator because he/she is highly trained, has great ideas, earned respect in the team, supports the team dynamics and never allows us to be lazy," says Jovana Vukovic.

She underlines that children always need someone older to facilitate them, assist them and support them, On the other hand, children shouldn't serve as project decoration. A constant cooperation between the elders and the children is needed in order to achieve the desired goals.

## What's to be learned from this case?

**How does this case demonstrate children's engagement in governance?** All programmes and projects in the youth centre are governed by children and youth, with adults from the organisation only providing support for the management, planning, budgeting and evaluation. Children suggest the subject and the method, in addition to taking responsibility for implementation.

**What is the impact of the children's engagement in governance?** Extensive awareness has been created on child trafficking, child pornography and prostitution among participants by using psychosocial counselling, child researchers and school pupils, as well as police and community members, all of whom were involved in research and awareness raising on these issues. This awareness along with cultivating personal life skills among the members of the youth centre may work as protection against abuse and exploitation.

**What are the lessons learned and recommendations?** Children cannot do much without adult support, e.g. donors have to do the financing and management in the supporting adult organisation has long-term planning that might not easily be changed. Good coordinators are also especially useful, because they are highly trained and have great ideas. Adults also help ensure that the involvement of children in governance is ethical and meaningful and that the actions involving children are concrete.



# 70 per cent more spent on children locally

“The adults need our help when it comes to public policies. Otherwise they can only think of their own priorities and not ours,” says a 15-year-old girl from Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua. Here, children demand to be heard in decision-making processes and influence the projects and development plans the local government is budgeting for.

Save the Children started working with local governments a decade ago and supported the legal establishment of the association the Network of Municipal Governments Friends of Children in 2008. Its sole purpose is to promote the fulfilment of children's rights at community level.

Together with the network, Save the Children has ensured that children are directly involved in the discussions and approval of projects directly benefitting them, and child councils and lobby events have been created as spaces for children to engage in governance at the municipal level.

And it pays. The coordinator of the Network of Municipal Governments has noticed that there is greater development measured in terms of the actual impact in relation to the investment made in the communities that listen to the children. This, she explains, is because children know what they need and what they want. The money is being spent for better purposes, and the beneficiaries value the investments more, when children are listened to while planning investments.

## My neighbourhood, my project

Each year, the local authorities in some municipalities invite children who are organised in child councils to a participatory lobby event, where children present their requests based on a gap analysis carried out by the children themselves in their communities.

In the municipality of Ocotal, children presented their collectively decided projects selected during the lobby event. The authorities approved 10 out of 16 projects and included them in the Annual Investment Plan for the coming year. Among the children's projects were classrooms improvements, more books

in the library and a band or a dancing group in the Centre for Culture.

“We do this to treat our children as citizens with rights,” says the mayor of Ocotal. According to the mayor, the process has involved integrating children into the social and political life of the municipality. The process has influenced the perception of leadership in the neighbourhoods, where children are gradually becoming more directly involved. “Adult acceptance of children's own projects being approved and funded is a historical development,” says the mayor.

CHILDREN IN NICARAGUA DEMAND TO BE HEARD IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES.



Photo: Lisbeth Dina Jensen



DRAWING PICTURES OF WHAT THEY WOULD LIKE IS ONE OF THE MANY ACTIVITIES NICARAGUAN CHILDREN ENGAGE IN TO INFLUENCE LOCAL GOVERNANCE.

Ahead of the lobby events, the children do some 'diagnostics' in their own areas to find out which rights are violated. Then, Save the Children and its partner organisations support preparatory assemblies, where the children learn to develop small proposals. To make the children's requests more focused, the children generally are divided into groups of children living in the urban area, children in the rural area and disabled children. Depending on the age, the children draw pictures that represent their wishes, or they write about the projects they want the local government to carry out.

Jaimy, a 16-year-old girl from Ciudad Sandino, has been participating in a child council since she was 10 years old. She recalls, "The government gave us the opportunity to comment on what we wanted to accomplish in our communities in a lobby event where the municipality had gathered more than 200 children. We were split into smaller groups and in the groups we talked about what our demands would be. We focused on our right to security, so we asked for lights in the playgrounds and on some of the dark streets. The municipality agreed to carry out our project and now it is safer for children and their families to be in the park or on the playground after six or seven o'clock when it is getting dark. The police have also contributed to this since we made them aware of the problem."

Some months after the participatory lobby event, the municipal government convokes the children again for another lobby event called informative lobby or accountability lobby event, where the municipality accounts for the projects that have already been implemented, for projects that are underway and for the expenditure for each project. The mayor and the deputy mayor are present during the events.

The local government representatives always explain why if some requested activities have not been carried out, like a centre for children and adolescents, technical education centres and micro credit programmes, which were beyond the authorities' financial capacity.

“

**We need to claim what is ours**

It is very important that we as children participate. Especially now that we have this space and this opportunity, we need to take advantage of it and claim what is ours.

*Jaimy, 16-year-old child mayor*

### Activities in the child councils

One of the children's councils in the Managua area noticed that many people, and especially the poor families, did not want to or were unable to register their children at birth. The families felt it was too expensive. To combat this problem, the children launched a festival called Right to a Name.

"Before the festival we went from house to house and asked if people knew of children that were not registered. Those families were invited to the festival. During the festival, we provided birth certificates to children from zero to 12 years. Lawyers did it for free, the local government paid for the festival, and almost 150 children were registered. That was a great success for us," explains Jaimy.

The children also carried out a Walk for the Environment to create awareness on the importance of keeping the streets in the community clean. The mayor joined the walk.



## Election day

On election day, hundreds of children gather to vote. In front of a long line of children from six to 16 years of age, three teenagers sit at a table. They hand out the ballot and tell the younger children how to proceed. Having received the paper, the children vote in polling booths made out of cardboard boxes.

When they have made up their minds, they throw the ballot into the handmade ballot box and press their fingers into blue ink to signify that they have voted already.

Children in the communities carry out elections to vote for the child mayor and deputy mayor of their child council, who will represent the children in consultations with the local government.

“

He is honest and humble ... and very good in mathematics. He can do it. He will do his very best,

*explains Josué Ramón Cruz, 12 years old, about his favourite child mayor candidate.*



THE CHILDREN RECEIVE THE BALLOT...



...VOTE BEHIND POLLING BOOTHS MADE OUT OF CARDBOARD BOXES...



...AND THROW THE BALLOT INTO THE BALLOT BOX



HAVING VOTED, THE CHILDREN MUST PRESS THEIR FINGERS INTO BLUE INK TO SIGNIFY THAT THEY HAVE DONE THEIR DUTY.

Photos: Lisbeth Dina Jensen



Another child council did a scientific diagnostic of the adult's perception of children's participation. They interviewed 100 adults about children's capacity to participate. Only five per cent of the adults thought that children were able to say anything concrete or rational. Two years later the children asked the same questions to 100 adults, approximately 50 of whom were also part of the first sample. This time, the analysis showed that 35 per cent believed children had the necessary capacities, demonstrating a 30 per cent increase in the number of adults who believed children were able to participate.

### Annual competition

Experience has proven that local governments are more likely to listen to other local governments. Therefore, knowledge sharing is a great way for authorities to learn, and children's rights have turned out to be a unifying factor for local governments, despite political and religious differences.

Every year, the Network of Municipal Governments Friends of Children evaluates the commitments made to fulfil child rights, and during a widely attended Annual Competition ceremony the local government with the best performance receives the honour of a prize worth USD 5,000. The money is granted to a project completely decided upon by children in that municipality. This encouragement and public recognition has made healthy competition among local governments possible.

In 2011, the Telpaneca municipality won the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Competition, because they had obtained the highest combined score covering the following four themes: 1) investment in chil-

dren, 2) support for child participation, 3) support for the right to leisure, and 4) support for disabled children. Telpaneca had increased its annual investment in children from 20 per cent in 2010 to 30 per cent in 2011, and children had been consulted when the local government was developing a public policy for children.

According to Mayor Bernarda Castillo, "The biggest challenge now is to continue increasing the budget for children. Currently, 80 per cent of the content of the public policy for children is being implemented, but we want to make that 100 per cent." She affirms that it is important to let children participate, because, "You need to work with them and prepare them for the posts they will have in the future."

The municipality that won in 2010 inaugurated the project in 2011. According to the deputy mayor, they consulted children in every neighbourhood by letting the children draw the project they wanted. After an exhibition of all the drawings, each neighbourhood prioritised one project, and finally all the children in the municipality voted to identify the ultimate project. "The big winner was a playground, which we did not have, so I think they chose well," says the deputy mayor.

Afterwards, the government officials helped the children develop a budget to investigate how much the playground would cost in terms of materials, paint and other expenses. The children discovered that they needed money beyond the existing budget. In the end the local government paid the additional costs with some contributions from a local hardware shop.



The local authorities do not always agree with children, though. In one case, the mayor desperately hoped that the children would choose to spend money on a playground, but the children wanted a music band to play at community parties and celebrations. The mayor tried heavily to influence the children, but when the time to vote came, the great majority nominated the band. The mayor shed a few tears, and the children had their band.

Every four years, the network has to resurge because of local elections and the change in staff in the local government. But the network sustains, because it has received great recognition and appreciation in the country, and because it is based on long-term visions, strategies, priorities, projects and budgets.

“

**We are taken seriously**

“I’m very grateful that the local government has taken us seriously; that they invite us to the consultations and lobby events and listen to us. We have felt very comfortable in all the processes.”

*17-year-old girl from Managua*

## Facts about the Network of Municipal Governments Friends of Children

Currently, 80 per cent of all municipalities in Nicaragua are included in the network. Save the Children Child Right Governance Programme Coordinator Pedro Hurtado Vega explains that, “it has expanded through ‘peer logic’ between the municipalities and almost created a sort of domino effect, because they see that it is worth the effort.”

The network has managed to secure an increase in the annual average of municipal investment in children from 8.5 per cent from 2001-2004 to 14.5 per cent from 2005-2008, directly benefiting hundreds of thousands of children throughout Nicaragua. In 2011, 60 municipalities had child rights plans and 30 already have a Municipal Policy for children. In 2010, it was only seven.

Policies, plans, projects and budgets were prepared and approved with input from 15,500 children. Children directly selected the content of nine municipal projects, most of which address the right to education and recreation, benefitting more than 140,000 children in 2010 and 2011.



## What's to be learned from this case?

**How does this case demonstrate children's engagement in governance?** The children are organised in child councils across the country and via various lobby events they are directly involved in deciding how the municipal budgets should reflect children's needs and demands. The lobby events also ensure that the local governments are being held accountable to fulfilling their promises. The Annual Competition ensures that children hold the absolute power to decide which project the award should be granted to.

**What is the impact of children's engagement in governance?** There has been a 70 per cent increase in the average municipal investment in children over a period of four years in Nicaragua. Eighty per cent of all municipalities are now part of the network. The idea of the Municipal Network for children has been replicated in other countries in the region. The children's engagement in governance has led to a more effective realisation of children's rights. Playgrounds are constructed, schools are repaired and music instruments are included in the municipal budgets. Security has been improved in parks and playgrounds, and marginalisation of poor children has been reduced, because they are guaranteed access to services when they have a birth certificate.

**What are the lessons learned and recommendations?** Development projects for children are more likely to be given priority when children are involved in the process. The realisation of children's rights requires quality partnership between different sectors as well as long-term vision, strategies and budgets. Experience has proven that local governments are more likely to listen to other local governments. Therefore, experience sharing is a great way for authorities to learn, and children's rights have turned out to be a unifying factor for local governments, despite political and religious differences. Encouragement and public recognition may generate healthy competition among local governments.



# Youths work with authorities to eradicate poverty

## Facts about “We can!”

- “Tunaweza,” meaning “We can!” was implemented by Plan Kenya in the districts of Kwale, Kinango, Msambweni and Kilifi from 2008-2010 in partnership with 39 civil society organisations (CSOs), various government partners and two NGO partners, Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children’s Rights (KAARC) and the Coalition for the Promotion and Development of the Child (COPDEC).
- The project targeted an estimated 72,000 children and youth.

Youth comprise a large proportion of the labour force in Kenya, yet youth usually work under the direction of older people. Posing questions has traditionally been unthinkable. Children are to be seen and not heard, while child and youth participation habitually has been confined to child and youth organisations. Children’s participation in governance used to be non-existent in Kenya.

“Tunaweza” or “We can!” is a youth, children and community empowerment project implemented by Plan Kenya in collaboration with key government offices and civil society. The initiative has increased child and youth engagement in governance in CSOs and government structures influencing the everyday lives of children in Kenya.

## How the project came into being

The project emerged from a participatory community development planning process where children, youth and communities identified their development priorities and possible interventions to address these priorities. Two partner NGOs facilitated child participation in the planning process.

In order to introduce the project and establish access to children, youth and communities, sensitisation campaigns were carried

out in 14 CSOs in Kwale and 25 in Kilifi by Plan staffs, youth and local leaders. They explained about the importance of child and youth participation in development activities and the need to establish a mutual working relationship between youth and CSOs.

A mapping of various community structures carried out by Plan and CSO representatives identified 84 registered and 82 unregistered youth groups, which could act as pioneers and be joined by other youth who were interested in engaging in governance. The information about these youth groups was disseminated during trainings, meetings and in documentation distributed to the youth.



Photo: Lotte Ladegaard



Photo: Lotte Ladegaard

POSING QUESTIONS HAS PREVIOUSLY BEEN OUT OF THE QUESTION FOR CHILDREN IN MANY AFRICAN COUNTRIES – FOR EXAMPLE, IN ETHIOPIA, WHERE THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN, AND IN KENYA.

## Building capacity

In Kwale, three NGO forums were formed to build capacity and foster meaningful representation and participation of children and youth amongst all partners and individuals. Youth networks were also established in all the CSOs in Kwale, Kinango and Msambweni. Designed to create space for youth advocates, these networks helped spread information about upcoming events. Members of the network participated in decision-making forums at the CSO level and in village meetings, and they were under continuous mentoring and coaching for them to become gradually more endowed.

One-hundred and forty youth advocates were involved in mobilising community groups via sensitisation and information meetings, and they supported youth groups in becoming empowered to work closely with CSO leadership.

In Kilifi, the youth participated in a district network identifying issues they felt affected them, for example drug abuse, unemployment, teenage pregnancies and child marriages. Subsequently, the youth leaders organised and executed advocacy campaigns against these problems.

Plan staffs were also trained in human rights based approaches, gender and many other issues, while e.g. CSOs participated in training on participatory monitoring and evaluation.

## Making leaders

A youth and child leadership training manual was developed involving the Children's Department, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, the Coalition for the Promotion and Development of Children, Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children, the Ministry of Education, Kenya Scouts Association and others. Input from the children and youth was incorporated.

Primary schools students were trained on leadership facilitated by patrons of the Kenya Scouts Association in Kwale, Msambweni and Kinango. Selected from child clubs within the schools, the participants learned life skills such as communication, leadership expertise and core living values. These skills enabled them to effectively run their clubs.

Similar leadership training for youth groups from 12 CSOs was organised by Plan and the Ministry of Youth Affairs.

## Income generation – a main concern

As income generation is a main concern for Kenyan youth, Plan and the Ministry of Youth Affairs facilitated youth who wanted to apply for funds established to create employment for youth. The youth also engaged in community work like clearing bushes along roads and growing tree seedlings guided by the Forestry Department. In return, the youth sold the seedlings to the Ministry of Youth.

Some youth groups participated in exposure visits to gain inspiration for income generation. One group visited youth involved in butterfly farming and has since started a similar project in their own community. Some youth visited government irrigation schemes to learn about irrigation methods, how to grow cashew nuts as well as marketing techniques. These youth are now practising irrigation techniques on their group farm.



CHILDREN AND YOUTH MAKE UP A LARGE PART OF THE LABOUR FORCE IN KENYA AND ETHIOPIA, WHERE THIS PHOTO IS FROM.

In Kwale, hundreds of youth from CSOs were trained in resource mobilisation that involved project proposal writing skills and information on how to access funding from different donors. One group was granted USD 626 from the Ministry of Gender and Social Services for their tree seedling project.

Youth representatives were also trained in project management, acquiring information and skills like finance, monitoring, evaluation and report writing.

Any information on grant opportunities was posted on the government department notice boards and shared with the youths at community meetings and during trainings.

## Sport and mobilisation

Sport was found to be a very appropriate tool for mobilising youth. The youth in one CSO organised a football league to keep the boys busy during school holidays. This event was designed to





sharpen sport abilities while simultaneously educating the youth on issues like drug abuse.

The project also supported the celebration of International Women Day in partnership with the Ministry of Social Services. A girls' football match was used to advocate eradication of child marriages, while youth advocates organised a 16-day Activism against Gender Violence campaign through a football league.

### **Access to relevant information**

Dissemination of information was a continuous process. The children and youth learned about relevant acts and conventions like the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*, the *Millennium Development Goals*, and the *National Youth Policy*. Introduced to youth enterprise fund application forms and registration forms for youth groups, they got copies of the

*Harmonized Draft Constitution*, district development plans and the National Youth Council Bill.

Magazines were developed by the children and youth, who told their own stories, made drawings and poems along with videos and posters encouraging other youth to become engaged in governance. The magazines, videos and posters urging the youth to attend local meetings, unite and demand opportunities were disseminated to various youth groups, CSOs and relevant line ministries.

### **Getting access to engagement in governance**

In Kwale, when 102 youth advocates came together in 2009 to review the National Youth Policy they identified various shortcomings. Important problems were left out of the policy; for example, unemployed male youth used by politicians to perpetuate violence was not mentioned. Neither were corrup-

OFTEN, CHILDREN AND YOUTH MEET WITH OTHER CHILDREN AND YOUTH. HOWEVER, INTERACTION BETWEEN ADULTS AND CHILDREN AND YOUTH LEADS TO FASTER RESULTS WHEN CHILDREN ENGAGE IN GOVERNANCE.

Photo: Lotte Ladegard

tion and nepotism, although these issues are major concerns for Kenyan youth. The gaps were compiled in a memorandum and forwarded to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and other relevant government officials.

Twenty-four youth representatives also reviewed the Economic Stimulus Projects with the Community Development Fund managers and suggested a way forward that included children and youth in the projects and their monitoring.

Network meetings were convened by the District Youth Office. These meetings were used for selecting youth leaders to represent the youth agenda at the district level, thus providing youths with the opportunity to share issues affecting them with the District Youth Training Officer. The district meetings culminated in the establishment of a new District Youth Council. District Youth Councils reviewed their respective district plans and forwarded their comments and suggestions for further youth engagement to the District Development Officers.

The District Youth Officer, the District Youth Council and some CSO youth representatives also met to measure the provisions of the National Youth Council Act and other instruments influencing the lives of children and youth. Copies of these instruments were made available to their own groups.

During a meeting with the Financial Services providers in Kilifi, the youths learned about the Community Development Fund Act. Gaps were identified at policy and implementation levels, and the youths were requested to work out a memorandum to the Members of Parliament.

Improvements in birth registration and a water dam construction have also been attributed to the children and youth's involvement in data collection and awareness creation. A group of youth lobbied with the police for the closure of a drinking den, while others were registering voters and worked as clerks and presiding officers during by elections.

## Sustainability through linkages

In order to ensure sustainability, the youths were linked up with the respective government line ministries from a very early stage, thus making child rights governance part of government plans.

Apart from having gained an awareness of and access to funding from sustained, decentralised government funds to create economic sustainability, the youths have been linked up to other civil society organisations working with governance to avoid dependency on Plan.

The project has led to incorporation of youth leaders in key decision-making committees, e.g. the All District Poverty Eradication committee. Several departments and ministries recognised and involved the youth in programmes that have continued way beyond the Tunaweza project.

The District Youth Councils provide youth with a strong voice in areas of civic education. An increased number of youth also influence decisions at local level governance, e.g. in the National Boundary Review Commission, the Constitution Review Commission and the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission.

While there are many gains, a few frustrations have also popped up during the project. Sometimes the children and youth would have to wait for months before any progress was made, which caused great distress. Understaffing and high turnover of government and district officers have also proved to be a challenge to the project as it takes time to get to know, sensitise and make new officers feel ownership about the project.



## What's to be learned from this case?

**How does this case demonstrate children's engagement in governance?** Through the District Youth Councils children and young people gain access to decision makers at district, and in some instances, national level. Children and youth review and provide input concerning the National Youth Council Act and the Community Development Fund Act.

**What is the impact of the children's engagement in governance?** The project has led to incorporation of youth leaders in key decision-making committees, e.g. the All District Poverty Eradication committee. Several departments and ministries have also recognised and involved the youth in programmes that have continued way beyond the Tunaweza project. Improvements in birth registration and a water dam construction have been attributed to the children and youth's involvement in data collection and awareness creation. A group of youth lobbied with the police for the closure of a drinking den, while others registered voters and worked as clerks and presiding officers during by elections. One youth group was granted money from the Ministry of Gender and Social Services for a tree seedling project.

**What are the lessons learned and recommendations?** Linking up with government line ministries from a very early stage makes child rights governance part of government plans, while awareness of and access to funding from sustained, decentralised government funds create economic sustainability.

# Governance in day care centres? Maybe not ...

## About the National Council for Children

The National Council for Children is a Danish institution administratively linked with the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration, but nonetheless politically independent.

A chairperson is appointed by the Minister of Social Affairs and Integration, while six members are recommended by an elected assembly of organisations working with children. Subsequently, the recommended members are appointed by the minister.

The Council, which receives an annual government grant, was established as a trial scheme in 1994, but in 1997 the Danish Parliament decided to make the National Council for Children permanent.

Its many tasks include closely monitoring the reporting process to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and issuing its own supplementary report.

In connection with legislative and other initiatives of significance to children, the National Council for Children is available for consultation. The Council can request that public authorities account for political decisions and administrative practices, but the Council does not deal with specific complaints.

The National Council for Children advocates on behalf of all Danish children. By carrying out studies based on input from children, the Council acts as the voice of Danish children.



While the involvement of adolescents in governance is common, examples of young children engaging in governance are scarce. "Till now, we have not been good at asking the youngest children about their opinion," admits Stine Lindberg, Head of Section for the involvement of children, the National Council for Children in Denmark.

Although most young children in Denmark spend many of their waking hours in day care centres, no one has ever examined their access to influencing their daily lives there until Stine Lindberg's department decided to establish a Mini Children's Panel to ask these young children about their opinions on children's engagement in governance in day care centres.

The Mini Children's Panel comprises children 4-6 years of age who volunteer their opinions on subjects taken up by the Council. The children's replies are disseminated to the public at large, child experts, politicians, children and others with an interest in the field of children. But most of all, the studies are designed to inspire and motivate day care staff to initiate further participation and child governance in day care centres.

The National Council for Children also has another aim, which is to have young children internalise and value their initial experiences of being heard and of being part of something larger – a democracy – where their voices also count.



## What is participation to a five-year-old?

As the Council's prime task is to secure children's rights to participation in decisions regarding their own lives, studying participation and child governance in day care centres was an obvious objective. "It is a fact that we do not know much about how children in day care centres experience participation and co-management," writes Stine Lindberg in a 2011 study published by the council called *Rules and co-management in day care centres*.

But how do you ask children at the age of five about such abstract subjects as participation and co-management in governance? The Council chose to pose 12 concrete questions on situations from everyday life in day care centres. The questions were designed to elicit a response of "yes," "sometimes" or "no". The quantitative survey, which included 149 children aged 4-6, was supplemented by qualitative interviews with eight children aged 4-6 from different day care centres.

Children's involvement in co-management in day care centres usually entails regular children's meetings led by day care staff. During these meetings the children speak in turns. Sometimes the day care staff presents topics the children talk about on the playground, during lunch and while playing, based on the assumption that this will make them feel the meetings are based on their current interests and thus participatory in nature.

The study revealed, however, that the children mainly experience these meetings as socialisation and as an educative forum rather than as a forum for democracy and governance. "You have to raise your hand, and then the adults decide if you're allowed to speak. If you don't know anything, you're not allowed to raise your hand," explains August, a boy in the study.

## Unwilling to take decisions

Danish children as young as five years of age are accustomed to being involved in family decisions. Although not all of their decisions are taken into consideration by their parents, children are used to having their voices heard at home from an increasingly young age.

In the day care centre children appeared to be less willing to get involved in decision making as more than a third of the child respondents admitted that they do not like to take decisions in the day care centre. For the children, "taking decisions" appeared to be understood as "being in charge while playing" rather than "being co-managers".

According to the study's findings, young children's own social practices are more important than adult attempts to integrate democratic processes in day care centres, because many young children worry about being perceived as too dominating by the other children.

A girl named Sarah explains, "Children don't want to have to decide so much that others become sad. They want them to be able to join too."



## Study methodology

The 2010 study *Rules and co-management in day care centres* was carried out in the newly established Mini Children's Panel and comprised 149 children aged 4-6. The goal is for the panel to grow until it has approximately 1,000 panel members comprised of young children.

The Danish School of Education selected the day care centres via a simple random sample to make sure that the respondents were not only geographically and demographically representative, but also that different types of day care centres were represented, e.g. both public and private day care centres with different age groups of children. All child respondents were volunteers and parental consent was sought.

A computer-generated verbal questionnaire was developed and distributed to participating day care centres on USB sticks as not all computers available to the children had Internet access. The children received simple instructions from day care staff and the computer, which was equipped with a mouse and headset. The children had to click on "yes," "sometimes," or "no" and each response was represented by a symbol. The staff remained present to assist if problems regarding understanding or the symbols arose, but they did not participate in answering the questions.

Initially, the child was presented with numerous pictures of animals and a little train rolling across the screen. Next, the computer asked the child to do a practice test using the different response options. Afterwards, 12 questions were posed one at a time and the response selected by clicking on a square, a triangle or a circle, each one symbolising one of the three different response options. Finally, a green arrow appeared to lead the child to the next question. The train cars gradually became shaded with colour. When the last question was finished, the train hooted and left the screen.

Eight children also participated in qualitative interviews carried out two by two.

Fictitious names were used in the final study to preserve anonymity.

## What's to be learned from this case?

**How does this case demonstrate children's engagement in governance?** The Mini Children's Panel comprises children 4-6 years of age who volunteer their opinions on subjects proposed by the National Council for Children. The children's replies are disseminated to the public at large, child experts, day care staff, politicians, children and others with an interest in the field of children.

**What is the impact of the children's engagement in governance?** Due to a lack of resources, the National Council for Children has been unable follow-up on and assess the impact of the children's engagement in governance.

**What are the lessons learned and recommendations?** Young children appear to be somewhat unwilling to get involved in decision making as their own social practices are apparently more important than adult attempts at integrating democratic processes in day care centres. Many young children worry about being perceived as too dominating by the other children. Because examples of young children's engagement in governance are scarce, doing more research on young children's engagement in governance is recommended in order to explore the avenues for their involvement in decisions influencing their everyday life.





# Who does the Danish school belong to?



## **Us or the system?**

You need to feel that they trust the students. You need to provide the students with more freedom to move, so we can experience that the school belongs to us and not to the system.

*Laura, member of youth expert group*

## Low awareness on child rights in Denmark

"While welcoming the State party's information that human rights and democracy are part of the school curricula at both primary and secondary school levels, the Committee is concerned at the low rates of awareness of the Convention, especially amongst children."

"The Committee is concerned that the curriculum for the training of persons working for and with children, including teachers, does not include the Convention."

"The Committee reiterates its previous recommendation for the State party to develop systematic and on-going training programmes on human rights, including children's rights, for all persons working for and with children, e.g. judges, lawyers, law enforcement officials, civil servants, local government officials, teachers, social workers and health personnel, and especially for children themselves."

*Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: DENMARK  
4 February 2011*



Being a developed country does not necessarily bring child rights, child participation and child rights governance to the forefront. This became evident in the *Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: DENMARK* in 2011, where the Committee was, "concerned at the low rates of awareness of the Convention, especially amongst children." The Committee also noted, "that the curriculum for the training of persons working for and with children, including teachers, does not include the Convention."

"Many adult decision makers also forget to ask the children and youth about their opinions, because they think they already know what is best for children and youth," says Stine Lindberg, Head of Section for the involvement of children, the National Council for Children in Denmark.

This applies, for example, to the educational system. In recent years, Denmark has had a strong focus on upper secondary education. While the government target is that 95 per cent of all students exiting ninth and tenth grade, which is at about age 16, must complete a youth education programme, the reality is that many students drop out of these upper secondary education programmes. On average, only 89 per cent of Danes young people finish an upper secondary education programme. In Copenhagen, the capital, the numbers are even bleaker, with only 78 per cent completing a programme.

## Invisible youth

While adult experts discuss the issue at conferences, issue reports and fill newspaper headlines, and a Youth Commission

consisting of adult professionals has been established by the Copenhagen City Council, one group was never really visible in the debate – the youth themselves.

Although the National Council for Children in Denmark does not implement its own projects, it does invite children and young people to voice their concerns. In 2010 the Council instituted an expert group of seven young people between 16-22 years of age who had experience with dropping out of upper secondary schools.

The group was invited to three evening meetings in the Council in the autumn of 2010 to share their personal experiences with the youth educational system in Denmark. The Council helped pinpoint topics and facilitated the discussions using coloured paper and posters for statements and key words to be turned into recommendations aimed at parents, teachers, educational advisors, politicians and other authorities.

## Non-functioning student councils

Recommendations involved, for example, including children and youth in the governance of the educational institutions; developing a sustainable youth policy about, for and with youth; establishing a national youth commission consisting of youth that could act as advisers to the government; and the establishment of a mobile task force of youth to visit schools to create dialogue and awareness among students, teachers and administrators in the upper secondary education system.

The young experts pointed out that children's engagement in governance in the Danish school system is almost non-existent.



Photo: Red Barnett

Even the mandatory school-based student councils rarely function in the upper secondary school system, which means that pupils cannot even influence their own school at local level.

During a subsequent major national conference on the topic, the young people's expert group shared its recommendations with many other young representatives from various secondary schools, representatives from the relevant ministries such as education, social affairs and integration, organisations, researchers and field-level practitioners. To explore new avenues, the Council chose to hold the conference in cooperation with the Danish Chamber of Commerce, a network of trade, IT, industry and services, all of which are the main sectors that employ youth education programme graduates.

A report with the recommendations from the expert group was distributed to conference participants and a film of the group presenting its recommendations was given to the Minister of Education and shown at the conference.

## No real changes

In an evaluation carried out after the conference, the participation and presentation of the expert group was especially praised as being valuable. But more than a year later, when asked if the efforts had changed anything, staff from the National Children Council responded "not really."

None of the youth experts' recommendations had thus far turned into reality, and in February 2011 the UN expressed concern about the low level of awareness on child rights in Denmark.

Some attempts are being made, for example, by the new Copenhagen Youth Commission, which is planning events for young Copenhageners. However, young Copenhageners are not members of the Commission. Recently, representatives from the National Council for Children participated in a kick-off conference on a large-scale local project focusing on preventing young men from dropping out of upper secondary education programmes. Two boys were invited to the conference, though at the last second and most likely only because the National Council for Children insisted.

The lack of serious involvement of children in governance was also noted during a visit to Denmark in March 2012 when Marta Murras, the Vice President of the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child and the rapporteur for Denmark was following up on last year's critical concluding observations. According to the Danish newspaper *metroXpress* 22 March 2012, Marta Murras had devoted a whole day to vulnerable children aged 13-17 years.

"All the children I have met in Denmark have one thing in common: They do not feel that they are being heard by the adults. However, you cannot meet the requirements of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child without involving the children," concluded the rapporteur.

"Adult Danes are habitual thinkers, and they lack tools and resources to involve and engage children in the governance processes. They may feel that it is very complicated and not really necessary," says Stine Lindberg, Head of Section for the involvement of children.

INTERESTINGLY, THE FILIPINO GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY INCLUDED CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN THEIR RULES AND REGULATIONS, WHILE YOUNG PEOPLE IN DENMARK ARE EXCLUDED FROM MOST GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES.





## What's to be learned from this case?

**How does this case demonstrate children's engagement in governance?** A group of children and young people were invited to voice their concerns about the upper secondary school system. At a national conference they shared their recommendations with other young people, representatives from the relevant ministries, organisations, researchers and field-level practitioners. To explore new avenues the conference was held in cooperation with the Danish Chamber of Commerce. A report and a film were distributed at the conference. The film was also delivered to the Minister of Education.

**What is the impact of the children's engagement in governance?** There is yet to be any impact.

**What are the lessons learned and recommendations?** Being a developed country does not necessarily bring child rights, child participation and child rights governance to the forefront. Maybe on the contrary. Highly educated adult decision makers tend to forget to ask the children and youth about their opinions, because they think they already know what is best for children and youth. Danish civil society could profitably use some of the experiences gained from children's engagement in governance in developing countries to initiate child rights governance in Denmark.

# We will continue to do this for us

A handful of boys proudly invite us inside. The room is miniscule, with space only for a desk and four chairs, but it belongs to the school's child rights club. So for the boys, who are all members of the club's committee, this is a real children's sanctuary. There are girl committee members too, assert the boys, "but they are in class."

Child rights clubs are a part of the national educational system in Ethiopia. However, many clubs have been languishing due to a low level of awareness and lack of informational materials.

Then, Save the Children Denmark and its local partner organisation, GPSDO, introduced the project *Promote Child Friendly Environment in Guraghe Zone*, and matters began to change. With school-based issues as a point of departure, the children in 114 Guraghe schools now deal with sanitation, disciplinary issues, supporting vulnerable children, abuse and exploitation of children

"It is a lengthy procedure, though. We ask our school management to write a letter; and then we go to the speaker of the Wolkite City Administration. We only get five minutes. Then, he forwards our concerns to government officials and politicians. They always say that they have no budgets, but we keep asking," explains Fuad.

## I want to combat sexual harassment

About 30 kilometres west of Wolkite, Kulpidon, who is 15, starts out a bit hesitant. Being allowed to speak when you are so young and a girl is still a new sensation. She is a member of the local child parliament in arid Gibe Kebele, where age-old traditions have forced girls to remain quiet, and where female genital mutilation, sexual abuse of girls and the spread of HIV is part of being a girl.

"In our community child marriages and early pregnancies are common. I heard about cases in my community, and I see that girls experience sexual harassment. I want to combat this," explains Kulpidon.

The child parliament members in Gibe Kebele help raise awareness among other children about their rights, and they act as watchdogs in their schools, "I speak on behalf of other girls, and I speak for myself. I report to the authorities if girls are harassed or abused, and I've learned to say no to sexual harassment."

The child parliament in Gibe was established by the Woreda Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs office. Different committees in the parliament deal with different issues, and when the children agree, they report to the Kebele administration. If the Kebele administration is unable to resolve the issue, it reports to the Women, Children and Youth Affairs office in the Woreda.

## You have to involve the children

Similar to the school child clubs that were more or less dormant until the *Promote Child Friendly Environment in Guraghe Zone* arrived and provided capacity building and raised awareness, the obligatory Child Rights Committees at Kebele and Woreda were also essentially inactive. Thanks to capacity building, new life has been infused into these committees, which are now important partners for local communities in Guraghe.

In the Adoshe Kebele Child Rights Committee, the members are considering how they can best protect their children. The committee has been involving children in their regular meetings, where children have the opportunity to raise key issues. As one of the members ponders, "If child rights are to be realised, you



and general awareness on child rights, not to mention assess the child friendliness of their schools and communities.

"We also initiated a child parliament, because we wanted to reach further and help more children. We got inspiration from a study visit to a school in our capital, Addis Ababa. We prepared a proposal for the town council, and they accepted it," explains Fuad, who is the 17-year-old president of the Wolkite Child Parliament.

The parliament is to act as a link from the local level to the middle tier in the decentralised local administration, the Woreda. Still very new, the child parliament in the town of Wolkite has already raised issues like the establishment of safe playgrounds and enhanced child participation in decision-making processes.



have to involve children. They know their needs. We cannot understand when a workload is too much for a child."

Much of this understanding and awareness has been created during Community Conversations, which are meetings where communities identify and analyse their concerns and priorities, mobilise resources and address issues. Through dialogue and by the help of facilitators from the project, Community Conversation empowers children and adults alike to think about their behaviours, values and practices.

Normally, the Adoshe Kebele Child Rights Committee members also participate in the Community Conversations to help forward reports to the police. They bring in health professionals who tell about e.g. the dangers of female genital mutilation. They also make people understand that by educating their children instead of sending them into child labour in Addis Ababa, they help produce responsible and productive citizens.

This also applies to the Adoshe Kebele Child Rights Committee, which acts as a link between the villages, the Kebele and the Woreda. "We have a council at Kebele level, where three children are represented, and together with adults in Adoshe Kebele, identify important issues. This council raises issues towards the Children's Council in our Woreda. The system is new, but over time, matters raised by children may lead to new child-friendly legislation," explain the committee members.

### **At the risk of social exclusion**

In Yesesaye Kebele the members of Community Conversation have also taken measures to protect their children. Situated on

a plateau far away from the town of Wolkite, with a road barely discernible and with donkeys or legs as the only means of transport, this community has decided not to wait for new legislation or for the Woreda administration to take action.

"When a baby is born, we go and check if it is a girl or a boy. If it is a girl, we talk to the parents about female genital mutilation, and we have decided to punish the father if he carries out this practice anyway," explains one of the community members. The punishment consists of exclusion from important social structures like the Iddir, a common autonomous and voluntary indigenous association that assists families in burying their dead and taking care of orphaned children.

This community has also constructed a wooden bridge over a small ravine, because the children were afraid of walking on the old log that used to pass as a bridge. The community is now approaching the Woreda administration to get support for a pre-school, a cement bridge and a grinding mill.

While many female elders are present during the Community Conversation, they almost all remain in their own circle at the far end of the traditional round house where the meeting takes place, making the fact that some of the young girls are among the men all the more striking. These girls attentively follow each word and gladly raise their voices at any given opportunity. Changes are certainly happening.

"Previously we left all problems to the government or to our children, who we used to send to work in Addis Ababa to generate income and supplement the family budget. Now we know that we can solve problems on our own. We will continue to do this for us," says a Community Conversation participant.

GURAGHE COMMUNITIES HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO PRE-SCHOOLS AND SUBSEQUENTLY PUT PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT TO PAY FOR AND ESTABLISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS.





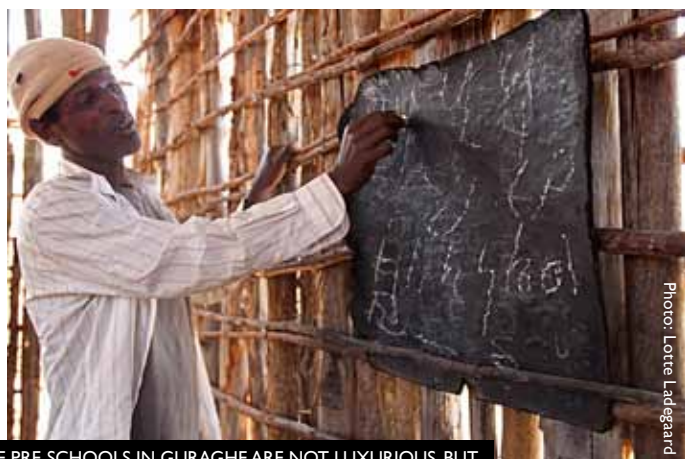


Photo: Lotte Ladegaard

THE PRE-SCHOOLS IN GURAGHE ARE NOT LUXURIOUS, BUT THEY PROVIDE THE YOUNGEST CHILDREN WITH A SAFE PLACE TO LEARN INSTEAD OF BEING IDLE ALONE AT HOME.

## Special care to vulnerable families

Community members also have begun taking exceptional care of the especially vulnerable members of the community. When a fire burned Ababu's house to the ground, he nearly committed suicide, but co-villagers provided timber and constructed a new house for the poor man, his wife and three young boys.

And while Zereachi struggled to make ends meet with four children, a mentally ill husband and a very small plot of land growing only false bananas, a traditional crop that does not yield bananas but a starchy, edible root, three goats donated by the community provided new hope for the family.

The same applies to Alemneh, who was given away as bonded labour when his father could not pay back a loan he needed to build a house to replace the old one that was falling apart. Only 13 years of age, the boy was rescued by the community, which paid back the loan and helped the family construct the house.



Photo: Lotte Ladegaard

THE PRE-SCHOOL IN CHEHA WOREDA IS IN DIRE NEED OF REPAIR. MAYBE THE GOVERNMENT WILL FINANCE THIS?

## No drop-out any longer

In Cheha Woreda, in the middle of nowhere, a somewhat rickety school made of timber and red soil appears. Situated on a huge, dry, sandy patch of land, Sesenamatye School is the very first in this area.

Wondimu is director of the new school and he has received a government award for his huge commitment to having a school built in this area. "The children wished for a preschool, and when the preschool was built by contributions from the community, we used this proof of our keen interest in education to put pressure on the government. Finally, after four years, they gave in and provided us with this school," says Wondimu.



Photo: Lotte Ladegaard

IN CHEHA WOREDA, THE COMMUNITY HAS CONVINCED THE GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE A SCHOOL FOR THE CHILDREN IN THE AREA.



## Facts about the project

*Promote Child Friendly Environment in Guraghe Zone* is being implemented by Save the Children Denmark's partner organisation Guraghe People's Self-help Development Organisation, GPSDO.

With a special focus on especially vulnerable children aged 12-17, the project aims at enabling children to play an active and meaningful role in their own development and in the development of their communities by applying their acquired knowledge and skills for meaningful participation in decisions impacting their lives at family, school, Kebele, Woreda and Zone levels in Guraghe, 150 kilometres southwest of Addis Ababa. The project also wants to create a child-friendly environment supported by key stakeholders and duty bearers at all levels.

Outcomes and review of lessons learnt from a previous child rights project and a child-friendly assessment helped shape the project. A Child Friendly Community Assessment Committee consisting of representatives from communities, civil society, NGOs, local government and members of Kebele Child Rights Committees carried out the assessment, which included a thorough mapping of problems and opportunities seen from the perspectives of child and adult stakeholders. Almost 50,000 children are active in the project, while more than 82,000 vulnerable children benefit.

Nine-year-old Mulugeta Deju, who is the leader of the schools' child club, explains, "We used to walk for one hour to go to school, and many children dropped out. When children are absent, our club now fetches them at their homes. Parents want them to work, so they don't like them to leave. We don't want to put pressure on the children, so we talk with their parents. For the last three years no one has dropped out of school."

Each member of the school child club committee contributes a small amount every month. When the children have enough money, they buy ballpoint pens and sell them at a profit. "With this income we can buy exercise books and pens for poor children. We also brought coffee from home, which we sold, so we could buy three reference books," explains the young club leader.

The children have also planted bushes and flowers fetched from their own gardens behind neat, blue-painted fences all over the compound. Normally, a half hour before school starts in the morning, the club members meet in a circle in their own, small open spot with homemade benches on a wide field. "In that way our schooling is not disturbed," explains one of the club members.

### Proud of preschool

On a hilltop, members of a community called Kosed Kebele are also more than happy to display their preschool and new water point, both of which have been constructed solely using community members' own contributions in terms of timber and labour, while the Catholic Church provided cement and tubes for the water point. Today children and women do not have to walk for hours with heavy jugs of water, and younger children learn instead of being idle and alone at home while their parents are working.

"We took the decisions during Community Conversations. Children decided what was most important. We also decided

that we will pay for the preschool teacher, even if it is difficult," says community leader and Community Conversation facilitator Worku Asfaw.

The community is now pushing the local government for electricity. As it is, homework is done in near darkness, only lit by flammable kerosene lamps. "And we have requested that the Woreda administration provide our preschool teachers with training. Although the government officials say they have no budgets, we keep on asking. But at least we do get chalk from the government school," adds Worku Asfaw.

However, for the children the most immense changes may be that their voices are finally being heard. Simultaneously with being heard and provided with new life skills, the children experience that their confidence and personal commitments increase. "Traditionally, children could not speak out. Before, we did not even eat with our children, and they had to leave the house if visitors came. Gradually people realise that children raise critical issues concerning everyone," says Community Conversation facilitator Adonech Sema.

### Children can ask the government

At Abeshege Woreda you easily sense that it is not a lie when the Woreda excuses its lack of intervention with the absence of budgets. In a backyard, a tiny cell with a blue door sagging on the hinges houses the Abeshege Woreda Child Rights Committee, which is also the link between the Kebeles and the Zone.

"Schools and Kebeles may report here, and anyone can call on us. This also includes the child parliament. If a Kebele needs something they feel is beyond their capacity, they can bring their proposal here, and we select what can be done at local level and which we have to fund. Unfortunately, we have a very limited budget. Every year we request a larger budget from the Zone. We also look for funding options with NGOs," says Seife, head of

KOSSED KEBELE'S GIRLS NOW HAVE A MUCH EASIER LIFE, BECAUSE A NEW WATER POINT SAVES THEM FROM HOURS OF WALKING WITH HEAVY JERRY CANS.



Women, Children and Youth Affairs and chairperson of the Child Rights Committee.

Children's issues are also raised at the Woreda Council meetings. While the sector offices are not permitted to pose questions, the children are represented in the council, and they have the right to ask and review Woreda activities. As a result of the children's recommendations it was decided that every Kebele should facilitate playgrounds and libraries.

### Children get the help from elders

The project is also digging into the century-old Yejoka, a council of elders elected by the Guraghe communities in each Woreda. The Yejoka are responsible for the development and implementation of the Kitcha law, a customary law acting as a supplement to national laws and legislation.

"The Kitcha works much faster than government laws. When the government introduces policies and strategies, we implement immediately at local level. The Kitcha is a very important psycho-social tool in Guraghe. If a person does something wrong, we investigate and find a solution, and when people gradually learned about child rights via media and the government, it felt natural to mainstream child rights into the Kitcha law," explains Yejoka secretary Seifu Woldie, Abeshege Woreda.

According to Seifu Woldie, the inclusion of child rights in Kitcha law has led to increased consciousness among the people in Guraghe. Subsequently it has helped decrease trafficking and lessen migration for child labour; led to fewer early marriages; and also reduced the school drop-out rate among girls. In addition, more girls avoid circumcision and paying a dowry, while the abuse and exploitation of children in Guraghe is also becoming rarer.

### Facts about Ethiopia's three-tiered local government administration

Ethiopia's lowest local level administrative unit is the **Kebele**. The Kebele administration has a representative council called the Kebele Council and an executive body, the Kebele Administrative Council.

The **Woredas** are established by all regional states and cover a geographical area in which approximately 100,000 or more people reside. Comprised of elected officials, the Woreda Council acts as the executive organ of the Woreda administration.

The top tier **Zone** administration is not an autonomous institution, but rather a branch of the regional governments. The most important function of the Zone is liaising between the Woredas and the regional administration. It also coordinates the work of the Woredas and provides them with technical assistance.



COMMUNITY FACILITATORS AND OTHER ADULTS FIGHT FOR CHILD RIGHTS GOVERNANCE ALONGSIDE WITH CHILDREN IN ETHIOPIA.



## What's to be learned from this case?

**How does this case demonstrate children's engagement in governance?** Children organised in child rights clubs in 114 Guraghe schools are directly engaged in decision-making processes at school level. The child clubs in some areas have initiated child parliaments in order to reach more children and create links from the local level to higher tiers in the decentralised local administration. Children also engage in Community Conversations, a platform where the children can voice their needs and engage adults in supporting them. Often, the local Child Rights Committee participates in these conversations, and some Child Rights Committees have begun to include child representatives.

**What is the impact of the children's engagement in governance?** Having children, and especially girls, raise their voices is still a very new feature in Guraghe. Today girls are active in clubs, child parliaments and Community Conversations, where they take up taboo issues like child marriages, early pregnancies and sexual harassment. In some communities the children have convinced adult community members that they needed e.g. a bridge, water points and preschools. Initial gains have made them want to improve their own communities even further by placing more demands on the authorities. In one community children and their headmaster have managed to advocate that the authorities establish a primary school.

**What are the lessons learned and recommendations?** Using Community Conversations as a part of child rights projects is fairly innovative, but has proven to be extremely efficient. During these meetings, communities identify and analyse their concerns and priorities, mobilise resources, and address issues. Through dialogue and by the help of facilitators from the project, Community Conversation empowers children and adults alike to think about their behaviours, values and practices. In a conservative area like Guraghe, where children traditionally are expected to remain quiet, a gradual inclusion of the entire community in child rights activities may lead to meaningful and ethical child participation in governance.

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