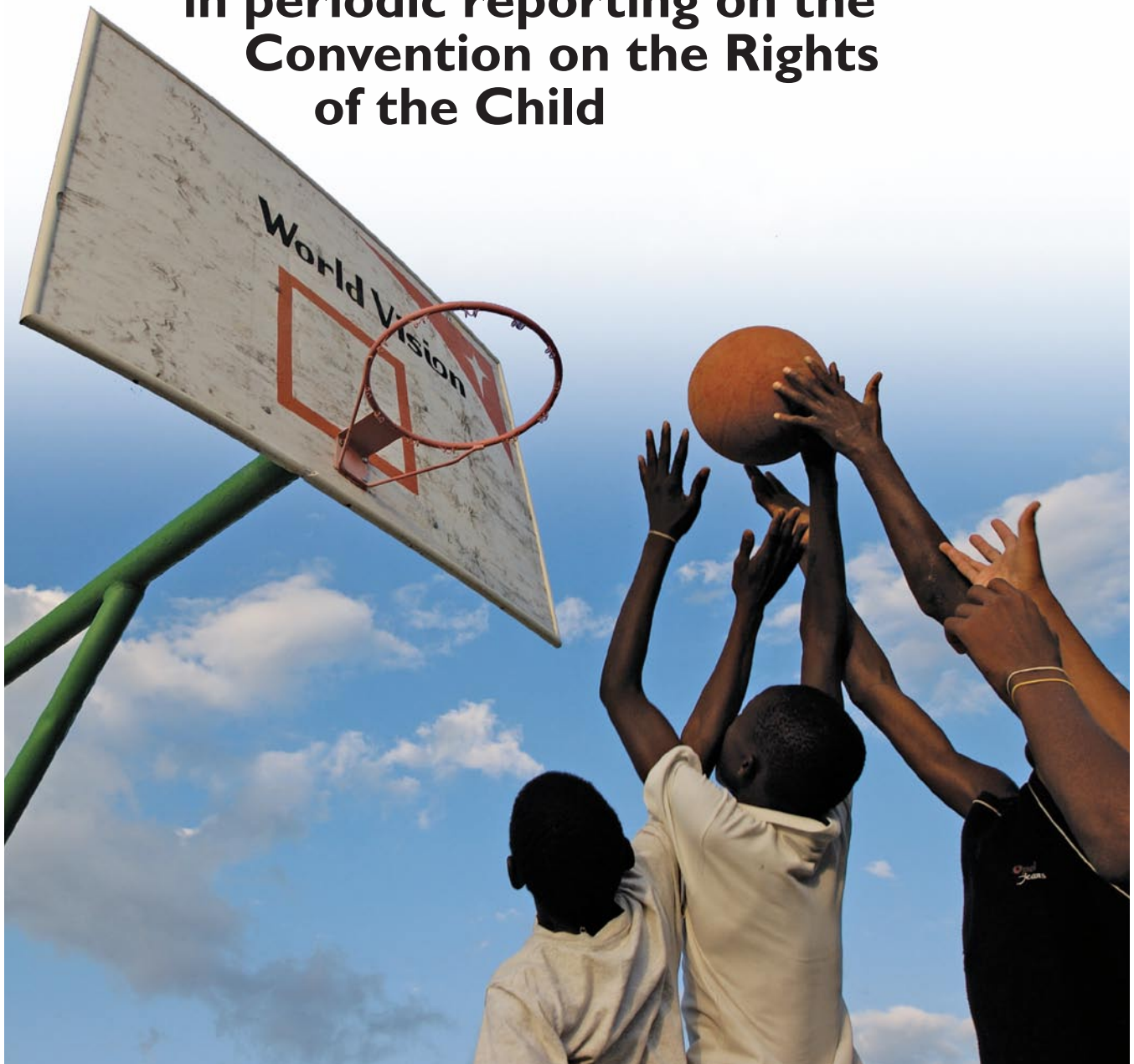# Children as change agents:

Guidelines for child participation in periodic reporting on the Convention on the Rights of the Child

World Vision

Our vision for every child,
life in all its fullness;
Our prayer for every heart,
the will to make it so.

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and
advocacy organization working with children, families and
their communities worldwide to reach their full potential
by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.

Motivated by our Christian faith, World Vision is dedicated
to working with the world's most vulnerable people.

World Vision serves all people regardless of religion, race,
ethnicity or gender.

World Vision

Author: Jennifer Miller
Project Supervisor: Sara L. Austin

"Adults continue to assume they know best ….
The Convention on the Rights of the Child
demands that we question that assumption. It
insists that we listen to children and that their
views must inform decisions and actions taken on
behalf of children. It also insists that we promote,
respect and protect children's own capacities to
take responsibility for those decisions and action
they are competent to take for themselves."

Evolving Capacities and Participation. Canadian International
Development Agency (CIDA) (Lansdown, G.), 2005.

Acknowledgements

There were many people who contributed to these guidelines. Many thanks are given to those in the field that gave their time to be interviewed: Denise Allen, Susan Bissell, Carla Garnelas, Brent Parfitt and Joachim Theis. As well I would like to thank those who were able to give their contributions through the editing process: Gerison Lansdown, Michael Montgomery and Tara Collins. In addition, I would like to thank Jaap Doek for the information he contributed around the periodic reports.

Foreword

Over the past few years, child participation has become more widespread and encouraged among non governmental organizations and increasingly at international levels, such as the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children and the UN Study on Violence Against Children.

Many are now recognizing that it is a child's intrinsic right to participate and that this participation should not be tokenistic. Organizations often refer to "meaningful" and "ethical" when promoting participation. What does that really mean?

This report will be examining this issue, but essentially, it means that children's participation must be guided by the general principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, namely: non-discrimination, the best interest of the child, the right to life, survival and development, and respect for the child's views.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has been encouraging participation of children and young people in the reporting process, but also by hosting its annual discussion day on Article 12 in 2006 and by preparing a General Comment on Article 12 to be published shortly.

The Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) was created by a number of organizations in order to facilitate information sharing on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. By working in partnership with many child rights actors, including the CRC and the NGO Group for the CRC, there is now a central place where information about how to contribute to the work of the CRC can be easily retrieved.

CRIN welcomes this report as a useful tool in supporting all those who want to involve children and young people in the reporting process. We will support World Vision's efforts in promoting its use, by integrating it in our existing website in English, French, Spanish and Arabic, and linking it with other CRC-related information.

Promoting children's participation is about fulfilling children's right to be active citizens in our societies. This should also involve giving them tools to make use of existing international, regional and national mechanisms. As we strive to create a more just society, this means improving children's access to justice systems and other channels for claiming their rights; focusing on the CRC is only one part of the puzzle.

Veronica Yates
Child Rights Information Network

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Introduction

The United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 20 November 1989. The CRC is a comprehensive instrument of international law that sets out rights defining universal principles and norms for the status of children, and it is the only international human rights treaty to include civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.[1]

The CRC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history,[2] yet there are significant gaps with regard to mechanisms for enforcing States Parties' compliance. In particular, such a gap exists with respect to the participation of children in holding their governments to account for the implementation of the CRC. Currently, the primary mechanism for enforcing the CRC is the periodic reporting process, whereby States Parties monitor the implementation of the CRC within their jurisdictions and submit periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. States Parties are required to submit their first report two years after ratification of (or accession to) the CRC; subsequent reports are required every five years thereafter. The reporting procedure is a valuable process, in that it *"provides a forum for a constructive dialogue between a State Party and an independent group of experts to monitor, in a non-adversarial manner, overall compliance with international treaty obligations …."[3]*

Not only is the reporting process an opportunity for dialogue between the Committee and States Parties, but it is also an invaluable tool for civil society to hold States Parties accountable to their obligations to children. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has actively encouraged and supported the participation of NGOs' involvement in monitoring and reporting on the implementation

of the CRC. Indeed, while it is common practice for treaty bodies to consult with civil society in the reporting process, the only bodies that have standardized procedures are the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights.[4]

More recently, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has also begun to actively encourage and support children's participation in the reporting process. Children can participate in the alternative reporting process either through adult-led NGOs that report to the Committee, or through their own child-led organizations. On occasion, children also participate in the formal State Party periodic reporting

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1 *A Guide for Non-Governmental Organizations Reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child,* revised 1998, The NGO Group for the Rights of the Child, Geneva.
2 There are 192 States Parties to the CRC; the exceptions are Somalia and the United States of America.
3 Report of the Secretary General: Comparative summary of existing communications and inquiry procedures and practices under international human rights instruments and under the Charter of the United Nations. Commission on the Status of Women, 40th Session. E/CN.6/1997/4, 21 January 1997, para. 11.

4 Other treaty bodies consult with NGOs, but they do so in a more ad hoc manner; the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women receive oral briefings from NGOs immediately prior to the public consideration of a State Party report. However, these briefings are held in private, closed sessions, and therefore are not attended by government representatives, are not formally documented and no translation is provided. Source: <http://web.amnesty.org/web/web.nsf/print/treaty-ngoattendance-eng>.

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process; for instance, through participating in consultations organized by their government or by taking part in the government's delegation to meet with the Committee.

Unfortunately, children's participation in the periodic reporting process is not yet common practice. However, this trend is changing, and the concept of child participation is spreading. This is clearly seen with the attention that has been paid to child participation by the UN in recent years; for instance, in forums such as the 2006 Day of General Discussion, where it was highlighted that child participation is a right, that it is critical to self-development, that it fosters learning, builds life skills and enables self-protection; it also allows children to positively contribute to society and builds democracy.[5] The recommendations that the Committee issued based on the General Discussion encouraged both State Parties and NGOs to directly involve children in the reporting process.[6] An increase in child participation is also seen in the alternative reports submitted to the Committee.

Given the growing interest in children's participation in periodically reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, World Vision embarked on a process to research the experiences of various NGOs in supporting child participation in the alternative reporting process. The research included a cursory review of 16 alternative reports from various NGOs around the world, an extensive review of secondary information on child participation, as well as numerous interviews with those working in the child participation community. The goal of the research was to learn from the experiences of others who have supported children's participation in the alternative reporting process, and to draw lessons learned that could be

used more widely by others (see World Vision's summary document to these guidelines, *Children As Change Agents: A Review of Child Participation in the Periodic Reporting on the CRC* for the full research report). The research resulted in the development of a set of guidelines that would assist NGOs and other civil society organizations that want to include children in the alternative reporting process.

Within this document, you will find information about how to include children in the monitoring and reporting process of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Every context will be different, and therefore it is important to view these guidelines as just that, guidelines. They may need to be adapted to fit the specific needs of the country, children or subject/theme being monitored.

Involving children is not always an easy process. Child participation often involves challenging children's traditional roles in society[7] and transforming the relationships of power between adults and children.[8] These changes are not always welcome at first, but through education and practical implementation, the benefits of child participation shine through.[9] When facing these challenges, it is important to remember that child participation is a right. Article 12 of the CRC states that "The child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child." This article, supported by many others, such as Articles 13 and 15, reminds us that the question should not be whether or not children will participate in the reporting process, but rather how will they participate.

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5 UNICEF, 2006, Day of General Discussion *"To Speak, Participate and Decide—The Right of the Child to be Heard,"* Article 12: UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Committee on the Rights of the Child Geneva, 15 September 2006—Opening Statement—UNICEF*,* 7 May 2007, <www.crin.org/docs/UNICEF-OpeningStatement-VK-14Sep2006.doc>.

6 Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006, *Day of General Discussion on the Right of the Child to be Heard,* 7 May 2007, <www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/discussion/Final_Recommendations_after_DGD. doc, paras. 31, 34, 57>.

7 *Children and Young People as Citizens, Partners for Social Change, Exploring Concepts,* Save the Children South and Central Asia Region, (O'Kane, C), Nepal, 2003, pg. 1.

8 *Children and Young People as Citizens, Partners for Social Change, Learning From Experience,* Save the Children South and Central Asia Region, (O'Kane, C), Nepal, 2003, pg. iii.

9 *So You Want to Consult with Children? A Toolkit of Good Practice,* International Save the Children Alliance, 2003, supra 8, pgs. 23–34.

Child Participation Benefits for Children, NGOs and Governments

Child participation within the periodic reporting process has potential benefits for children, their families and communities, NGOs, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and State Parties.

Including children is a crucial step in ensuring that the implementation of the CRC is truly reaching those it set out to assist, the children. If given the opportunity, children can, and will, express their feelings, thoughts and ideas about their daily lives and how their access to rights, or lack thereof, is affecting them. Children specifically benefit by having the chance to express themselves on matters in which they are the experts, their daily lives, and by doing so, influencing their country's agenda. This expression can lead to an increased sense of empowerment and responsibility to themselves, their peers, their families and their society.

As children become more aware of their rights, they are assuming a more active role in society.[10]

An increased sense of responsibility benefits the children's families and communities by encouraging and supporting children to be active citizens. Children who are involved in making decisions about their lives and who are informed about their rights often feel privileged to take on the responsibility of informing others in their community about their knowledge. The more children become engaged, the more likely that the programs and policies that are developed to assist them will be able to respond effectively to their needs and the needs of their families and communities.

"It is not effective, morally acceptable nor practical to seek solutions to child protection without building on the resiliencies, capacities and contributions of children themselves."—*Evolving Capacities and Participation*

"The Children's Report reflects the actual situation in the life of children in our State, as understood by the children themselves; this is of great significance, because the vision of real life is very different for the children than it is for those persons whose duty it is to care for children. In comparing the State's Report and the Children's Report, we see a very different picture. Many people whose job is related to children are not aware of children's thoughts, their needs and attitude, and therefore it is often the case that these people cannot perform their job in the best interests of the children."—*Alternative Report submitted by Latvian Save the Children in 2006, pg. 5.*

The Committee will also benefit from the participation of children in the reporting process, because an alternative report that involves children will give a more personal, critical and practical approach to the State Report. By includ-

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10 *Forthcoming publication,* ìUNICEF Innocenti, Research on the General Measures of Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, pg. 30.

ing the children's own experiences, ideas and suggestions, the Committee will be better able to assess the implementation of children's rights within the specified country and make appropriate recommendations. It will also allow the Committee to see how the implementation of the CRC is impacting children on a day-to-day basis. This dimension to the reporting process is much needed, as State Reports often "tend to present the legislative framework and often do not consider the implementation process."[11] Including children is refreshing and encouraged by the Committee,[12] and will "enhance the validity and reliability of the research results."[13]

States Parties will benefit from child participation within the reporting process as well. They will benefit by receiving accurate information from the children regarding how the programs and facilities they have initiated to implement the CRC are being used and how well they are meeting the goals for which they were designed. These opinions will assist the State Parties in developing new, or adapting old, programs so the programs are more precise in implementing the Convention.

In addition to all of the aforementioned benefits directly resulting from children's participation, many of the benefits that come from having NGOs participate in the reporting process can also be enhanced through children's participation (see NGO Guidelines at www.crin.org/docs/Reporting %20Guide%202006%20English.pdf).

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11 supra note 1.

12 Parfitt, Brent, Member of the Committee on the Rights of a Child, *Child Participation in the Periodic Reporting Process,* Interview by Jenn Miller,16 February 2007.

13 *Focus on Child Participation in Monitoring Child Rights,* Tara Collins, 2006.

Creating Meaningful Child Participation

Before continuing, it is important to define a few key terms that will be used throughout these guidelines.[14] The term "child" will be used to refer to all persons under the age of 18. Throughout the document, you will notice other terms such as "young person," "adolescent" and "youth." For the purpose of these guidelines, these terms generally refer to children over the age of 12 and under the age of 18. It is important to note, however, that children's capacities and capabilities are not set by their age, but rather by a combination of factors (see Consulting with Children, pg. 14); this topic will be discussed in greater detail later in the document.

The term "young adult" is also used in this document. This term refers to those who are in a transition process of no longer being considered children (over the age of 18), but have not yet found their full place in adulthood.

Principles of Child Participation

The principles surrounding child participation are derived from the CRC: non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child. Additional principles such as recognition and respect for children's evolving capacities, transparency and accountability, and being dedicated to involving children in all areas of the reporting process should also be applied. Those seven principles will help ensure that when children are participating, it is meaningful and effective in its purpose and application.

The principle of **non-discrimination** ensures that all children, regardless of their backgrounds and social identity, have the opportunity to participate and that when doing so, are treated equally and with respect.

Ensuring that **the best interests of the child** are being met includes many responsibilities and is an ongoing process. All procedures and processes should be developed with the child's well-being as the top priority. The child's best interests should also be of paramount consideration when the procedures are being put into practice.

By adopting the principle of **the right to life, survival and development,** there are many aspects that must be considered. The right to life does not simply mean that you will not directly take the life of a child; rather, to implement the right to life means that you will also take purposeful and positive steps to ensure the child has a life that will enable him or her to grow mentally, physically, morally, spiritually and socially.

Respect for the views of the child involves respecting the child as a whole and as a full-fledged citizen who is entitled to give an opinion on all matters affecting him or her. This also includes respecting the child's evolving capacities and taking these into account when asking the child to participate.

These principles should be the guiding ideology over every process; without these guiding principles, the involvement of children can become tokenistic and possibly even exploitive.

Building Ownership:

A starting point is to develop a clear vision for children's participation.[15]

For participation to be meaningful, an environment must be created in which the child will feel comfortable and be safe. Identifying a clear vision and developing goals with respect to what the organization wants to accomplish by including children in the reporting process will assist in creating this environment.[16]

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14 For a full list of definitions, please refer to the Glossary on page 58

15 Theis, Joachim, *Child Participation in the Periodic Reporting Process,* Interview by Jenn Miller via e-mail, 30 November 2006.

16 *Building a Culture of Participation: Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation Handbook,* National Children's Bureau London, (Cronin, K., Kirby, P., Lanyon, C., Sinclair, Ruth), 2003, pg. 19.

To help determine what the vision and goals of the organization are, ask questions such as:

- What do you hope to achieve by including children in the reporting process?
- Why do you think it is important to include children in the reporting process?
- What do the children hope to accomplish from participating?
- What do we hope to change on a macro level? A micro level?

Be sure to not only question those directly involved with the organization, but also the children who will be involved.

Everyone involved, especially the children, should support the vision and goals that are set. Ensuring that the children agree with the vision and goals is important, because if the children involved do not feel as though their own beliefs and desires are incorporated, how will they know that their participation is more than mere tokenism?[17] This step will set the tone and procedures for the remainder of the participation process, as well as for additional topics, such as what types of information the group wants to collect (will the report be a thematic one, or will it cover all areas of the CRC), and general ideas as to how the information will be collected (will it be through one-on-one discussions or more general surveys distributed across the country).

To accomplish this, and to avoid having to redefine the vision and goals, children can and should be involved during their creation. While setting the goals, it is important to remain realistic;[18] let the children know that their recommendations to the Committee on the Rights of the Child will not be able to be implemented overnight. Be sure to explain the political processes of the country in which the monitoring is taking place, and the role that the Committee's concluding observations and the CRC has in those processes. Being realistic also includes highlighting the important role the children are playing in bringing their ideas and beliefs to the attention of the Committee, and the role they can continue to play in lobbying for change once the report is completed.

Case Study:

National Council for Children (Denmark)— Alternative Report submitted 2005

"Children's own descriptions of their thoughts, opinions and experiences are important contributions to the development of society's view of children and their involvement as fully fledged citizens … Children's beliefs inform the political work and make it more relevant to children."

The Children's Society (England)—Alternative Report submitted in 1999

"This time round CRAE wants to ensure that children and young people are involved throughout this process and get the chance to tell the UN how well their rights are being respected."(Article 12)

Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights (Netherlands)—Alternative Report submitted 2002

"The intention of this report is to inform the committee of experts about the opinions of young people in the Netherlands regarding their rights, and what this group knows about their rights. The report is also intended for the young people in the Netherlands."

Save the Children Latvia (Latvia)—Alternative Report submitted 2006

"The goal of this project was to ascertain the main problems of children in various target groups, problems which hinder children from feeling good, as well as children's proposals regarding ways in which we might improve their situation."

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17 *Evolving Capacities and Participation,* CIDA, (Lansdown, G.), 2005.

18 supra note 9, pgs. 42 & 44; *Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision Making,* UNICEF, (Lansdown, G.), Florence, 2001, pg. 12.

Addressing Power Imbalances

Adults involved in the participation process play a large and important role in ensuring that the participation is meaningful and the environment in which it takes place is a safe and comforting one.[19] The adults should be there to support, protect and offer their skills and knowledge as an empowerment tool for the children.[20] To do this, the adults must be well informed of their roles (facilitators, translators, counsellors, and so forth);[21] this includes being knowledgeable in the area of child participation. Knowing about power imbalances and how to prevent them, the child protection policies of the organization conducting the report and child rights is highly recommended,[22] as is having facilitation skills. It is also important that all adults know their specific position, and what that requires of them, within the facilitation of the reporting process. Are they to act as chaperones? Provide skills training? Facilitate group discussions? It is equally important that all children involved are also aware of the role that each adult plays.[23]

"[An Adult's role] … would be to enable children to occupy and use decision-making spaces effectively to change structures and programmes to those that improve the quality of their lives and that of their communities. To do this, the children need to gain strength through collective action, own and use information and be able to access and utilize human and material resources. We need to prepare ourselves for this new role. We need to provide children with the knowledge and skills to organize themselves, access information and resources and understand structures, be they political, socio-cultural or economic." —*Children and Young People as Citizens, Partners for Social Change, Learning From Experience,* pg. 12.

On a global scale, children are not seen as having the capacity to evaluate and express their thoughts and ideas about child rights and how they affect their daily living.[24] It is important, therefore, for the adults and organizations involved to truly believe in the concept of meaningful child participation, and know how to support and facilitate it.

Due to the unequal balance of power existing between adults and children throughout the world, any process that involves both children and adults is at risk of being manipulated by adults.[25] One way to avoid this is to create a "child-only" period. This time (which can be spent in a specially marked area) should be designated for children to freely express their ideas and opinions to each other without the presence of an adult.[26] Although it is necessary for an adult to be on site for safety reasons, this exclusive privacy is very important.[27] It can be used by children to discuss suggestions and reflect on the reporting process.[28] This period should not detract from times of reflection, however, in which both adults and children are present;

19 *12 Lessons Learned from Children's Participation in the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children,* International Save the Children Alliance, 2004, pg. 6; supra note 17, pg. 8.

20 ibid, International Save the Children Alliance, 2004, pg. 7.

21 ibid. pg. 22.

22 supra note 8*,* pg. 10.

23 *Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision Making,* UNICEF, (Lansdown, G.), Florence, 2001, pg. 10; supra note 20, pg. 22.

24 supra note 8, pg. 4.

25 *Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision Making,* pg. 17; Theis, Joachim, 2006. *Child Participation in the Periodic Reporting Process,* Interview by Jenn Miller via e-mail, 30 November 2006.

26 *Opening Minds, Opening up Opportunities: Children's participation in action for working children,* pg. 28.

27 supra note 20, pg. 22.

28 supra note 26, pg. 28.

rather, it should be just the opposite. The issues and suggestions brought up in the child-only time should be used to enhance the reflection time with adults. Additionally, any of the consultations with children (workshops, interviews, for example) should be scheduled as close to the child-only periods as possible; the exception would be if interpreters or facilitators are required.[29]

Because it is important to gather information from children from many different backgrounds within the country being monitored, power imbalances may also arise between the children. As was the case with adult facilitators, children must understand the principles of child participation as well. They should be encouraged to recognize their differences, but also be able to see their similarities in regard to how their rights are being respected or denied. The children should work together to ensure that they are all recognized as rights holders.[30] Emphasizing the importance of having so many diverse backgrounds coming together for one cause can also help to eliminate the power imbalances between children.

> "We think that [it] is a real pity, but it was not possible to interview all children and young people. We will never be able to speak on behalf of all children and young people. Because we are so different."
> —*Alternative Report submitted from Belgium,* 2002, pg. 10.
>
> "Children should be encouraged to celebrate differences among them, to challenge discrimination and to work together co-operatively and democratically, in a manner that transforms and challenges much of their existing experiences of exploitative relations."
> —*Children and Young People as Citizens, Partners for Social Change, Learning From Experience,* pg. 16.

Perhaps most importantly though, remember to never make assumptions about the children you are working with.[31] Every child is different, has encountered different experiences, has different beliefs and values, and has different opinions. Many times, you may be working with vulnerable children, and it can become easy to stereotype these children to fit an image. By stereotyping a child, you form beliefs about what that child's thoughts and ideas should be. By doing this, you put not only the results of the monitoring at risk for becoming skewed and false, but also put the child at risk of becoming exploited.

Practical Practices: How to Overcome Power Imbalances[32]

▶ Participate in active listening;[33] for instance:
- ☐ Crouch to their level, so you can speak face-to-face rather than looking down on them.
- ☐ Repeat what they tell you. The benefits of repeating what was said to you are that you can confirm that you have heard and interpreted what the child has just told you correctly, and it reassures the child that you are listening.

▶ Spend time with the children outside of the scheduled activities time, such as eating lunch with them. This helps demonstrate that you value them as people, not just for what they can contribute to the report.

▶ Let the children know when and where to contact you outside of the scheduled activities time.

▶ Have a designated person whom the children can go to if they have questions or concerns about the reporting process.
- ☐ Make sure the children know who this person is and how to contact him or her.
- ☐ If you are not the designated person and a child comes to you, do not turn the child away. Instead, let him or her know that you would be happy to

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29 supra note 9, pg. 37.
30 supra note 7, pg. 1.

31 *Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision Making,* pg. 14.
32 See page 47 of note 12 for more ideas on how to combat power imbalances.
33 supra note 16, pg. 43.

help now and in the future, and that if for some reason you are not available, there is another person who would be happy to assist.

▶ Give feedback to the children's suggestions.[34]

   ☐ If the suggestions cannot be implemented, be sure to give feedback as to why not, and work with the children to come up with a new idea based on the original suggestion.

▶ Reflect and share

   ☐ Sharing is something that should be done by both the adults and children within the participation process. By using appropriate self-disclosure, the children will start to trust you more, and therefore breakdown traditional power imbalances.[35]

▶ Designate child-only reflection spaces.

   ☐ This space could be set up in a separate corner of the room being used for the participation exercises or, if available, another room dedicated for the use of children only.

   ☐ Make sure to use the information collected in this time of reflection to enhance the other aspects of the participation.

▶ Ensure that all decision-making processes and power relations are transparent.

Applied Principles: Respect for the Views of the Child and Non-discrimination

   ☐ By making a conscious effort to rid the participation process of power imbalances, you are ensuring children's ideas and opinions are being respected and that no one group of people (facilitators, participants, translators, and so forth) are seen as more valuable than another group.

Consulting with Children

When consulting with children, there are many things that must be considered. Firstly, *all* children must be recognized as "full members of society in their own right."[36] This means that all children have not only views on the matters that affect their lives, but also the right to express them.[37] Therefore, adults should encourage children to communicate their views and opinions and ensure that those opinions are taken seriously and treated with respect.

Because children are full members of society and have opinions and views on the matters that affect them, they should have the right to "negotiate their participation to reflect their own preferences and working methods."[38] Allowing children to do so will increase their sense of responsibility and ownership over the reporting process; it will also ensure that the topics covered relate directly to the children's experiences.[39]

Secondly, not all children will be able to participate and give their ideas and opinions in the same way. When involving children, it is important to take into consideration their level of maturity, current capacities, and interest in participation, as well as the local context of where the participation is taking place.

Recognizing a child's capacities is not as simple as classifying children into age brackets. Rather, a child's capacities are based more on his or her experiences, the level of support the child receives, as well as the expectations of their community.[40] Adequate time must therefore be set aside for getting to know the children who will be involved in the reporting process, so their capabilities can be further developed, and appropriate methods designed to ensure the children's capacities are used to the fullest extent. Just as every child has unique experiences and beliefs, every child will have different capabilities.[41]

34   ibid, pg 45; supra note 9, pg. 60.
35   ibid, pg. 44.

36   supra note 7, pg. 16.
37   supra note 17, pg. 8.
38   supra note 9, pg. 12.
39   supra note 31, pg. 9.
40   supra note 17, pg. 21.
41   ibid., pg. 20-21.

Case Study:

The Children's Society (UK)—Alternative Report submitted in 1999

This Alternative Report included the opinions of children from the ages of 12 months to 19 years. To accomplish this there were two types of activities that the children could participate in.

Children over the age of 12 participated in a discussion group. Each of these groups had approximately six children, and they discussed what it was like to be young in the UK, their understanding of children's rights and what action could be taken on children's rights.

For children under the age of 12, worksheets and activity groups were created. The children worked in pairs, with an adult available to help if requested. These groups focused on issues such as what it was like to be a child in Britain, how well adults listen to children, which rights they thought children should have, and what they thought could be done to make sure that children are happy, healthy and safe and have new opportunities.

The ages for these groups were flexible, and children were given the option of which group they wanted to be a part of. In the end, a few children under the age of 12 decided to participate in the discussion group instead of the activity group.

All children, even the very young, can participate; the challenge is creating methodologies that children of all capacities can use.[42] Oftentimes this will mean creating different methods of collecting information for different groups of children. For example, it has been shown that younger children have been able to express themselves more through non-written media,[43] whereas older ones may not have a problem participating in round-table discussions. Involving

children in the process of creating the methodologies can help ensure that the processes are respecting their different capabilities.

Disability is another consideration when designing the process for children's participation. Children with disabilities are able to participate, but it is the responsibility of those facilitating the process to ensure that appropriate methods are used and that the children are given adequate support. Providing adequate support can take many different forms. For example, it may mean having information available in Braille for children who are blind, using a sign language translator for children who are hearing impaired, and ensuring that the location and space used for meetings are accessible to children with physical disabilities.[44]

Participation should be seen as a way for children to be able to grow and evolve their capacities.[45] They can do this by being allowed to make decisions about their lives and how the monitoring process will be completed, as well as through sharing experiences with other children. Competence is something that is gained through experience, not suddenly acquired at a certain age.[46] (See "Creating Meaningful Child Participation," on page 10)

Another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration when consulting with children is gender, as it plays a large role in determining how children will come to understand and respond to different terms and concepts. It will also affect how they interact within the group; different cultures have different social expectations of males and females. In order to allow all children to discuss their ideas freely on various topics, it may be advisable to separate the group into boys and girls for certain activities. Before consulting with children, facilitators should ensure that they

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42 ibid., pg. 20.
43 supra note 8, pg. 11.

44 The information found in this paragraph was taken from the article "Disabled Children and Participation in Decision Making" from Hull University, United Kingdom. For more information on child participation and children with disabilities, you can read this article online at <www.hull.ac.uk/children5to16programme/conference/shakespeare.pdf>.
45 supra note 17, pg. 21.
46 supra note 7, pg. 20.

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have taken sufficient time to research and familiarize themselves with the expectations of males and females within the respective culture. Keep in mind that gender-based expectations may also vary according to the age and maturity of the person.

Having knowledge around the local culture(s) that exists when planning for children's participation, particularly regarding perceptions of children's rights and what it means to have access to them is vital. Variations in views may also be connected to additional policies and treaties on children's rights within that cultural context. For example, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child conveys a strong emphasis on the relationship between rights and responsibilities, which would be helpful to reference when planning for children's participation in monitoring the CRC within the African context.

There are many other factors—in addition to a child's age, maturity and gender—that a facilitator should consider when consulting with children. These include the child's economic background, location (rural versus urban), education (is the child attending school?) and role within his or her family and community. Taking these other aspects into account will not only be useful in determining how to best consult with the children, but also in analyzing the results from the consultations.

When consulting with children, it is also important to look at the location where the participation will take place; having a child-friendly location can help the children to feel more at ease. Consider, for example, whether the furniture can be rearranged. Is it accessible to children with physical disabilities? Is there a safe area outside for leisure and recreation? If possible, use a space the children are already familiar with and feel safe in.[47]

Practical Practices: Consulting with Children

▶ Make sure all language needs are met and proper interpretation is provided.
    ☐ This includes Braille and sign language.[48]
▶ Do not use jargon, and do not talk down to the children.
▶ Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak.
    ☐ If a child is not participating, ask, "What's your opinion?"[49]
▶ Do not dismiss a child's view. If you disagree, challenge the view and not the person; ensure that points raised by children are fully discussed.[50]
▶ Be prepared to be challenged.
▶ Do not underestimate children.[51]
▶ Ensure participation is directly linked to the children's own first-hand experiences and is identified by the children themselves as a key area of concern.[52]

Applied Principles: Right to Life, Survival and Development Respect for the Views of the Child

    ☐ By interacting with children in a way that makes them feel comfortable and able to present their ideas and beliefs, we are giving children a chance to learn and grow. At the same time, we are fighting stereotypes that put children at a disadvantage.

Accessible Information

When including children in the reporting process, it is crucial to ensure that all information that will be used to facilitate preparing and writing the report is in a child-friendly

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47 supra note 9, pg. 28.

48 ibid., pg. 12.
49 ibid., pg. 57.
50 ibid., pg. 60.
51 supra note 31, pg. 15-16.
52 ibid., pg. 5.

language and format.[53] This means ensuring that the presentation and wording of documents, theories, procedures and practices can be easily understood by a person of any age. Examples of documents that should be translated are the State Report, any policies or laws that will be discussed, and procedures (a child-friendly version of the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child can be found at www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pdfs/NCD-poster_e.pdf).

Child-friendly language does not only include changing the wording of the various documents (as not all children will be able to read), but also ensuring the children understand the concepts, practices and ideas involved with monitoring the implementation of the CRC, including the facilitation of writing the current report. Children can only fully participate if they have all the information they need to make an informed decision.[54]

Having sufficient information also means advising the children as to what is expected of them and when. If this information is not provided in a format that is easy for the children to understand, the children will be at a disadvantage and unable to truly communicate their beliefs and opinions. The more information a child has, the more committed and involved he or she will be.[55] In many cases it will not be enough to simply provide children with documents that use child-friendly language. It is important that time be set aside to present and discuss the documents. This way, you can ensure that the children truly understand what is expected of them.

In addition to providing child-friendly information with respect to documents, theories and practices, you may need to provide children with additional skills training so they can participate to the fullest extent.[56] For example, children may need training on meeting procedures (taking minutes, chairing meetings and so forth). Children may also need additional skills for interacting with outside adults,

such as those persons on the Committee or conducting further interviews, such as with the media.

> "Practical participatory exercises … allow [children] to discover and understand concepts by themselves."
> —*Joachim Theis, 30 November 2006.*

It is crucial that children feel supported and prepared before they interact with the outside adults in regard to the reporting process. Giving children updated information about the meeting they are going to participate in and the procedures that will take place during the meeting, as well as advising them on how to promote their ideas and opinions, are all ways of providing support and ensuring that the children are properly prepared.

Practical Practices: Creating Child-Friendly Information

▶ A step-by-step procedure on how to translate a document into child-friendly language (taken from the "Operations Manual on Children's Participation at Consultations") can be found in Appendix A of these guidelines.

▶ Remember, not all children will be able to read. Find different ways to explain the documents and concepts so all the children can understand; for instance:
  ☐ Role-playing, drawing, putting on puppet shows, and using photographs or songs are all ways to help children who cannot read to understand the material presented to them.

Applied Principles: Non-discrimination and the Right to Life, Survival and Development

  ☐ Presenting information in a child-friendly format allows all children to participate, as well as to learn and grow.

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53 supra note 31, pg. 9; supra note 20, pgs. 11–12; supra note 9, pg. 13; supra note 8, pg. 56.
54 supra note 31, pg. 9; supra note 8, pg. 11.
55 supra note 9, pg. 19.
56 supra note 8, pg. 63.

Building Support

Building relationships with the parents and guardians of the children participating (or hoping to participate) as well as with the larger community is very important and beneficial.[57] Because child participation is a relatively new concept in many communities, parents and guardians may not feel comfortable giving consent for their children to participate. Ways to overcome this include explaining what the goals and concepts of child participation are. Parents will be more likely to give their consent if they know that their children will not be exposed to harm and that their participation will have a beneficial impact for not just the children, but for the community as a whole.[58]

Having the support of key leaders within the community is also important in promoting change within the community itself. If the leaders hold the popular belief that children do not have much to offer in regard to policy or programs, it will be much harder to effect change, especially once the

report has been completed and the children may not have the same adult support. When building these relationships, you must be very clear about the goals of child participation, both short and long term; without this, child participation can often get "stuck at a low level."[59]

> "Ultimately we need to reach the family as the primary setting for the development of children's sense of social responsibility and competence to participate. The family is more difficult to reach in any direct way. Parents can best be influenced by seeing examples of their children's competence …" —*Children and Young People as Citizens, Partners for Social Change, Learning from Experience,* pg. 6.

Networking is also crucial to enhancing child participation.[60] Building relationships with other organizations that work with children and share the values of child partici-

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57 supra note 8; supra note 26, pg. 29.
58 supra note 26, pg. 29; supra note 16, pg. 33; supra note 8, pgs. 3–5.

59 supra note 15.
60 supra 16, pgs. 53–54.

pation can have numerous benefits. For instance, you can be sure that work is not being duplicated. If another organization has decided to include children in its alternative report, why not combine your efforts? Or if another organization has done something similar in the past, look at how it conducted its research; this is a great opportunity to learn from previous mistakes and to gain new ideas.[61] By partnering with other organizations, you can also disseminate your information to a broader base of children and adults.[62]

> "Developing and strengthening children's networks promotes children and young people to learn from each other, to develop a common agenda and to have a stronger voice for advocating on key priority issues affecting them." —*Children and Young People as Citizens, Partners for Social Change, Learning from Experience,* pg 16.

Building relationships between the children is also critical if participation is to continue once the report is finished. Adults should gradually phase out of leadership positions and have children work together and take over those positions.[63] The case study below is an example of how adults can start as leaders, but turn the position and power over to the children and youth.

Maintaining a culture of meaningful participation throughout the reporting process is essential; it shows respect for children and a strong belief in meaningful child participation.

Case Study:

What Do You Think? (Belgium)—Alternative Report submitted in 2002
The facilitators of the "What Do You Think?" program discussed with children and youth issues that young people are faced with, but may not have very much information about. One of these issues was HIV and AIDS.

After some discussion, the question "What can you do about this lack of information?" was asked. It was then left to the children and youth to find a way in which they could influence their society and provide their peers with the information they were lacking. In the end, an HIV and AIDS conference was developed and held for the young people of Belgium.

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61 A summary to these guidelines, *Children As Change Agents: Child Participation in the Periodic Reporting on the CRC* has been produced and includes systematic analyses of 16 alternative reports, as well as a brief overview of each report reviewed.

62 supra note 16, pg. 53.

63 supra note 15.

Practical and Ethical Considerations

Child Protection Policies

Depending on the country and organization, different child protection policies and laws will apply. It is always the responsibility of those leading the reporting process to ensure that all local, national and international policies and laws are being followed, and cultural traditions and customs are being respected. It is important to go beyond the minimum standards set out in each country, and to strive to ensure that everything possible is being done to guarantee that child protection guidelines are incorporated into every aspect of the reporting process.

When developing a child-protection policy, there are some key areas that must be addressed. These areas include:[64]

- Introduction
  - ☐ Why is this policy is in place? Who will it set out to protect? Who is to be held responsible for ensuring the policy is respected and enforced?
- Awareness-raising
  - ☐ How will you make the information within the policy public knowledge?
- Program Planning
  - ☐ How will you ensure that the programs being used to include the children within the reporting process will be of benefit to them?
- Personnel Recruiting or Screening
  - ☐ How will you ensure that all adults taking part in the reporting process will add to the children's well-being and development?
- Behaviour Protocols
  - ☐ What constitutes appropriate and proper behaviour between adults and children? (This section not only protects children, but will protect staff from false accusations.)
- Allegation/Incident Management Plan
  - ☐ How should suspected child abuse be reported, and what will the response to those allegations be?
- Advocacy
  - ☐ How will the organization become involved with the community (both locally and nation-

ally) to promote the rights of children and press for changes where children's rights are not being respected?
- Communications about Children
  - ☐ What rules or regulations will be adopted to ensure that any communication that involves information about children is appropriate and in their best interests?
- Confidentiality
  - ☐ How will you ensure that information that needs to be kept confidential will in fact be kept confidential? (Additional information on confidentiality can be found further in this section of the guidelines.)

Discussed below are some specific ethical considerations around gathering information from children for the reporting process.[65]

Unintended Consequences

As mentioned earlier, there are power imbalances between children and adults. This is crucial to keep in mind when designing how the information will be gathered. The methods used to collect the information, if not designed correctly, could lead to misinterpretation and manipulation of the children's true ideas and beliefs. Proper child-protection practices can help combat this. Factors such as local cultures and traditions should be taken into account when designing methods. Questions to consider include:
- Are the methods sensitive to cultural beliefs and customs?
- Are we using appropriate methods to collect sensitive information?
- Will translation to local dialects be provided?

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64   These areas have been derived from World Vision International's Child Protection Standards.

65   The book *Ethical Approaches to Gathering Information from Children and Adolescents in International Settings: Guidelines and resources* (2005) by Katie Schenk and Jan Williamson is a great resource for more information on ethical considerations when including children in the periodic reporting process.

- Will the sample of children being used represent, as best as possible, the children of that country as a whole?
- Are the methods appropriate for the children's social location?

Time should also be allocated to thinking through any negative consequences that could result from children participating in the reporting process.[66] Harmful effects could include being negatively viewed within the community or not having the support needed to discuss sensitive issues. Below is a case study that shows how important having the proper support is.

Attention needs to be focused on how to avoid any negative consequences. One way to help prevent any unintended consequences is to include children in the creation of the research methods, as they will have valuable information about their communities and the culture in which the research will be carried out. Children will provide a unique knowledge base that will not be found elsewhere. Additionally, the adults involved should have a well-developed knowledge base around the government, policies, media and politicians of the country and the communities participating, so any negative consequences can be identified and addressed before they occur.

Informed Consent

Another important aspect to child protection is to remember that although it is the right of the child to participate, and children should be given the opportunity, it is also their right to choose not to.[67] To ensure that this right is being respected, all children, and their parents or guardians, participating must give their informed consent. Depending on the laws of the respective country, you may need to obtain active consent from the parents or guardians, as opposed

to passive consent.[68] In some cases a child may not have a parent or guardian to give consent (if the child is no longer in contact with family members, or if the parents have passed away and there are no caregivers); in situations like these, an adult such as a teacher or social worker, or someone who is in close contact with the child should be approached.[69]

Case Study:
Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights (Netherlands)—Alternative Report submitted in 2002

The facilitators of the report wanted to consult with children who were seeking asylum. The interviewers found it difficult to receive any personal information from the children because of their experiences. They found, however, that showing a video conference in which other young people were being interviewed, and allowing the children to have a mentor present enabled the interview to be conducted more smoothly. One girl, who was living in the Netherlands as an illegal immigrant, was also interviewed. This was able to take place because the girl knew one of the researchers, and a relationship of trust had already been built.

When gaining informed consent, it is essential to ensure that all parties understand all aspects of the consent. This may mean taking a different approach, rather than the typical distribution of consent forms, receiving a signature and filing. "Informed consent is more an interactive process than one that depends on reading."[70] Having community discussions or a translator are ways to help ensure that your messages are being received correctly (also see the suggestions given in the Accessible Information sec-

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66 supra note 8 pg. 28; Schenk, K., Williamson, J., *Ethical Approaches to Gathering Information from Children and Adolescents in International Settings: Guidelines and resources,* The Population Council Inc., Washington, 2005, pg. 4.

67 supra note 31, pg. 10.

68 Active consent requires the parent or guardian to purposely give their consent for the child to participate; for example, signing a consent form. Passive consent, meanwhile, requires that the parent or guardian be informed and, unless he or she objects, it is assumed that consent has been obtained.

69 Schenk, K., Williamson, J., *Ethical Approaches to Gathering Information from Children and Adolescents in International Settings: Guidelines and resources,* The Population Council Inc., Washington, 2005.

70 ibid., pg. 47.

tion on page 16). Sitting with each child and talking through the consent form is the best way to be certain that the child understands the entire consent form. Aspects of the informed consent that you will need to present are:

- Purpose of the research
- The expected length of the child's participation
- Details as to how the child will be participating
- Any possible risks or discomfort to the child (such as discussing sensitive subjects). It is also important to mention here how you plan to overcome these risks (for example, by providing counselling).
- Any benefits that the child will experience
- Confidentiality within the participation process and when this confidentiality can be broken
- Contact information of the person the child or the parent/guardian should contact if there are any questions about the participation
- The voluntary nature of the participation and that the child can choose not to participate at any time

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a crucial part of child participation. Often children have information they want to share, but keep quiet, as they are afraid of the possible consequences that may occur from sharing the information. If a child is assured that what they say will be kept confidential, they may feel freer to share their stories and experiences with you. However, as mentioned above, confidentiality may need to be broken. It is crucial that the child and his or her parent/guardian (as well as the facilitators) know under what circumstances it will be broken. Generally there are three situations in which confidentiality must be broken:

- discovery that the child is being neglected or abused,
- discovery that the child is or is threatening to harm another person,
- discovery that the child is or is planning to harm him or herself.[71]

It is essential to have a procedure in place to handle any of these situations that require confidentiality to be broken.

The Roles and Responsibilities for Children, Young Adults and Adults

Children can participate at many stages of the alternative reporting process. Below is a list of stages that children can be involved in:

- consulting from the very beginning, and having input to the strategy
- giving input to the design of the research methods
- assisting in collecting research information
- participating in responding to the questionnaires/surveys/interviews
- participating in analyzing the research results
- participating in the preparation of the report
- meeting with representatives from the government to present the results of the report
- participating in the pre-sessional meetings with the Committee on the Rights of the Child to present the report

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71 ibid., pg 40.

- participating in the session to observe the government's report to the Committee
- designing, implementing and participating in follow-up meetings with NGOs and/or the government to discuss the Committee's Concluding Observations
- participating in evaluating the reporting process, including evaluating their own participation and the support they received
- designing follow-up projects in regard to the outcomes of the meetings with the Committee

It is recommended that children and adults work together at every stage of the reporting process and that children become involved as early as possible.[72] That way, the research methods, strategy, and analyses are sure to be child-friendly.[73] Keeping in mind that children have a unique body of knowledge that cannot be gained elsewhere is important when deciding how children will participate within the reporting process. Children can be involved throughout the process and will add insight that may otherwise be lost.

It is recommended that any activity the children participate in, from the initial designing of research methods to participating in follow-up meetings, be well organized and non-chaotic.[74] Many children will come from a life that is already filled with instability. This experience should work toward resolutions for that instability, not add to it.[75]

As mentioned above, the children are not the only ones who contribute to the report; adults have a crucial role to play in ensuring that the participation and the reporting as a whole is conducted using the guiding principles and is relevant for the children, State Parties and government.

There is another group that is also often involved with children's participation. Young adults who were involved with child-rights advocacy may find themselves lost and with-out direction once they turn 18; however, they must not be forgotten, as their involvement can be extremely beneficial.[76] Young adults can serve as a bridge between the children and the adults. For example, take the recommendation of having a time and space that is just for children so they can reflect without the presence of an adult. In these situations there may be need for a facilitator; a young adult can fill this role. They can also serve as mentors to the younger children; help during the follow-up and evaluation times (as they may have been under 18 during some of the reporting process); help with regular adult facilitation processes; and, if possible, attend the sessional meetings.[77]

It is important to be prepared for the involvement of young adults. Ensure that there is proper support for them and that specific roles are in place. Being prepared for the participation of young adults also gives children a chance to see how they can be involved once they turn 18. They can prepare for a specific role, and therefore be a greater asset to the participation process.[78] This is not to take away from the focus being on children who are under 18. However, as previously stated, young adults are valuable to this process.

Resources: Funding and Time

Another practical and ethical consideration is to ensure that there is adequate funding and time allocated for the preparation and writing of the report.[79] Oftentimes these resources are underestimated when it comes to child participation. It is recommended that planning for the report start at least two years before the date the report is to be finished.[80] The more time dedicated toward planning, the greater the possibility that negative consequences can be recognized and prevented.

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72 supra note 31, pg. 10.
73 supra note 26, pg. 28.
74 supra note 16, pg. 39.
75 ibid.

76 supra note 20, pg. 20.
77 More information on the sessional meetings can be found in the "Child Delegates" section under "Stages of the Reporting Process" on pg. 36.
78 supra note 20, pg. 20.
79 ibid, pgs. 8–10.
80 ibid. pg. 9.

The participation process is often more expensive than what was expected, due to lack of adequate planning and preparation. It is important to include the following items when considering the budget:[81]

- Travel and accommodation for the child participants, their chaperones, as well as facilitators and interpreters
- Materials (pencils, paper, craft supplies, and so forth)
- Transportation
- Booking of venues
- Resource persons
- Documentation and copying
- Leisure or recreational activities
- Miscellaneous expenses
- Follow-up activities after the event
- Child protection resources

Practical Practices: For the Protection of Children

▶ For an example of a child protection policy, see Appendix B.

▶ An example of a consent form can be found in Appendix C.

▶ Child Protection Representative:
  - ☐ To help implement the protection policies, it is recommended that there be a designated person(s) in charge of ensuring that the policies are being followed.[82]
  - ☐ Responsibilities would include distributing the policy to all adult and child participants (and ensuring that it is understood), making sure that all consent forms are received and providing any needed support for the children.
  - ☐ This person(s) would also be the contact for any abuse that needs to be reported.[83]
  - ☐ The children should also be well informed as to whom this person is so that if they have any questions or concerns, they know whom they can contact.[84]

▶ Reporting abuse:[85]
  - ☐ If you suspect that one of the three situations (see the "Confidentiality" section on page 22) for breaking confidentiality is occurring, it is important to act right away.
  - ☐ Report the abuse to the Child Protection Representative.
  - ☐ Your report should include how you came to form your suspicion, risks to the child and specific details about the suspected abuse. Written documents should be made of the suspected abuse as well.

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82 supra note 9, pg. 66.
83 ibid.
84 ibid. pg. 69.
85 *Operations Manual on Children's Participation at Consultations,* Inter-Agency Group on Children's Participation, (Veitch, H.), Bangkok, 2006, pgs. 33–34.

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81 ibid. pg. 12.

☐ Role of the Child Protection Representative: investigate (look at each situation individually, paying attention to the circumstances and situation carefully) and, depending on your decision, take appropriate action as directed by law and/or policy of the country and organization.

▶ Central database: It is also recommended that there be a central database with all of the children's information so that it can be easily accessible.

☐ Information contained in the database would be the consent forms, contact information of child's caretaker and any medical conditions or special needs.

Applied Principles: Best Interests of the Child and the Right to Life, Survival and Development

☐ Ensuring that preventive and protective measures are in place allows children to participate in a healthy and safe environment; it also allows for procedures to be in place in case a negative situation arises.

Stages of the Reporting Process

Once all of the preparations have been made, the planning stage for the reporting process will be complete and it will be time to move on to the "action" stage. Below is a list of steps and practical ideas that will assist you in gathering the children's ideas and writing the report.

1) Selection and Representation

Before children are able to participate, they must first be given the opportunity to do so. Therefore, the first step that needs to be taken is to invite children to be a part of the reporting process. The process of gathering children to participate needs to be carefully planned so that as many children from a range of different backgrounds as possible have an equal opportunity to have their voices heard.

Special initiatives may need to be developed in order to reach children who are usually "invisible" within their communities. These children may include those with disabilities, those of an ethnic, racial or religious minority, and those not attending school. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and every effort should be made to ensure that children from all backgrounds are included.

One way to reach a larger audience of children is to use various methods of communication to disseminate information about the opportunity to participate.[86] This could include contacting other organizations known for having direct contact with different groups of children, or publishing a request for participants in a newspaper, on the radio or online.

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86   supra note 9, pg. 20.

Case Study:

Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights (Netherlands)—Alternative Report submitted in 2002
In addition to contacting various institutions that had direct contact with different groups of children, the facilitators of the Alternative Report also had a survey published in a magazine called *House*. This magazine is a periodic publication distributed to youth care institutions.

Latvian Save the Children (Latvia)—Alternative Report submitted in 2006
The facilitators of the Alternative Report wanted to determine the problems of children in various target groups. To reach these children, they contacted organizations that have contact with specific groups of children. The facilitators contacted orphanages, social care centres and boarding schools when trying to gain information from children who had lost parental care and were living in institutions. They also contacted schools that specialized in assisting those with disabilities to gather the opinions and ideas of children living with a disability.

Some NGOs may choose to write a thematic report. In such cases, it would be appropriate to limit the children participating to those who have direct experience with the theme being reported on. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind the type of research that will be conducted when gathering children to participate. For instance, you should consider whether the information needs to be collected in person, such as through interviews or activity groups, or whether the information can be collected through additional sources such as questionnaires. More information on how to conduct these methodologies can be found in the "Methods for Collecting Information from Children" section of these guidelines on page 29.

While conducting the research you may find it is easier to have a smaller steering committee of children for certain

areas of participation.[87] For example, in order to give an accurate description of how the CRC is being implemented within a specific country, you may need to send out hundreds of questionnaires or surveys. It may not be practical or even possible to have all of the children contribute to how the surveys or questionnaires should be worded, or how the report should be put together from the responses received. In situations like this, it could be beneficial to have a steering committee composed of a smaller group of children. To ensure that discrimination does not occur, it is crucial that the process of selecting children to participate on the committee be transparent and, where possible, democratic.[88]

If a situation arises in which the number of children requesting to contribute to the steering committee becomes too large, another option is to have a few committees, each focused on a different area of the report; for example, each group focusing on specific articles in the CRC, or general topics such as health, school and family.

It is important that the steering committee and group of children giving their ideas and opinions be as diverse as possible. Some criteria to consider are gender, age, religion, location (rural versus urban, and regions of the country), school enrolment (children enrolled versus those not enrolled), socio-economic background, race, ethnicity and (dis)abilities.[89]

Practical Practices: For Gathering Children and Fair Representation

▶ For gathering children:
  □ Create a document that includes all of the information about the children's participation (this document can be based on the information in the consent form).

  • This document should also inform the children that there are two ways to be involved. One is through general participation (answering surveys, questionnaires, participating in discussion groups), and the second is through the steering committee. Let the children decide which way (or both) they would like to be involved, but be sure to give the details of how much time and commitment will be involved for each.
  • Allow for children to also indicate any special needs they may have, or inquire during the participation.
  • See Appendix D for a sample of this document.
  □ Send this document to organizations and institutions known to have direct contact with students, such as schools, youth facilitation centres and community groups.
  □ Post the information on web pages children are likely to access, as well as the website of the organization hosting the monitoring projects.
  □ Publish the information in newspapers, magazines and newsletters that are distributed to children or whose work is closely associated with children; announce the information on the radio, as well.

▶ For fair representation:
  □ Be sure to publish the information in, or send it to, a wide variety of media.
  □ Specifically select organizations or publications that will reach those who are marginalized in their communities (children who do not attend school, those who are ill, those who live in institutions, and so forth).
  □ Keep track of who has responded to your request to participate so you can be sure to include children from many backgrounds. If a particular group of children are not responding, follow up with your original inquiry to find out why.

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87 ibid; supra note 31, pg. 13.
88 supra note 20, pgs. 13–14.
89 supra note 20, pgs. 18–19.

Applied Principles: Non-discrimination, Respect for the Child, Right to Life, Survival and Development

☐ By ensuring that a diversity of children are participating, and reaching out to children who are usually marginalized within their communities, the principle of non-discrimination is clearly evident. By having an inclusive process for the selection of children, you are also respecting the identities of children by not excluding them, and giving them an opportunity to develop by participating in the monitoring process.

2) Training and Building Capacity

Once the children have been gathered together, you will need to spend time helping them to understand the processes they will be dealing with. For instance, they will need to understand such things as what rights they have as children, what the CRC is, how the monitoring process works, as well as how the political system in their country works and how the CRC fits within that system. Children will also need information on the States Parties' report, previous recommendations that the Committee has given and what laws and policies are in place to support children's rights.
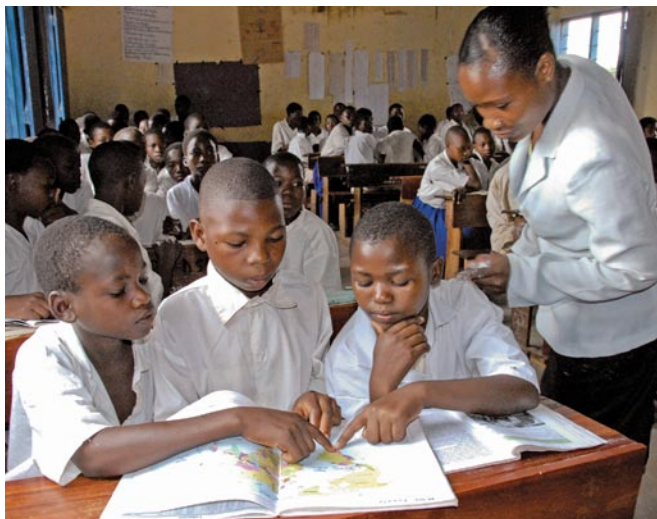
Additional information would include what the goals of the report are, what the goals for children's participation in the reporting process are, why it is important for the children to participate, and how their ideas and opinions will be used. It is at this stage that the information from "Accessible Information" (on page 16) will be presented to the children, more specifically, the background information that the children will need to participate.

Adequate time should be allocated to this stage of the reporting process, as the knowledge and skills developed at this point will assist the children later on in the monitoring process. This time can also serve to build relationships between the children and is a good opportunity to play some icebreaker games, as well as teach the children about the above-mentioned areas. Below is a case study that shows additional information that was presented to the children participating in the alternative report completed by The Children's Society in 1999.

> ### Case Study:
>
> ***The Children's Society (UK)—Alternative Report submitted in 1999***
> Before the activities took place, the facilitators provided the children with some additional information about why their participation was needed and how the information they gave would be used. This included explaining the Children's Society's commitment to ensuring that the Committee on the Rights of the Child had access to all the ideas, suggestions and experiences that were presented during the activities. The Children's Society also let the children know that the information they, the children, gave would be used by the Society when "setting priorities and influencing public policy." As a final point, the Society reminded the children (as previous written material had been distributed) that their participation was completely voluntary and they could leave at any time.

Practical Practices: For Training and Building Capacity with Children

▶ Begin the consultation process or meeting with an "expectations" exercise.[90]
  □ The results from this meeting can then be used to create the process or methods for the participation around a set of common expectations.
▶ Allow plenty of time for discussions.[91]
  □ Discussions will allow children to gain a more thorough understanding of the concepts, and allow you to ensure they are grasping them correctly.
  □ The discussions can be used as an introduction or conclusion, or both.
  □ Discussions can also help to deal with controversial issues.
▶ Remember that not all children learn in the same way. Activities should be designed so that all children can participate. This is very important to keep in mind when developing activities. (See "Consulting with Children" under the "Creating Meaningful Child Participation" section on page 14.)
▶ Work in small groups whenever possible.[92]
  □ There are many benefits to working in small groups; for example, a sense of self-confidence, safety, friendship and enhancing the participation process for all young participants.
  □ At first, children may be grouped according to common language and/or culture to help overcome the initial communication barriers.
  □ Ensure that the creation of other groups (based on age, issues of interest, topics) is also encouraged.
  □ Make sure all views are presented with each discussion.
  □ Smaller numbers of children allow for more informal consultations and available support from adults whom the children trust. This creates an environment with an increased sense of encouragement and protection.[93]
▶ Avoid activities where speakers are presenting to the children; allow the children to be active in their learning.
▶ See Appendix E for examples of activities that can assist in teaching children about Children's Rights.
▶ The book ABC—*Teaching Human Rights: Practical activities for primary and secondary schools* has many different activities that can be used to help teach children about human rights.[94]

Applied Principles: Right to Development

▶ Presenting the concepts and materials in a format that the children can understand will allow the children to learn, grow and develop.

3) Methods for Collecting Information from Children

Once the children have been given sufficient time to learn about the different concepts and theories they will need to make informed decisions, gathering their ideas is the next step. The most common methods used to include children are having the children give their opinions by responding to questionnaires, surveys and interviews. However, it has been found that when children are the ones conducting the interviews or surveys, the responses they receive are often more in-depth.

Holding seminars, work groups and activity days are other ways to collect children's ideas and opinions on their rights. Although not as popular as questionnaires, surveys or interviews, these three methods are excellent for gathering information from children. They are often used when larger

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90 supra note 20, pg. 20.
91 *In Our Own Backyard: A Teaching Guide for the Rights of the Child,* UNICEF, Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data, 1995.
92 supra note 9, pg. 34.
93 supra note 26, pg. 31.
94 This book can be accessed online at <www.un.org/events/human-rights/2004/education.htm>.

groups of children are being consulted, as it allows for more than one child to give an opinion at the same time.

Seminars: Oftentimes when a seminar is used to collect information from children, it is set up as a round-table discussion. Different topics are raised, and the children are encouraged to freely discuss their opinions, feelings and thoughts about each one. Preparation for a seminar would also include finding out which topics would be most relevant to discuss at the seminar. To collect this information, you could distribute questionnaires or surveys.

Work Groups: While similar to seminars, work groups often have smaller groups of children focusing on one or two specific areas, rather than on a range of topics. Work groups also add another dimension to the exercise. After discussing a topic, the children may be asked to create an activity regarding the conclusions they came to. Oftentimes the activity will be used to elicit from the children what they can do to bring about the changes they want implemented, or how they will raise awareness about the issue they discussed.

Activity Days: This method of collecting information is less direct than the other methods; however, it can be very beneficial to children who may not be able to articulate themselves in large groups. The main focus of activity days is to use different activities to gather the children's ideas, thoughts and opinions. For some examples, please refer to Appendix F, as well as the Practical Practices section "For groups that are gathering information via seminars, work groups or activity days" on the next page.

It is important to consider the type of information you hope to collect, and design your methods accordingly. It is crucial, however, that no matter which way the children participate, you ensure they receive the proper support and training as necessary.[95] Moreover, by providing children with adequate support, you are more likely to get effective results from your research methods.

It is also important to note that these guidelines focus on children's participation in the alternative reporting process. Including supplementary information such as interviews with outside individuals who are experienced in the areas being covered by the report, government statistics or additional alternative reports may be useful. However, the procedures on how to do this are not provided here. For ideas on additional sources you may want to include in the alternative report you are facilitating, please review World Vision's summary document to these guidelines, *Children as change agents: A review of child participation in Periodic Reporting on the CRC.*

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95   supra note 26.

Practical Practices: For Gathering Children's Ideas and Opinions

▶ Appoint a lead facilitator who is responsible for the design of the program—in partnership with the young participants—and for guiding a team of facilitators through the process. These responsibilities would include:[96]

- ☐ Creating a diverse participation team:
  - ● Ensure that there will be enough facilitators, with the proper skills, to assist the children who will be participating.
- ☐ Ensuring necessary training has been completed.
- ☐ Providing leadership to the facilitation team.

▶ For groups that are gathering information via seminars, work groups or activity days:

- ☐ The facilitation teams' responsibilities would include:[97]
  - ● Working with the children to develop their own ideas about what they would like to discuss;
  - ● Ensuring that a diverse representation of children is present and that all children are being treated equally;
  - ● Informing the children, at the beginning of the process, what the policies and principles of the participation are. This will help to promote respect for the diversity of children present;
  - ● Letting the children know, if appropriate, about the diversity of social locations and backgrounds to make the group aware of the challenges that can be posed by the use of several languages. Also, make sure that no one language dominates the discussions in either group work or plenary sessions;
  - ● Being aware of "the different backgrounds of the participants so as to design a process that reflects different contributions," and

being aware of "sensitive issues that may require attention;"

  - ● Ensuring children are prepared for any consultations with outside adults;
  - ● Consulting with the rest of the team to assess group energy;[98]
  - ● Meeting with the children (possibly the steering committee) to review each day.[99]
- ☐ When planning, realistic estimates of the time needed for each activity should be based on the following:[100]
  - ● Allowing time for the children to build relationships with each other.
  - ● The most time possible should be allocated toward working in small groups, which, it has been shown, allows the children to participate more directly and is more enjoyable.
  - ● Incorporate time for recreation. Planning a picnic or having some unstructured periods are examples of how to achieve this.
- ☐ For numerous suggestions on how to gather the ideas and opinions of children of all ages, take a look at Book 4 in the Adolescent and Youth Participation Handbook series by the Commonwealth Secretariat.
- ☐ See Appendix F for additional ideas on activities that can be used to collect children's opinions.

▶ For groups that are collecting children's ideas via questionnaires or surveys:

- ☐ Tips for writing questionnaires or surveys:
  - ● Avoid suggesting an answer in your question such as "Do you like baseball or basketball?" as this limits the response that the child can give you.
  - ● Avoid asking questions containing the wrong answer, such as "Is the sky blue, yellow or green?" as this implies that what may be a way of life or common sense to one person is the same for others.

96　supra note 9, pg. 30.
97　ibid. pg. 31.

98　ibid. pg. 29.
99　ibid.
100　supra note 26. pg. 27.

- Avoid questions that have unclear or vague words in them. Make sure all of your questions are child-friendly.
- Make your questions as specific as possible, without limiting the child's ability to respond.
- When creating questions, do not assume anything about the children you will be interviewing. All children have had different life experiences and may not understand or interpret correctly the assumption you have made.

▶ The Online Human Rights Education Library has many different activities that can be used to collect children's ideas and opinions on children's rights.[101]

Applied Principles: Best Interests of the Child, Right to Development, Respect for the Views of the Child

▶ When designing the methods that will be used to collect children's ideas and opinions, consideration must be given to their evolving capacities. This is important because if the activities are not designed with their capacities in mind, the children may not be able to fully participate or articulate their thoughts correctly. The methods should also be designed in such a way that the children will be able to learn and grow from their participation experience.

4) Analyzing the Data and Reaching Conclusions

Once all of the information has been gathered, you will need to analyze the data to discover common or contradictory themes, as well as to make key findings and conclusions. The methods that were used to collect the data will also help to determine the methods that will be used to analyze the information. The final report should include a summary of all of the children's ideas and opinions presented during the information-gathering phase. A summary of the procedures used to analyze the data should also be provided. Below are a few examples of how other organizations analyzed their data.

Case Study:

Save the Children Latvia (Latvia)—Alternative Report submitted in 2006
To collect the ideas and opinions of children, the facilitators distributed questionnaires. Once all of the responses had been received, the results were summarized in percentages.

What Do You Think? (Belgium)—Alternative Report submitted in 2002
Numerous methods (short stories, questionnaires, surveys) were used to collect the ideas and opinions of children; therefore, a broader approach was used to analyze the information. The team collected all of the responses and recorded the main themes in a spreadsheet; they then tabulated how many times each theme was mentioned. The results were brought back to a steering committee of approximately 40 children, who reviewed them and gave their own opinions and helped to prioritize the topics.

Once the data has been collected, it is critical that it does not become skewed. One way to ensure that the report remains true to the beliefs, opinions and suggestions of the children is to have a meeting with those who participated, before the report is submitted to the Committee,

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101 This website can be accessed at <www.hrea.org/erc/Library/display_doc.php?url=http%3A%2F%2Feycb.coe.int%2Fcompass%2Fen%2F contents.html&external=N>. Some of these activities may be better suited for the "Training and Building Capacity" section on pg. 28, whereas others will be suitable for gaining the thoughts and ideas of children regarding children's rights.

to get their opinion on the final product. Another method is to include children in the analysis of the findings; allow the children to draw their own conclusions from what was given. This may not be practical for groups that consulted with large numbers of children; however, a steering committee of children should have the opportunity to review the report before it is submitted.

The results from this analysis should not end with the report. The findings can and should be used to create further opportunities for children to advocate for their rights in the areas that most affect them. Further information on this can be found in the "Follow-up and Evaluations" section on page 38 of the guidelines.

Practical Practices: For Analyzing the Gathered Data

▶ Going through the information question by question, or activity by activity, will ensure that all of the thoughts expressed will be captured.
  □ While doing this, you may want to keep track of how many times similar responses are given to the same question or activity.
  □ Another way to analyze the data is to find general themes throughout the participation process and combine similar answers from numerous questions or activities.
  □ Keeping track of the frequency and intensity of the responses is also important.
▶ Depending on the amount of information collected, this stage could be overwhelming and time-consuming. When including children, it may be best to have groups of children work on different sections of the analysis.
  □ For example: have one group of children focus on questions 1–5, another group on questions 6–10, and so forth.
  □ You may choose to have groups of children work on subject areas, such as education or health.
▶ Data reduction is the first step to analyzing the data.[102]
  □ This step consists of going through all of the responses given and narrowing the responses to only those that directly relate to the children's rights (their thoughts on issues such as violence, educations, health and so forth), their ideas on how their rights are currently being implemented, and suggestions on how the implementation of their rights could be improved.
  □ It may be easier to organize or reduce the data by heading the information under questions such as "What do children think about their rights?" "Do the children feel as though their rights are being respected? If yes, how come? If no, why not?"

102   Chapter 4: Analyzing Qualitative Data, 3 May 2007, <www.ehr.nsf. gov/EHR/REC/pubs/NSF97-153/CHAP_4.HTM, paras. 11–17>.

"What should be done so that children's rights are more respected?"

- ☐ The above are not set questions; when organizing the data, be sure to keep an eye out for other themes that may emerge.
- ▶ Reaching conclusions:[103]
  - ☐ This stage requires those participating in the analysis to take a step away from the results they have just organized and try to extract general themes and topics.
  - ☐ This can be done in two phases: one for the overall information, then again for the specific questions under which the information was headed. Keeping track of the frequency and intensity of the responses, as suggested previously, will help with this step.
  - ☐ When drawing conclusions, it is essential that they can all be clearly supported by the direct responses of the children. Having a representative group of children who participated assist with this stage will help ensure that the children's responses are not being misinterpreted.
  - ☐ Drawing conclusions based on separating the data according to the different aspects of the children's identities may also be useful.
    - For example, what issues were most important to children in school? Children not in school?

Applied Principles: Respect for the Views of the Child

- ▶ Ensuring that the children's ideas and suggestions are correctly interpreted demonstrates a commitment to respecting children and their views, as well as respecting them enough to be listened to.

5) Preparing the Report

Once the information has been analyzed you will be ready to start writing the report. When preparing an alternative report, it is suggested that the State Parties Report, as well as the concluding observations from the previous State Report, be used as a starting point, if available. The information gathered from the children can also be compared with that of the current State Parties Report, previous recommendations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and current policies and legislation. This will allow for the organization writing the alternative report to inform the Committee of their position on what has been said in the State Parties report and highlight any additional concerns that were not mentioned.

If a copy of the State Report and the concluding observations cannot be supplied by the State, unedited copies of all reports can be found online at www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/sessions.htm The analysis of the State Report should be conducted in a section-by-section approach, rather than looking at each individual article. The clusters listed below are the sections that should be analyzed within the report:[104]

- General measures of implementation (Articles 4, 42, 44.6)
- Definition of the child (Article 1)
- General principles (Articles 2, 3, 6, 12)

- Civil rights and freedoms (Articles 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 37a)
- Family environment and alternative care (Articles 5, 9, 10, 11, 18, 20, 21, 25, 27.4)
- Basic health and welfare (Articles 18, 23, 24, 26, 27)
- Education, leisure and cultural activities (Articles 28, 29, 31)
- Special protection measures (Articles 22, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40)

The report should include specific examples of legislation, policies and statistics to support the points being made. The report should also be very specific in identifying what articles are being discussed and how those articles are being violated. For more information on what should be included in the final report, see "A Guide for Non-governmental Organizations Reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child" at www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=12388&flag=report

In addition to the above-mentioned items that should be included in the report, the procedures used while collecting the information, as well as the procedures used to write the report, should also be included and easily accessible to the Committee. These are important to document not only for the Committee, but also for those who are interested in facilitating child participation themselves. There is a lack of information, however, as to how children participate in the monitoring of the CRC in their communities. This information can be very valuable, as it can help others think of creative ways for children to be involved, and how to overcome obstacles. It is also important to be clear regarding which parts of the report were derived from the opinions of children, and which were not.[105]

Having children participate in the writing of the report, and/or including direct quotes from the children, helps to give the report weight; it brings an added sense of reality to the information being presented. Below is an example of how one organization included children during the writing of its alternative report.

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105   Allen, Denise, *Child Participation in the Pre-Sessional Meetings,* Interviewed by Jenn Miller via telephone, 15 May 2007.

Case Study:

National Council for Children (Denmark)— Alternative Report submitted in 2005
Although adults wrote the alternative report, the facilitators wanted to ensure that it correctly conveyed the ideas and beliefs of the children. To do this, seven children who participated, along with a journalism student, gathered together to edit the report.

Practical Practices: Writing the Alternative Report

▶ Depending on the capabilities of the children participating, they may or may not be able to assist in the physical process of writing the report. Children who cannot help with the writing can participate in other ways; for instance:
  ☐ Assist in the editing of the report.
  ☐ Give direction as to what sections should be given greater focus.
  ☐ Provide input as to what articles relate to the different topics discussed during the gathering of information stage.
  ☐ Provide input as to how the report is formatted (design, layout, creative inserts, and so forth).
▶ Appendix G contains links to 16 alternative reports. You can review these to gain ideas on how to format the report you are facilitating.

Applied Principles: Best Interests of the Child, Right to Life, Survival and Development, Respecting the Views of the Child

▶ By including children in the process of preparing the report you are helping ensure their best interests, as well as respecting their opinions by dedicating time to guaranteeing that the children's true beliefs, values and recommendations are being presented. Including them at this stage also allows them to develop further skills that may assist them in their future.

6) Child Delegates and Pre-sessional/ Sessional Meetings[106]

As discussed above, one of the ways that children can be involved in the reporting process is to participate in the pre-sessional meetings with the Committee, as well as the session to observe the State Parties report. There are mixed feelings about this process, as it has the potential to become tokenistic and exploitive; however, if the children are given the proper support and resources, it can be an empowering and refreshing experience for all involved.[107]

The pre-sessional meeting is a confidential three-hour meeting in which UN agencies, NGOs (and any children who have accompanied the NGO) that have submitted an alternative report concerning the specified country, and the Committee develop a strategy to present to the government. In order to attend a pre-sessional meeting, you must first be invited by the Committee.

Once the Committee has reviewed the alternative report and acknowledges the importance of the information presented, the authors of the report will receive an invitation to attend the pre-sessional meeting. When replying to the invitation, the authors/facilitators should be sure to include the number of people who will be attending and specifically indicate how many of them will be children.

It is recommended that more than one child delegate attend the pre-sessional meeting, as the child could feel lonely and isolated, especially if this is the child's first time travelling to Geneva (or to a country other than their homeland). Additionally, it has been found that when more than one child attends the pre-sessional meeting, the Committee is better able to set aside time for an additional meeting in which only the children and Committee would be present. Lack of funding, however, is often the biggest hurdle when trying to bring children to the pre-sessional meetings.

It is generally not possible to bring all of the children who were involved in creating the alternative report to the meeting, and it is also often not possible to bring all of the children from the steering committee either; in such cases, child delegates must be selected. It is highly recommended that the children have a strong voice in selecting their own representatives, and that this process be transparent and, where possible, democratic.[108]

When selecting which children will travel to Geneva to meet with the Committee, there are several specific qualities that should be considered. At the pre-sessional meeting, the Committee will be interested in discussing the government's practices and policies, hearing about the children's direct experiences in regard to how society has responded to their needs, as well as their recommendations for improving the status of children within their home country. The recommendations that the Committee will present to the States Parties need to be practical both for the context of the country and for the time frame in which the country is expected to implement the recommendations. Consequently, the children attending the pre-sessional meeting must have a well-developed understanding of the different systems that interact with children's rights. More specifically, the issues and recommendations presented by the children should be well thought out and practical; the children will also be expected to take part in complex discussions. Usually, due to the capacities required of the children attending, adolescents are chosen to participate in the pre-sessional meetings. The children will also be expected to prepare a short paper that will be used as an opening statement. The paper should be approximately five minutes in length and express the main issue(s) the children wish to present to the Committee.

Another factor to consider when selecting the children to attend the pre-sessional meeting is their direct experience in an area the alternative report has recommended for improvement. For example, if the report states that the needs of children with disabilities requires quick and urgent attention, it would be beneficial for the Committee to hear

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106   Unless otherwise referenced, the material in this section was derived from a telephone interview with Denise Allen on 15 May 2007. See note 105 for full reference.

107   supra note 12.

108   supra note 20, pgs. 13–14.

from a child who can attest to this from his or her personal experience.

What is of utmost importance, however, is that the children attending the meeting have also helped to create the alternative report. Being involved in the creation of the report is beneficial for many reasons. The first is that it will serve as a helpful tool when the children are deciding what they would like to present to the Committee. Participating in the exercises to help formulate their ideas, assisting in collecting information and being involved in the layout or editing of the report will help the children in putting together a clear, comprehensive presentation.

Below are some examples of ways that other organizations included children in the pre-sessional and sessional meetings.

Case Study:

What Do You Think? (Belgium)—Alternative Report submitted in 2002
For children who were unable to attend the meetings, the organization made video recordings of what the children wanted to present. These videos were then played during the meetings.

National Council for Children (Denmark)— Alternative Report submitted in 2005
This organization translated a letter from a child who wanted to give some additional feedback. The facilitators translated the letter and were able to present it to the Committee during the meetings.

It is important for children to be involved in the pre-sessional meetings, if possible, because it will give them a chance to present their views to the Committee themselves. It will also give the Committee a chance to meet with the children and to hear their views expressed in their own words.

It is not recommended that children attend the sessional meeting, as this meeting will consist of six hours of formal and legal conversation. However, if there are children who

have participated in the reporting process who are considered experts in human rights, and would be able to follow the conversation, they should be encouraged to attend. Again, it is important to keep in mind the capacities of the children involved.

Practical Practices: For Bringing Child Delegates to Geneva

▶ Preparations:
- ☐ Ensure the children participating are well informed about the alternative report:
  - Rather than having one child become an expert on all areas of the alternative report, it may be more practical and effective to have each child become an expert on one issue, such as health, education or the situation of street children.
- ☐ Ensure the child knows who they are representing:
  - They do not have the mandate to speak on behalf of all children in their country; they can only speak on behalf of those who were specifically consulted.
- ☐ Inform the children about whom they will be presenting to:
  - Include photos of the Committee members and give a brief history of how they arrived at where they are today; this will help the children to feel more comfortable speaking with the members of the Committee.
- ☐ Give the children information about Geneva:
  - Inform the children about the lifestyle, culture and history of Geneva.

▶ Arrive at Geneva one to two days before the meeting:
- ☐ Arriving early will allow the children to overcome any jet lag they may experience; it will also allow the children some time to adjust to the new atmosphere and become comfortable in a new country.
- ☐ Be sure to set aside some time to have fun!

▶ Take the initiative to find other children who will be attending the meetings:
- ☐ Contacting the NGO Group for the CRC is a

good starting place to find children from other organizations that will be attending the meetings.[109]

▶ Contact the Secretariat to find out who the Rapporteur is for the country reporting:

  ☐ The Rapporteur may be able to set aside time to have an informal meeting with the children to gather additional information from them that they may not have had the chance to present in the pre-sessional meeting.

Applied Principles: Best Interests of the Child, Respect for the Views of the Child

▶ Making sure the children selected are properly supported, prepared and capable to participate will ensure that attending the meeting is in their best interest.

▶ Giving the children a chance to present their views and recommendations directly to the Committee lets the children take full ownership of their opinions and confirms to them that their rights will be and are being respected.

7) Follow-up and Evaluations

Following up with the children who participated in the Alternative Report should not be given any less attention than the creation of the report itself. In fact, it should be planned near the beginning of the reporting process. This way, information about the debriefing can be given at the same time the information regarding what is required of the children during the monitoring process is being presented.

Following up can be a source of motivation and learning for all who were involved in the reporting process.[110] Children will have a deeper sense of satisfaction with respect to their participation if they are able to see the fruits of their labour.[111] Not conducting a follow-up or debriefing, how-

ever, can leave the children feeling disappointed and unsatisfied, as they would have exerted a lot of themselves and their energies into the reporting process.[112]

The final report should not be seen as an end in and of itself. Rather, it can be viewed as part of a continuum. After presenting the report to the Committee, the children will be interested in hearing how the process went, what was recommended and what can be done now. The research conducted while preparing the report, and the feedback and recommendations given by the Committee, can lead to new projects and initiatives that children can be involved in.[113] Practical considerations, such as how children can take their new-found skills and the results from their monitoring back to their communities and put them to use, should also be presented at the follow-up.[114] Below are some examples of Alternative Reports that were deemed successful by the facilitators.

Case Study:

Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights (Netherlands)—Alternative Report submitted in 2002
The facilitators of this Alternative Report said that it was very successful because the "youngsters were able to open the Committee's eyes to certain topics" and because "the influence of the children is visible in the recommendations that the Committee made."

What Do You Think? (Belgium)—Alternative Report submitted in 2002
The facilitators of this Alternative Report defined success as having the recommendations of the children heard and acknowledged by the Committee. In the end, the facilitators were happy to say that this was accomplished. They also noted that because the report was a success, they now had more strength to their lobbying efforts.

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109 More information on the NGO Group for the CRC can be found at <www.crin.org/NGOGroupforCRC>.
110 supra note 20, pg. 18.
111 ibid. pg. 18.

112 ibid. pg. 17.
113 supra note 9, pg. 76.
114 ibid., pg. 76.

Evaluations can also be completed when following up with the children. The evaluations should measure not only the processes used, but also the impact that participation had on the children, the Committee and the government. It is important to keep in mind that **the report is not the end goal**. The creation of the report is a process in which children can learn and grow, and through which governments can be held accountable to their commitments to children; it is important to measure and evaluate the outcomes of the process.

Evaluation of the macro changes that have (or have not) been accomplished should also be measured.[115] Is there greater transparency between the government and children? Is the government truly listening to children? What has changed, or not changed, to show this? The evaluation process can help ensure that the participation is happening for the right reasons, and is not simply being tokenistic. When creating the evaluation mechanisms, it is important to go back to the original goals and visions, as these will help determine what should be measured as well as how it should be measured.

Conducting an evaluation at all levels (micro, mezzo and macro) is also significant for future advocacy campaigns. The results from these efforts will be tangible information that will show how valuable child participation is. It will also enhance child participation within the research context, as we will be able to learn more about which methods are successful for which children.[116]

Just as it was important to take into account all of the children's capabilities and capacities when designing how their opinions would be collected for the report, the same procedures should be used when developing the evaluation and follow-up. And again, children should be involved in the planning and creation of the follow-up and evaluations.

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115   supra note 20, pg. 26.
116   supra note 8, pg. 64.

Conclusion

Including children within the reporting process is not something that can be done on a whim; careful planning, preparation and execution are all needed to ensure their participation is meaningful. These guidelines were created to assist in making this process a little easier and more effective. In addition to these guidelines, World Vision has also produced a report that summarizes and systematically analyzes 16 Alternative Reports that included children's participation;[117] the report also offers a few recommendations to organizations looking to include children within the reporting process. We highly recommend reviewing this report, as there is a great deal of additional information presented.

The benefits of children's participation are numerous, not only for the reporting process and those involved, but for society as a whole. In the past, the unique abilities of children have not been recognized to the extent that is possible, and children have rarely been given their due time to participate in holding their governments accountable to their obligations to protect child rights. However, this trend is changing. This change can be clearly seen through the efforts of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to focus on child participation, the growing number of NGOs around the globe that are including children in their Alternative Reports, and the gradual increase in attention these issues are attracting from governments. Those who work with children have a responsibility to learn from our experiences in supporting children's participation, for instance, through documenting our involvement with children and the results it produces, so that child participation will continue to increase, and be conducted in a more effective and meaningful manner.

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117 Miller J., *Children as change agents: A review of child participation in periodic reporting on the Convention on the Rights of the Child,* World Vision, 2007.

Appendix A

Producing Child-Friendly Documents[1]

Children need to be able to access and understand information on topics relevant to them.

Creating written documents for this purpose involves a number of steps. The following guidelines outline what you should consider:

- before you start writing
- when you start writing
- once you have produced a first draft
- how to test the document

Before you start writing

Assuming you have an original (adult) document to work from, decide whether you want to produce **a literal translation** in a child-friendly format, or whether you want to produce a child-friendly **summary**.

A child-friendly literal translation is sometimes preferred when organizations feel children should have access to the **same** information as anyone else. However, it tends to be very lengthy. A child-friendly summary may be more appropriate, depending on the context.

You may want to consider a combination depending on the type of documents you are producing, particularly if they will then be translated into another language. On the final document, state whether it is a summary or a literal translation.

Establish **why** the document is relevant to children; make sure you keep this in mind throughout the process: Why is this particular document being produced for children, and how can this be expressed?

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1   The above procedures on how to produce a child-friendly document were abstracted from the "Operations Manual on Children's Participation at Consultations," published by the Inter-Agency Group on Children's Participation in SEAP region in June 2006.

Be clear about the **age group** you are targeting and state this on the document. You may want to produce different versions for different age categories, e.g., 12- to 15-year-olds and 15- to 18-year-olds.

Know your target group. It is important to find out about the children and young people who will be reading the document you are producing.

Consider the following:

- Age range: if possible, find out whether children fit into categories spanning only three to five years (e.g., ages 10–13, 14–18)
- Educational background
- Language: will it be the same language as the document you are producing or will the document need to be translated
- Gender
- Urban/rural background
- Disability, particularly visual impairment

Read a few **children's books** for the age group you are targeting. This should help you relate to the children within that age group.

When you start writing

Start by asking, "What do children **need to know** about the subject?" It is useful to look at the topic (or the document you are working from) through the eyes of a child.

Ask yourself what is relevant to children reading this, and what would they want to know and expect to learn about in the child-friendly document. For example, children may not need to know about complicated procedural issues if they do not involve them.

Produce a **summary**. If you are working from an original document, it is worth writing a summary for yourself of the information that needs to be conveyed to children. It is easy to lose sight of some of the information in the process of producing a child-friendly version. Once a child-friendly

version is available, the summary can be used to check that all information is covered.

At the start of the document, **briefly explain** why it has been produced and how children might be able to use it.

Include a **short outline** of the document at the start; this helps the reader know what material is covered and how.

Use **simple language** and try to keep the document as short as possible.

Use the **present tense** if possible and keep sentences short.

Write as though you are **speaking to the child** (don't be afraid to use "you").

Don't use **metaphors**; some are not so obvious to children, such as "voicing your views" or "sign post."

Spell out any abbreviations, and don't use "e.g." or "etc."

Explain any **jargon**, or any difficult words or concepts.

Try using a highlighter to mark all words that might prove difficult for children to understand in the original document.

Don't include jargon that has little meaning for children, even if it sounds simple, for example, "key actors." To find alternatives for jargon, use a variety of sources, including children's dictionaries or websites aimed at children.

Possible ways to explain difficult words or concepts in the document:
- add **boxes** close to where the difficult word or concept is mentioned.

> **Boxes:**
> In the box, give an explanation of the word or concept so children can skip to it easily while reading the main text. Make sure the box is on the same page as the word or concept. Boxes also have the advantage of breaking up the text.

- create a **list** of definitions or difficult words or concepts at the beginning or end of the document.

This may help children who are at different levels of understanding to read the document. Writing too many explanations in the document itself can be distracting and lead to a longer, less readable document.

There may be things that shouldn't be translated, e.g., one or two key definitions; these can be quoted directly and then explained.

Work in a team to resolve some of the problems in translating the original paper or concepts; discussions are often useful to find simpler ways of putting things or to clarify definitions.

Provide links and list resources where children might be able to get additional information on the subject.

Use **visual images** to support the words. These help explain difficult concepts, so they should be relevant to the issue outlined (or you might end up confusing children with different messages in the visual images to those in the text). You may want to specifically commission photographs, drawings, illustrations, paintings or cartoons.

Use **photographs** carefully. Be sure that any people pictured have given their **consent** for the photo to be used.

Photos should:
- show children adequately clothed and not in sexually suggestive poses;
- respect children's dignity, not highlight them as victims;
- be culturally appropriate.

If the children shown are actual victims of violence (and not actors), even more care needs to be used to hide the real identity of the children.

Use false names for any children shown (state that these are false names).

Do not identify their precise location—general geography only.

Where possible, use images of children that are in profile, or are darkened or from the back; obscure part of the child's face if it is a full-faced shot (for example, a thick dark line or dappling across the eyes).

Text should look interesting. Some simple **graphic tricks** have been used in this document:
- use a font size that is at least 12 points; sans serif fonts are generally seen as more child-friendly because they are clearer to read.
- break up long sentences or paragraphs with bullet points or numbering.
- break up large blocks of text: use headings and sub-headings, boxes and illustrations.
- highlight key words: use **bold**, a different colour, *italics* or a *different font*.

Try not to use too many graphic tricks; for instance, a maximum of three fonts or text colours (except in illustrations).

You may want to have the document professionally designed; if so, give the designer a clear briefing of what you want, including information on the target group of the children who will be reading the document.

Once you have produced a first draft

Test the document with children.

As this can be quite a daunting prospect, the following[2] gives guidelines on developing test documents and cost-effective testing.

Written and **visual** messages should be **tested** before you use them with your intended audiences, so any mistakes can be corrected and you can be sure that children will understand the message. Test your written and visual messages and materials first on your colleagues, or members of your family of the appropriate age and gender.

Make adjustments.

Recruit a number of individuals from the target audience. You will have already had some contact with this group through researching your target audience, so approach a few of the more friendly and easy-to-reach individuals. Use as many as you can and try to develop a regular "piloting group."

Test your written and visual messages on these individuals.

Make further adjustments.
If necessary, test again to make sure changes are satisfactory.

Let members of the "piloting group" understand that this is important to your work, and make sure they feel valued. This should include payment of any expenses for taking part in the testing, refreshments and perhaps a small fee.

How to test the document

Depending on the audience and your access to them, you can work with the "piloting group" as a **whole** or **individuals**.

2   Ennew J and Plateau DP, *Child Labour: Getting the Message Across*, Bangkok, Regional Working Group on Child Labour, 2001, pgs.191-193.

How you present the message will depend on the channel you will use (written or oral) and the audience (level of literacy).

Visual materials (photographs, drawings, posters)

Test visual materials first, to **determine what the audience sees**.

Use several different drawings or photographs of the image you wish to portray.

Number the pictures beforehand.

Show the pictures without comment and ask, "What do you see in this drawing (or photograph)?"

You can also ask questions such as "Do you like this picture?" "How does it make you feel?"

Note the responses to each picture (it helps to have a colleague do the recording).

Select a picture after considering all the responses. If the first set of pictures all received negative responses, put them aside (you might be able to use them with a different audience, so don't throw them away) and start again.

Written materials or other use of words

Written messages may accompany a visual image, such as in a poster. You can test both separately and together.

Start by asking a **main question**: "Do you understand this?"

Then ask a number of **probing questions** to confirm the response. If they do not understand, find out why. Are the words too complicated? What words would they use to talk about this topic?

Sample questions:

- Do you agree/disagree?
- Why do you agree/disagree?
- How does this make you feel?
- Does it make you want to do anything? If so what?

As with the visual materials, you might want to test several ways of saying the same thing. You could write each message on a flash card and show each one in turn, asking for reactions or get people to rank the whole set in the order they prefer.

Appendix B

Child Protection Policy[1]

State Parties shall protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, mal-treatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse. (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, Article 19.)

Introduction

Members of the [insert official name of the Organizing Committee][2] have a common commitment to the prevention of child abuse and the protection of children. The abuse and exploitation of children happens in all countries and societies around the world.

This policy sets out common values, principles and beliefs, and describes the steps that will be taken in meeting the [insert official name of the Organizing Committee]'s commitment to protect children.

It applies particularly to how we protect children from abuse at the [insert official name and date of consultation].

In this document, "children" refers to anyone under the age of 18.

OUR COMMITMENT TO PROTECT CHILDREN

1. Our values, principles and beliefs

- All child abuse involves the abuse of children's rights.
- All children have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation.
- The situation of all children must be improved through promotion of their rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other

human rights instruments. This includes the right to freedom from abuse and exploitation.
- Child abuse is never acceptable.
- We have a commitment to protecting children with or for whom we work.
- Partner agencies involved in the consultation (Local Partners) are asked to use the child protection policy in preparatory and follow-up activities for the consultation.

2. What we will do

We will meet our commitment to protect children from abuse through the following means:

Awareness: We will ensure that all delegates to the consultation, staff and partners (including governments, non-governmental organizations—NGOs—and other delegates, translators, facilitators, guardians, Local Partners, volunteers and administrative staff) are aware of the problem of child abuse and the risks to children.

Prevention: We will ensure, through awareness and good practice, that delegates to the consultation and others minimize the risks to children.

Reporting: We will ensure that all consultation delegates and others are clear on what steps to take where concerns arise regarding the safety of children.

Responding: We will ensure that action is taken to support and protect children where concerns arise regarding possible abuse.

In order that the above standards of reporting and responding are met, members of the [insert official name of the Organizing Committee] will also ensure that they:
- Take seriously any concerns raised.
- Take positive steps to ensure the protection of children who are the subject of any concerns.
- Support children, delegates or other adults who raise concerns or who are the subject of concerns.

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1   The above child protection policy was abstracted from the *Operations Manual on Children's Participation at Consultations* published by the Inter-Agency Group on Children's Participation in SEAP region in June 2006.
2   All member organizations or individuals should be named in the Child Protection Policy—add a footnote if necessary.

- Act appropriately and effectively in instigating or co-operating with any subsequent process of investigation.
- Are guided through the child protection process by the principle of "best interests of the child".
- Listen to and take seriously the views and wishes of children.
- Work in partnership with parents/caregivers and/or other professionals to ensure the protection of children.

3. How we will ensure our commitments above are met

- All delegates at the consultation and all supporting staff (volunteer, locally appointed and internationally appointed) will be asked to abide by the Rules of Behaviour.
- All Local Partners accept the Child Protection Policy.
- All delegates and staff will have access to a copy of the Child Protection Policy.
- Recruitment procedures for key support staff at the consultation and all guardians will include background checks on suitability for working with children.
- Sensitization briefing for all delegates and briefing for all staff will include child protection issues.
- All delegates and staff will have contact details and will be briefed on the role of the Child Protection Focal Person at the consultation. Any child protection concerns and complaints should be reported to the Child Protection Focal Person who will handle them in strictest confidence.
- Systems will be established to investigate possible abuse once reported and to deal with it. In [insert name of host country for the consultation], this will include activating statutory procedures.

Rules of Behaviour

All delegates and staff at the consultation must sign up to and abide by these Rules of Behaviour.

Delegates (including child delegates), staff and others must never:
- Hit or otherwise physically assault or physically abuse children.
- Develop physical/sexual relationships with children.
- Develop relationships with children that could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive.
- Act in ways that may be abusive or may place a child at risk of abuse.
- Use language, make suggestions or offer advice that is inappropriate, offensive or abusive.
- Behave physically in a manner that is inappropriate or sexually provocative.
- Have a child/children with whom they are working stay overnight at their home unsupervised.
- Sleep in the same room or bed as a child (if this has not been agreed to by the child's guardian).*
- Do things for children of an intimate nature that they can do for themselves.
- Permit or participate in behaviour towards children that is illegal, unsafe or abusive.
- Act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children, or otherwise perpetrate any form of emotional abuse.
- Discriminate against, show differential treatment or favour particular children to the exclusion of others.

This is not an exhaustive or exclusive list. The principle is that delegates and staff should avoid actions that may constitute poor practice or potentially abusive behaviour.

*Adults are not permitted to sleep in the same room or bed as children. However, with the permission of both guardians, under-18 delegates may share rooms with other under-18 delegates of the same sex. Additionally, where culturally or socially applicable, and with written consent from the under-18 delegate and their parents/caregivers, guardians may share a room with the under-18 delegates (of the same sex) in their care.

Appendix C

Consent Form for Children[1]

Title of Monitoring Activity to Take Place: Survey, Workshop, Interview

Introduction: In this section, simply introduce yourself and the organization you work for.

Hello! My name is … I'm here for a study on behalf of (Organization Name).

Purpose: Include a brief statement about why you want to meet with the child and how the information will be used.

We're talking with children from (county name) to gather information about their daily lives and to find out what they think about children's rights within (country name). The information gathered will be used to create a report to be given to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. This is a committee that wants to make sure that every child is able to live a healthy life. They will review the information and give recommendations to the government of (country name) about how children's rights can be improved.

Procedures: This section will include a brief overview of what the child will be expected to do and how long it will take. Also include any options the child would have regarding these procedures.

We would like to ask you some questions in an interview that will take about 15 to 30 minutes. I would like to talk to you alone, but if you would like, you can ask for a parent, guardian or friend to be present at any time. However, I would really appreciate it if you would answer the questions honestly and openly, so that we can find out what

young people here in (country name) really think. Your answers are very important to us.

If you are not interested in participating in the interview, we also have a workshop that you can participate in. The workshop will last one hour and you will be asked to fill out some activity sheets and participate in discussions with five to 10 other children.

Risks: Include any risks that the child may face while participating and what is being done to combat these risks.

Some of these questions may talk about things that some people find quite personal, or may be difficult to answer. If any of the questions make you feel uncomfortable or you don't want to answer them, you do not have to. If any of the questions upset you, or if you would like to talk to someone about the feelings you experienced during the interview, please let me know and I, or another responsible adult, will be happy to take that time with you.

Benefits: Letting the child know the impact that he or she could have on his or her country's agenda is a benefit that should be mentioned in this section, along with any other benefits. However, make sure to not include any false promises in this section.

If you decide to participate in this interview, you will have the chance to help make children's lives in (country name) better. Even though this isn't a quick process, your thoughts and opinions are very valuable. You will also have the opportunity to learn more about your own rights and how you can be an active member in your community.

Right to Say No: Be sure to include this section so that the child is fully aware that participation is voluntary, and that if he or she chooses not to participate, or not to fully participate, there will be no penalty.

Remember, you do not have to talk about anything you don't want to. This will not affect your ability to receive

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1   This consent form has been adapted from the one provided in *Ethical Approaches to Gathering Information from Children and Adolescents in International Settings: Guidelines and resources* by Katie Schenk and Jan Williamson on pages 67–69 (Annex 4)

any of the services that (organization name) provides now or in the future.

Confidentiality: This section is very important, as it can help to build trust within the child-adult relationship. It is also very important that the children know that the confidentiality can be broken, and in what situations this would happen.

If you agree to take part in this interview, the things you tell me will be confidential. That means they will be private between you and me. I want to let you know, though, that it is my responsibility to make sure that you are safe. That means if you tell me you are being hurt by another person, you are hurting yourself, or you are planning to hurt another person, I will have to let another responsible adult know so that, depending on your situation, the right actions can be taken to make sure that you are safe.

Seeking Understanding: This is the area where, if you were verbally going over the agreement, you would ask if there are any questions; you would include the contact information of the representative the child could contact if there were any questions on the written form.

Do you have any questions about what was just mentioned? If you think of any questions in the future, you can reach (contact person) at (contact information).

Seeking Voluntary Agreement: This section asks the child if he or she is willing to participate and, if so, have the child mark this in some way, either with his or her signature or by placing a mark on the form. If the child chooses the latter option, a signature by a witness is necessary.

Would you like to participate in the research? If so, how would you like to participate? Please indicate here with your name or a mark if you would like to participate.

Date: _____

Child's Name/Agreement: _____

Parent's/Guardian's Agreement: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Appendix D

Invitation for Future Participants[1]

Letter to be Sent to Organizations and Institutions: Adult Version

(Name of Organization)
(Date of Mailing)

Dear *(name of individual or organization/institution)*,

My name is *(name of facilitator)* and I'm with *(name of organization)*. *(Brief introduction to organization)*. *(Name of organization)* is also involved with the periodic reporting process of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

The CRC is a tool that identifies rights that children are entitled to and is the most widely ratified human rights treaty of its kind. Currently, the primary mechanism for ensuring that governments are accountable to their obligations in the CRC is the "periodic reporting process." Every State that has ratified the CRC (State Parties) must monitor the implementation of the CRC within their jurisdiction, and submit periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child; State Parties are required to submit their first report two years after ratification of (or accession to) the CRC, and subsequently are required to report periodically every five years. Non-governmental organizations such as *(name of organization)* are also encouraged to report to the Committee and to provide an alternative report on the government's progress and gaps. Including the thoughts, ideas and opinions of children is critical to this process.

(Name of organization) has decided to take on this responsibility and we are very excited about the work that lies ahead. We have contacted your organization/institution because we know that you are in direct contact with chil-

dren and we are hoping to include the ideas and thoughts of those children in our report to the Committee. We believe that children have an important contribution to make to the monitoring process, and we would like to invite your organization/institution to help support children's participation in this process.

In this paragraph include general information about what activities will be involved for the participation, the different ways children can be involved (this is where the steering group would be mentioned), as well as the time line, and the date that you need to hear back from the organization by. Depending on the type of organization or institution you are contacting, you may want to include a sentence such as, "We understand that, due to the nature of your organization/institution, we may need to make additional arrangements or alter our original plans in order to include the children you work with. We would be happy to take some additional time to work with you so that the children can be included."

In this package we have also included a child-friendly version of this letter that you can distribute to the children and/or discuss with them. We have also included a consent form that children who are interested can read and sign. We are very excited about this opportunity and hope that we will be able to work further with you in the future.

If you have any questions or concerns about the processes involved, please do not hesitate to contact me at *(contact information)*. *I am also willing to make a presentation at your facility to provide additional information about the participation.* We would appreciate your response by *(date/deadline)*. Thank you again for you time and we hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,
Name of facilitator

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1 If you are choosing to present this information in a newspaper or on a website you may want to make it look more exciting as you will need to capture their attention away from the other information being presented.

Letter to be Sent to Organizations and Institutions: Child-Friendly Version

Are you a child currently living in *(name of country)*? Do you want to share your ideas about what it's like to be a child in *(name of country)*? Do you want to make a difference in the lives of children living in *(name of country)*?

If you answered yes to these questions, then you should continue reading to find out about an amazing opportunity that you could be involved in!

Hello,

My name is *(name of facilitator). (Name of organization and brief introduction to the type of work the organization is involved in)*. One of the activities that we are involved in is monitoring children's rights, and identifying what is working and where are there gaps in *name of country*.

Every child around the world has rights. Children's rights are protected in a document called the Convention on the Rights of the Child, otherwise known as the CRC. The CRC outlines all of the rights that children have, on issues such as protection, survival, development, and participation.

Every country that has agreed to protect children's rights in the CRC must continually measure their progress and identify gaps. This report should include information on what the government has done to implement the children's rights listed in the CRC, what struggles they have encountered and what successes have been made. The report will then be reviewed by an international committee of experts, who will give suggestions to the government on how they could improve their methods for implementing children's rights.

The government isn't the only one that can create a report to send to the Committee though. Organizations like *(name of organization)* can make their own reports and send them in as well! It is important to include the ideas and opinions of children and young people in these reports, to give a better idea of how children's lives are changing—for better or worse.

I am writing to you today because it is now the time for *(name of country)* to submit its report, and *(name of organization)* is starting to prepare our own report. We want to hear from you about your ideas and suggestions about children's rights in *(name of country)*! We believe that you, being a child in *(name of country)*, have valuable information to share about how children's rights are being respected, or not respected.

In this paragraph include general information about what activities will be involved for the participation and the different ways children can be involved (this is where the steering group would be mentioned).

We are very excited about this opportunity and hope that you will assist us in letting the Committee know more about children's lives in *(name of country)*! There's no need to worry if you're not familiar with children's rights, the CRC or the monitoring process, as we will make sure that you receive all the information you need to be able to express your ideas clearly, and will be more than willing to help you understand the above items. Your own experiences make you an expert in these issues, and your opinions should be heard!

If you have any questions, or are in need of some more information before deciding if you would like to participate, please contact me at *(contact information). (If you are planning to visit the organization or institution to follow-up, include this date here)*. If you would like to participate, please ask *(name of adult who can be contacted)* for a consent form. It is very important that you read the consent form and understand it. If you're having trouble understanding the form, be sure to ask an adult for some help.

We hope to hear back from you soon!

Sincerely,
Name of facilitator

Appendix E

Training and Building Capacities Exercises

Tree Exercise[1]

This exercise can be used as an overview to affirm how much the children have learned about rights and the processes that surround them. It could also be used throughout the teaching process to keep track of what has been presented and what is still left to come. This tree will help the children to see how the many different processes are interconnected and how they fit into the equation.

Resources

- Large piece of paper, or chalkboard, or coloured pieces of paper which could be turned into a tree
- Pens/pencils

Steps

Step 1: Draw a large picture of a tree (this can be done on a flip chart, chalkboard, or prepared out of colourful paper). Ensure that the tree has three distinct sections: the roots, trunk and leaves/fruit.

Step 2: Each of the three areas of the tree represents a different area of rights. The roots represent the historical, moral, ethical, philosophical and religious foundations of children's rights. The trunk represents the processes and legalities of having children's rights such as the Convention and government's responsibilities. The leaves or fruits of the tree represent what can be done to increase the acknowledgement of children's rights within their communities and country.

Step 3: Explain to the children what the tree and its various sections represent. Once this is completed ask the children what they already know about children's rights. For every piece of information that is given, write it in the corresponding section of the tree. Throughout the remaining activities children will be able to add more knowledge

to the tree. At the end of the program (this could represent the end of the day, or the end of the monitoring process) return to the tree to show the children how much they have learned about child rights.

Clustering Rights[2]

This activity will help the children gain a deeper understanding of the CRC, as well as give them an overview to all of the rights contained within it. The children will gain a deeper understanding by 'clustering' the rights from the CRC using different clustering methods (see below).

Resources

- A large piece of paper or chalkboard
- Paper cards. You will need enough cards to list one right from the CRC per card.

Steps

Step 1: Write the "five clusters" below on the paper or chalkboard.

- The five clusters
  - ☐ Survival—These cover the right to life and the right to the highest standard of health and medical care.
  - ☐ Protection—These rights describe how and what children should be protected from.
  - ☐ Development—These rights describe the environment and resources needed for children to grow and develop.
  - ☐ Participation—These cover the right of a child to express her/his views in all matters affecting that child.
  - ☐ Implementation—These outline how the implementation, monitoring and reporting on the CRC will take place. They describe the extent and guidelines for mobilizing resources to meet the rights of all children. They describe the framework upon which strategies are to be developed to mobilize all levels of the global community (inter-

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1   This exercise was adapted from the D@dalos Education Server-Human Rights: Tips for Lessons at <http://www.dadalos.org/int/Menschenrechte/Lehrerteil/tipps.htm#Unterrichtsbeispiele>.

2   This exercise was taken from the Child Rights Workshop Participant's Manual from World Vision Canada, which was based on materials from UNICEF Canada.

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national, national, regional, local) to promote the CRC and protect children's rights.

Step 2: Ask the children to get into small groups (depending on the number of children present this could be groups of 3–5). Once in their groups hand out the paper cards to each group. Each group should receive 41 cards, one for each right in the CRC, minus the last 12 rights. If children ask about these rights an easy way to describe them is that they state that adults and governments should work together to ensure that all children's rights are respected.

Step 3: After all of the resources have been distributed, ask the children to 'cluster' each right under its appropriate heading. Once they have finished each group should have five piles of rights, each pile representing one of the clusters mentioned above.

Step 4: Ask the children to choose a representative from their group to share which rights they clustered together and what heading those rights are under. Also ask the representative to explain why they chose to place the rights where they did.

Step 5: Once each group has had the chance to share, ask the entire group of children if they thought that some rights were harder to cluster than others. If so, why? You may want to lead to the topic of the rights being interdependent on each other in order to provoke discussion.

Linking Rights[3]

This activity will help the children link the articles in the Convention to real life events. This activity can be done alone or in small groups.

Resources
- Pens/pencils
- Case study cards (find examples of these at the end of this activity)

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3   This exercise was taken from the Child Rights Workshop Participant's Manual from World Vision Canada, which contained material from UNICEF Canada.

- Paper
- Child-friendly version of the CRC (either large enough for all children to see, or smaller ones for each group)

Steps
Step 1: If working in small groups, ask the children to form their groups. Distribute the pens/pencils, paper and CRC.

Step 2: Read the first case study to the children. You may want to read it twice so that the children gain a better understanding for what happened.

Step 3: Ask the children to determine in their groups (or alone) which articles link to the case study and to write these down on the paper provided.

Step 4: Repeat steps 2 and 3 for all of the case studies.

Step 5: Reflect as a group about which articles were chosen for each case study.

Case Studies
Depending on the age of children participating in this exercise you may want to choose different case studies or change the situations slightly.

Case Study 1: Gabriela
I am 13-years-old. I've been on my own for three years now. I used to beg for money, but now I am working. I am a prostitute. You see, my father killed my mother the day I left home. He was drunk and was hitting her, like he always did, but she fell backwards and slammed her head, and never got up again. All I could do was scream when I saw her, and run. I was afraid he'd kill me too. I hated it when he drank. But when he was sober, I was his little girl.

Case Study 2: Aba
I am 12-years-old and I have been working in a neighbouring country for nine months now. A local businessman came to see my parents and told them that I would be able to get a good salary if they let me leave my home and travel across the border. The work has been very hard—long hours (5am to 11pm), no school, no leisure and no salary.

There is no medicine if we are sick. There is food only once a day. I miss my family very much.

Case Study 3: Aziza

A few months after Aziza turned 15 she found herself in her husband's home, coping with the demand of married life and the challenges of pregnancy. During prenatal check-ups the doctor had warned against a delivery at home, but when the contractions began some three weeks early, Aziza's mother in-law did not heed the warning. When 14 hours passed without any sign of the baby, Aziza was wheeled to the hospital. To save Aziza's life, the doctor performed a Caesarian. Aziza finally delivered an underweight baby girl. Aziza suffered a life-threatening hemorrhage, but pulled through.

Case Study 4: Bariya

I am a 17-year-old girl and I cannot read or write. I was not provided with adequate legal counsel to appeal my sentence. I was accused of having premarital relations. I testified that my pregnancy resulted from rape by three men, but was nonetheless sentenced to 100 lashes with a cane for becoming pregnant outside of marriage. My punishment has been deferred until two weeks after I gave birth.

Case Study 5: Dehia

I am from a small town in North Africa. I am married and live with my husband's family. I was 14-years-old when I gave birth to my daughter who was stillborn. My labour was long and obstructed and the baby's head tore me. I am told that I am lucky to have survived, but I have vesico-rectal fistula (VVF). It is now two years later and my dresses are always soiled with the urine and fecal matter that constantly trickle down my legs. I am now excluded from family matters, and my husband is about to take a second wife.

Case Study 6: Ramon

I began working in a coca processing plant when I turned 11. The owner of the laboratory warned me of the dangers of handling sulphur, but I took this advice for granted as I already had experience working in coca fields. While draining the processed lead, my hands started to sting as if they

had caught fire. I yelled and yelled until I fainted. My friends took me to the health centre and then I was sent to a hospital four hours away. I did not receive treatment as I had no money and I didn't belong to the health care subsidized by the State, which required presentation of an identity document to receive treatment. I never thought birth registration was so important.

Appendix F

Gathering Information Activities

Ranking Rights[1]

This activity will give the children a chance to think about which rights are most important to them, express these rights in their own way and think of ways in which these rights could be more fully implemented within their communities.

Materials

- Blank cards (9 per group)
- A child-friendly version of the Convention on the Rights of a Child, large enough for all the children to see
- Crayons/markers/pencil crayons
- Flip chart

Method

Step 1: Place the child-friendly version of the CRC in a place where all the children will be able to view it.

Step 2: Children should divide into small groups, with each group deciding on nine articles that they feel are the most important to them. Have the children write the number of the articles that they have chosen on the blank cards—one article per card.

Step 3: Once the groups have decided on their articles, instruct them to express those articles in their own way. The children may want to draw a picture to express the right, for example, or they may choose to create a drama or write a short story. All articles can be expressed by showing what it would look like if the rights were either being respected or disrespected.

Step 4: Once the children have finished designing their expression of the articles, ask them to think of specific ways in which the rights could be better respected within their communities and/or country.

Step 5: Have each group present their articles, their group expression of the articles, and their suggestions on how they could be better implemented within their society. Be sure to keep track of what articles are mentioned, how the children view them and what their suggestions are.

Step 6: Follow up this exercise with a discussion and feedback from the children as to why they think certain articles were chosen more than others, the suggestions that were given and so on.

Our Futures[2]

This activity will give the children a chance to think about the future of their communities and what their ideal society would look like.

Materials

- Paper (both average and large sizes)
- Paints/pens/markers
- Materials for a collage, such as coloured paper, beads, shells, magazines and so forth
- Glue

Method

Step 1: To introduce the concept of change, ask the children to think about what their communities looked like a number of years ago, and how the communities have changed—not just in appearance, but in activities as well. Ask the children to think about why the changes were made and who made those decisions.

Step 2: Next, ask the children to brainstorm the changes they would have made, or not made, if they had been consulted.

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1 This exercise was adapted from the D@dalos Education Server—Human Rights: Tips for Lessons at <www.dadalos.org/int/Menschenrechte/Lehrerteil/tipps.htm#Unterrichtsbeispiele>.

2 This exercise was adapted from the HREA's Online Human Rights Education Library at <www.hrea.org/erc/Library/display_doc.php?url=http%3A%2F%2Feycb.coe.int%2Fcompass%2Fen%2Fcontents.html&external=N>.

Step 3: Discuss the link between decisions that are made for other people and children's rights. Ask the children if they think the CRC is a useful framework for making decisions that will affect other people. Why or why not?

Step 4: Ask the children to get into small groups. Distribute the smaller pieces of paper and pens and ask the children, within their groups, to draw or sketch what their ideal community would look like.

To get the children started, ask them questions such as: What rights would be visible within their communities? How would children feel? What would make them feel this way? What resources would they need to accomplish this? What sources of welfare services would be available (dentists, doctors, hospitals)? What type of work would be available? Who would do this work? What kind of education would be available? Who would have access to this education? What would the environment be like?

The children should not be expected to come up with all the solutions, but allow the children to use their imaginations. Let them know it's OK if they aren't sure how a certain emotion or right can be implemented; they should still express their desire to see that right recognized.

Step 5: Once the groups have completed their drafts, distribute the larger pieces of paper and the collage materials. Have the children transfer their ideal communities onto the larger pieces of paper in collage format.

Step 6: Give each group time to present their communities and discuss why they included the things that they did. How does the collage they made differ from their current communities? How is it the same? Have the other children give their feedback and ask questions to the group presenting.

Step 7: Having a debriefing with the children after this activity is very important. You can start by asking the children how they worked together in their groups, how they made their decisions and how the work was carried out. Additional questions can include: Was everyone able to participate within his or her group? Were they able to use their talents? Did the children enjoy being "architects of their future"? Do the children believe their ideas could be implemented someday? Are adults ready to listen to their ideas? Why or why not? What are the children's duties as citizens to help implement their ideas? What would be their rights and responsibilities in their future communities?

Appendix G

Case Studies Reviewed

Angola: Human Rights Watch, 2003, *Forgotten Fighters: Child Soldiers in Angola*, 11 September 2006, <http://www. crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.37/Angola_HRW_ ngo_report.pdf>

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Cambodia: NGO Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1999, *Cambodia NGO Report*, 8 September 2006

Colombia: Coalición contra la vinculación de niños, niñas y jóvenes al conflicto armado en Colombia, 2005, *Alternative Report to the report of the govern- ment of Colombia on the situation of the rights of the child in Colombia*, February 21 2007, <http://www.crin. org/docs/Colombia_COALICO_NGO_Report_EN.pdf>

Denmark: National Council for Children, 2005, *Children's Vision Supplementary Report to Denmark's Third Periodic Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child*, 13 September 2006, <http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/ treaties/crc.40/Denmark_youth_ngo_report.pdf>

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India: National Movement of Working Children, 2003, *The Alternative Report by the National Movement of Working Children, India*, 6 September 2006, <http://www.crin.org/ docs/resources/treaties/crc.35/India_NMWC_ngo_report. doc>

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Kyrgyz Republic: Youth Human Rights Group, 2004, *Alternative NGO Report*, 13 September 2006, <http://www. crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.37/kyrgyzstan_ngo_ report.doc>

Latvia: Latvian Save the Children, 2006, *Children's Report to the United Nations on Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Latvia for Hearing in Geneva in 2006*, 13 September 2006, <http://www.crin.org/docs/ber_ zin_EN_ist.pdf>

Netherlands: Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights, 2002, *Youth Reporting on Children's Rights in the Netherlands*, 8 September 2006, <http://www.crin.org/ docs/resources/treaties/crc.35/Netherlands_youth_ngo_ report.pdf>

Sweden: NGO Network for the Rights of the Child, 2004, *Report by Swedish Children, Young Persons, and Adults to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva 2004*, 8 September 2006, <http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/ treaties/crc.38/Sweden_ngo_report_NC.doc>

Uganda: Human Rights Watch, 2005, *The Less They Know the Better*, 11 September 2006, <www.crin.org/docs/ resources/treaties/crc.40/Uganda_hrw_aids_ngo_ report.pdf>

UK: The Children's Society, 1999, *It's Not Fair, Young People's Reflections on Children's Rights*, 6 September 2006, <http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.31/ Children's_Society.doc>

Glossary

Adolescent: A child over the age of 12 and under the age of 18.

Alternative/Shadow Report: A report submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child by an NGO, civil society organization or a child-led group, to convey their views on progress made by a particular government in fulfilling their, the government's, obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Child: Any person under the age of 18.

Child Delegate: A child who has been selected to present his or her opinions and beliefs to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Child Protection Policy: A set of procedures, principles and guidelines to ensure the safety and well-being of particular children.

Committee on the Rights of the Child: An international body of experts responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by State Parties and making suggestions and issuing recommendations to governments and the General Assembly on ways to meet the Convention's objectives.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): The most universally accepted international human rights treaty in history, ratified by every country except two; contains a broad range of children's economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. By signing the CRC, countries agree to place children centre stage, promoting and protecting their human rights.

Day of General Discussion: Once a year, at its September session, the Committee on the Rights of the Child holds a Day of General Discussion on a provision of the CRC in order to issue more detailed recommendations to governments. Each year, children, NGOs and experts are invited to submit written documents to inform the Committee's one-day debate with stakeholders (UN agencies, Committee members, NGOs, academics, lawyers, children, etc.).

Informed Consent: What is given by participants after learning what they can expect, as well as what is expected of them, regarding their participation.

Optional Protocols: The CRC is supplemented by two additional treaties that strengthen the rights set out in the Convention. They include the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

Ratified: Indicates that a state's governing body has approved the CRC, thereby becoming a party to the treaty (also known as a State Party). The state becomes legally bound to the Convention once it has signed *and* ratified the treaty.

Rapporteur: A member of the Committee of the Rights of the Child whose primary responsibility is to manage the review process of specific countries. The rapporteur's responsibilities include chairing the pre-session, overseeing various reports (including the concluding observations) and collaborating with country officials.

Social Location: A person's personal location within their society based on their collective roles, responsibilities and beliefs.

State Party: A governing body becomes a party to a treaty once they have signed and ratified the treaty, therefore becoming legally bound to it.

State/Periodic Report: The report that States Parties submit to the Committee on the Rights of the Child to document their progress in implementing children's rights.

Steering Committee: A representative group of children who are more involved, and have additional responsibilities in the alternative reporting process than the average child.

Thematic Report: A report submitted by an NGO, civil society organization or child-led group that provides additional information to the government's report on a specific issue.

United Nations (UN): An international organization, comprised of 192 nations, formed in 1945 to support and promote peace, human rights and security.

Young Adult: A person who is over the age of 18 but has not yet fully transitioned into adulthood.

Young Person: An alternative term to "Children."

Youth: An alternative term to "Adolescent."

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Children as change agents: A review of child participation in periodic reporting on the CRC

Introduction

The United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 20 November 1989. The CRC is a comprehensive instrument that sets out rights that define universal principles and norms for the status of children, and it provides for a broad range of children's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.[1]

While the CRC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history,[2] there are significant gaps with regards to mechanisms for enforcing States Parties' compliance. Currently, the primary mechanism for ensuring accountability of the State Parties to uphold their obligations under the CRC is through the periodic reporting process, whereby States Parties monitor the implementation of the CRC within their jurisdiction, and submit periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. States Parties are required to submit their first report two years after ratification of (or accession to) the CRC, and subsequently are required to report periodically every five years.

The reporting procedure is a valuable process, in that it *"provides a forum for a constructive dialogue between a State Party and an independent group of experts to monitor, in a non-adversarial manner, overall compliance with international treaty obligations …."*[3]

Not only is the reporting process an opportunity for dialogue between the Committee and States Parties, but it is also an invaluable tool for civil society to hold States Parties accountable to their obligations to children.

The Committee has actively encouraged and supported the participation of NGOs in monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the CRC.[4]

Moreover, the Committee has also encouraged children's participation in the reporting process. Children have access to the Committee on the Rights of the Child either through adult-led non-governmental organizations that report to the Committee, or through their own child-led organizations.

While children's participation in the reporting process is not yet common practice, there is increasing interest in and support for children's participation, either independently, or through participation in adult-led NGO alternative reports. For instance, some adult-led child rights organizations have taken the initiative to consult with children in the process of preparing shadow/alternative reports. There are also examples where children have taken the lead to organize their own reports and communicate directly with the Committee.[5] Some governments have also taken the initiative to include children;[6] however, for the purposes of this report the focus will be on NGOs and child-led organizations.

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1 *A Guide for Non-Governmental Organizations Reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, revised 1998,* The NGO Group for the Rights of the Child, Geneva.

2 There are 192 States Parties to the CRC; the exceptions are Somalia and the United States of America.

3 *Report of the Secretary General: Comparative summary of existing communications and inquiry procedures and practices under international human rights instruments and under the Charter of the United Nations,* Commission on the Status of Women, 40th Session, E/CN.6/1997/4, 21 January 1997, para 11.

4 While it is common practice for treaty bodies to consult with civil society in the reporting process, the only bodies that have standardized procedures are the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights.

5 The National Working Children's Movement in India and the Children's Group to Send Our Voices to the CRC in Japan are examples of a child-led alternative reports that have been submitted to the CRC.

6 There has been children's participation in the periodic reporting process from the following State Parties: Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, India, UK, Peru, Thailand, Cambodia (Source: Interview with Jaap Doek, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, July 21, 2006).

In an effort to foster a deeper understanding of children's right to participate, the Committee recently devoted significant attention to this topic. In 2006, the Committee devoted the annual Day of General Discussion to the theme of children's right to participate, which resulted in the Committee issuing recommendations[7] and initiating a General Comment to elaborate on the duties of State Parties to implement this right. One of the Committees recommendations from the Day of General Discussion encouraged State Parties and NGOs to include children directly in the monitoring process of the implementation of the CRC.[8]

In response to the Committee's recommendations, World Vision Canada initiated a research project to systematically analyze children's participation in the reporting process, and to develop a set of comprehensive guidelines in order to assist those who wish to facilitate children's participation in the reporting process.[9]

This report is a summary of World Vision Canada's analysis of alternative reports that have included children. This research responds to the gap in information concerning children's involvement in the reporting process, and World Vision hopes that this report will promote and strengthen children's meaningful participation within this area. In addition to the analysis, an outline of each report is also included within this document, along with six brief recommendations for those who wish to include children's participation in future reports.

Systematic Analysis of Alternative Reports

While reviewing numerous NGO reports submitted to the Committee, what was most apparent was the lack of reports written by or with contributions from children or adolescents. For the purposes of this research, World Vision identified 16 reports to be analyzed: Angola, Belgium, Cambodia, Colombia, Denmark, Egypt, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Japan, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Netherlands, Sweden, Uganda, UK. Three of these reports (Belgium, India, Japan) are written by children. These 16 reports were chosen on the basis of a cursory review of the alternative reports that were available electronically,[10] as well as some reports that were specifically recommended by various child participation experts.

The number of children who participated in the reports varied from a few dozen in Uganda to about 9,000 in Latvia. Only 11 of the reports specified the number of children involved (with five of these being approximate numbers), and six reports specified the ages of these children. Consequently these numbers may not be a true reflection of the number of children and ages of those children which participate most often.

The age of the children participating was just as varied, with children as young as 12 months (UK) participating in one report and young adults as old as 20 in another (Belgium). The most common age range was between the ages of 9–17 (Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, Latvia, Netherlands, UK).

The most common method of gathering children to participate was through contacting other organizations that had direct contact with children (Belgium, Latvia, Netherlands, Uganda, UK). This approach was used in order to provide opportunities for children who are often "invisible" or marginalized within their societies to be heard, such as refugees, children with disabilities or children who are not in

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7   Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006, Day of General Discussion on the Right of the Child to be Heard, 24 May 2007, <http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/discussion/Final_Recommendations_after_DGD.doc>.

8   *Day of General Discussion on the Right of the Child to be Heard*, Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006, para 31 and 34.

9   Children as change agents: Guidelines for child participation in periodic reporting on the CRC.

10   The Child Rights Information Network provides an electronic database of alternative reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on its website: <www.crin.org>.

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school. Five of the seven reports that stated how children were gathered to participate in the reporting process used this approach.

Another method, used by three of the organizations (Belgium, Latvia, Netherlands) was the use of different media outlets such as newspapers and the Internet, and in one report (Netherlands) a magazine that was specifically sent to youth facilitation institutions. The organizations posted the information they were interested in learning about (in the form of surveys, questionnaires, etc.) in the various media outlets and invited the children to reply if they were interested. In the reports reviewed, the organizations that publicized their information through a media outlet also had over a thousand children participate in the reporting process.

Other methods that were used included working with children who were already involved with the organization writing the report (India, UK), and contacting student councils (Denmark). Four of the reports (Belgium, Latvia, Netherlands, UK) used a combination of methods to gather the opinions and ideas of children from their country.

The methods used to collect the children's ideas and opinions consisted of four main techniques: surveys/questionnaires, interviews, conferences and workshops. With the exception of three reports (Angola, Sweden, Uganda), all of the reports used a combination of methods. Six of the reports (Angola, Denmark, Japan, Netherlands, Uganda, UK) provided information on their methodology; however, with the exception of three reports (Denmark, Netherlands, UK), this explanation was very brief. One report (Latvia) included the content of their interviews, while another report (UK) included templates of the workshops and activity sheets that were used to collect the information. Owing to the lack of details provided, and the range of differences within those methods that were recorded, it is difficult to do a comparison. A summary of all the reports reviewed, including the methods each organization used, is included in the next section.

In addition to collecting information from children, eight of the 16 reports (Angola, Cambodia, Colombia, Egypt, Ghana, Kyrgyz Republic, Sweden, Uganda) also gathered information from adults. The opinions of adults were gathered through interviews with government officials (Angola, Colombia, Kyrgyz Republic, Uganda), NGOs (Angola, Ghana, Kyrgyz Republic, Sweden, Uganda), representatives from organizations with relevant experience to the report (Ghana, Kyrgyz Republic, Uganda), religious leaders (Angola, Uganda), and individuals with relevant experience to the report (Angola, Cambodia, Egypt, Kyrgyz Republic, Uganda). Additional secondary sources such as NGO reports (Uganda) and peer-reviewed published literature (Uganda) were also used.

In regard to the focus of the reports, five reports (Egypt, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Sweden) focused specifically on responding to what had been said in the State Parties's Report or on the recommendations given by the Committee. The other reports (Angola, Belgium, Cambodia, Colombia, Denmark, Japan, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Netherlands, Uganda, UK) focused on what it meant to be a child in that country, rather than responding specifically to what had been said in previous reports.

Twelve of the reports (Belgium, Cambodia, Colombia, Egypt, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kyrgyz Republic, Netherlands, Sweden, UK) included information regarding all areas of the CRC (all five reports that responded directly to the State's report also included information on all areas of the Convention).

The other six reports focused on issues specifically pertaining to different groups of children, such as working children (India), children of ethnic minorities (Latvia), children with special needs (Latvia), children who had lost parental care (Latvia) and child soldiers (Angola). In addition to presenting the opinions of children from select groups, these six reports also addressed specific issues such as HIV and AIDS (Uganda), the treatment of children by adults (Denmark), school (Denmark, Latvia, Japan), health

(Denmark), participation (Denmark), family (Japan), and general implementation of the Convention (Japan).

A common theme in all reports was to include suggestions as to how children's rights and access to them could be improved. All but three of the reports (Belgium, Japan, Uganda) included suggestions on how to improve the rights of children, and it was clearly stated in eight reports (Cambodia, Denmark, India, Jamaica, Latvia, Netherlands, Sweden, UK) that the suggestions were given by the children.

Case Studies Used for the Systematic Analysis

Below is a synopsis of each of the alternative reports reviewed. These synopses were prepared based on a review of the written reports; interviews were conducted with NGOs that facilitated children's participation in three of the reports (Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands).

Country: Angola
NGO: Human Rights Watch
Date: April 2003
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.37/Angola_HRW_ngo_report.pdf

The adult-written alternative report, submitted in 2003 by Human Rights Watch, focused on the topic of child soldiers. Interviews were conducted with former child soldiers in order to gather their opinions and thoughts. The interviews with male children were conducted in private, while the interviews with the female children took place in a group setting. The report, however, does not mention how the children interviewed were selected to participate.

There were numerous suggestions made as to how the issue of child soldiers and the many dilemmas associated with it could be improved within Angola; but it was not indicated whether these suggestions came from the children. However, throughout the report there are numer-

ous quotes from former child soldiers giving their ideas and opinions to support the details being presented. The facilitators of this report also collected information from government officials, religious leaders, individuals with experience in the area of child soldiers and other NGOs.

Country: Belgium
NGO: UNICEF-What Do You Think?
Date: 2002
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.30/belgium_child_ngo_report_eng.doc

Although adults wrote the periodic report submitted by the UNICEF project "What Do You Think?", children were involved at every stage, from designing the logo, to developing research methods and deciding how the report would be formatted. The "What Do You Think?" project is dedicated to ensuring the children of Belgium have a voice in matters affecting them at all levels of government. However, they have more specifically focused their efforts on preparing alternative reports for the Committee. "What Do You Think?" was originally started by UNICEF in 10 different countries; however, Belgium is the only country where it remains active. Although thousands of children gave their ideas and opinions towards the report, there was a smaller steering committee of approximately 40 children who took the lead. The steering committee was formed by those who responded to the "What Do You Think?" correspondence that was sent out to numerous institutions, asking if they would like to be part of the monitoring process. The children in the steering committee were from various parts of Belgium and from different social locations.

Surveys and short stories were used to collect the ideas of children. The organization published the survey on their website, in newspapers and magazines so that as many children as possible could be included. The "What Do You Think?" team also organized an event call "The March." Held in Brussels, the event was intended to bring children together to meet with politicians and to discuss and share their recommendations and ideas about how chil-

dren's rights in Belgium could be further respected. All of the suggestions collected from this day were incorporated into a report titled "Package of Wishes and Ideas", which was then used to help create the alternative report. The "What Do You Think?" team also sent numerous correspondence to other organizations that had direct contact with children, to ask them if they would like to be involved. These organizations focused on children with disabilities, or who are generally marginalized within their communities.

The process of writing the report began in 1999 and took approximately two years to complete. The steering committee first discussed why they wanted to write the report, as well as what methods they would use to collect the information. After unsuccessfully trying to recruit new members to the steering committee, they decided it would be best to post a survey through the various media outlets.

Summarizing the numerous responses they received proved difficult, as the children who responded were from very diverse backgrounds. To analyze the results, the steering committee entered all the responses into a spreadsheet and tabulated how many times each topic was discussed. The steering committee then gave their ideas and input into the results, and decided which topics should be focused on. Adults assisted in the report by helping to collect additional information where needed, such as contacting specialty organizations, and acting as facilitators for the steering group when developing the views and goals of the project as well as the research methods. However, the report was primarily completed by the children.

One of the challenges that the steering committee encountered was from facilitators at children's institutions. The committee found that the facilitators at the institutions did not think that the children would be able to participate. They were also worried that the suggestions given would reflect badly on them. However, the committee found that sharing success stories of other children who had participated the anxieties of the facilitators were relived.

To overcome the challenge of communicating with children at different capacity levels, the steering committee developed different methodologies (such as debates, brainstorming sessions, songs and collages) to collect information rather than use the typical survey format. University students were also involved in collecting information; these students followed 25 children who had various disabilities for different periods of time, and created a "portrait" of the children's lives.

The report does not include suggestions about how to improve the status of children within Belgium, but it does place significant emphasis on understanding what the CRC is and why it is important. Rather than asking the children to respond directly to the government's report, the children were asked to comment on their social environment and their daily lives. The "What Do You Think?" teams assessment of the children's participation was that it was successful, because the Committee on the Rights of the Child acknowledged what the children had to say, and incorporated it into their concluding observations and recommendations.

Country: Cambodia
NGO: NGO Committee on the Rights of the Child
Date: 1999
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.24/cambodiaNGOreport.pdf

An adult-written alternative report was submitted by the NGO Committee on the Rights of the Child, in consultation with the Children's Committee and international organizations. In order to gather the ideas and opinions of children, the following methods were employed: surveys were distributed, workshops and interviews were conducted, and outside sources were contacted for children's opinions on their rights. Further information was collected through government ministries and institutions. Children were also given the chance to give their feedback on the final report. The report did not include information on how these children were selected to participate, nor was

information given as to how the surveys were conducted or analyzed.

The report focused on standards of health and health services, adoption, birth registration and data collection systems that monitor the implementation of the CRC. The report also included suggestions that children had given on how to improve the implementation of the CRC in their country. The process of collecting the information, conducting the analysis and the writing of the report took approximately a year and a half to complete.

Country: Colombia
NGO: Coalición contra la vinculación de niños, niñas y jóvenes al conflicto armado en Colombia
Date: 2005
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/Colombia_COALICO_NGO_Report_EN.pdf

An adult-written alternative report was submitted in 2005 by *Coalición contra la vinculación de niños, niñas y jóvenes al conflicto armado en Colombia.*[11]

A variety of methods were used to gather the ideas, opinions and recommendations of children. A national meeting with 45 children was held to discuss and analyze the recommendations that had been given by the Committee in the previous report, and to gather the main themes for the current alternative report. Other methods were also used, such as conducting interviews with students and graduates of military schools from around Colombia, as well as by conducting thematic research by and with young people. In addition to collecting information from young people, the facilitators also contacted government officials.

Teaming up with additional organizations within Colombia also assisted in the collection of information. Organizations could participate in one or more of the four following ways: providing relevant information on the implementa-

tion of the recommendations by the Colombian State, participating in the Coordinating Committee, giving feedback on the draft, or adding and disseminating the final report. The alternative report focused on all aspects of the implementation of the CRC.

Country: Denmark
NGO: National Council for Children
Date: January 2005
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.40/Denmark_youth_ngo_report.pdf

The National Council for Children submitted an adult-written alternative report in January 2005. Children's ideas and opinions were gathered through two one-day conferences. These conferences took place in Køge and Horsens on September 22, 2004 and October 7, 2004, and a total of 80 children participated, ranging in age between13–16. The children were chosen to participate because they were part of student councils in their respective areas (Køge or Horsens).

A process of selecting themes was organized in order to gather the children's opinions about what they thought was positive and what could be better for the children of Denmark. The themes were selected from the input of approximately 2,000 young people who participated in the National Council for Children's child panel survey in 2004, asking children how they thought life could be improved for the children of Denmark as well as suggestions from 25 youth and Scout leaders.

The suggested themes were then systematically categorized under relevant headings. The four themes for the conference were as follows: Angry Adults, Schools, Healthy in Denmark, and Who is in Charge Here?

To facilitate the conferences, four adults were given the task of working with a group of young people on one of the four themes. Each adult was familiar with the theme that they would be working with and was used to working with children in the age brackets that were present at the

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11   The Coalition Against the Use of Boys, Girls and Youth in Armed Conflict in Colombia.

conference; they also had knowledge of media production. The children gave their ideas and opinions based on their own personal experience on the subject to which they were assigned. At the end of the conference, each group gave a presentation on their findings, and included clear suggestions for solving the problems identified. These presentations were made available through numerous media outlets such as newspapers, radio shows and TV programs and are available at http://www.boernesyn.dk.

The children were also asked to bring a photo that would represent a situation that could be improved in regards to children's rights in Denmark. Each child was then given the opportunity to present his or her photo. The children decided which photo represented the situation that was most in need of improvement.

Another method used in preparation for the conference was to gather the ideas and opinions of the children through interviews conducted by the children themselves. Prior to the conference, children were asked to interview two of their friends who were not participating in the conference, so that during the conference they could discuss the most "interesting, essential and surprising" information that they gathered from the interviews.

One of the challenges that the National Council for Children faced was completing a follow-up meeting with the children who had participated in the conference. The difficulty was that these children were no longer active in the student councils, as a result, it was difficult to contact them for a follow-up meeting.

The final version of the report is a direct reflection of the children's discussions and presentations. At the conferences, there were four adults who wrote down the main themes and direct quotes so that the report could be based on the children's own words. A journalism student, along with seven children who had participated in the conferences, edited the report together to ensure that the children's ideas were clearly conveyed.

Country: Egypt
NGO: NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child
Date: 2001
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/CRC.26/egypt_ngo_report.pdf

The NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child submitted an adult-written alternative report in 2001. The report involved children through a few different methods. Three workshops were conducted with children to discuss "the most important subjects in the report." The report does not mention, however, how these children were selected, or how "the most important subjects" were determined. A youth conference was also held for children between the ages of 9–18 years, and the report states that the children came from seven governorates and were from diverse social backgrounds. The conference contributed a great deal to the development of the report, and a general meeting was also held for all who participated to help with the revision of the first draft.

Meetings were also held with member organizations to discuss the importance of this report and the monitoring process on the whole, as well as to set up three teams that would be responsible for different aspects of writing and editing the report. These teams were labeled as "cultural activities", "health and environment", and "children in especially difficult circumstances". Research methods and the division of tasks were also discussed.

The report addresses all aspects of the CRC, and gives suggestions about how to overcome the shortcomings of implementing the CRC. The report does not, however, mention if the children that participated gave any of these suggestions.

Country: Ghana
NGO: Ghana Coalition on the Rights of the Child
Date: May 2005
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/Ghana_GNCRC_ngo_report.doc

The Ghana Coalition on the Rights of the Child submitted an adult-written alternative report in May 2005. Children had the opportunity to contribute their ideas to the report through participating in meetings with civil society organizations or in a separate children's forum. Fifty children participated in the children's forum; information was not available on how many children participated in the civil society organization meeting. The children involved were from seven partner organizations, and gave their opinions and ideas at regional meetings, debates on the government's report, and through meetings to get their feedback on the alternative report; information on how these meetings were conducted was not available. While there are recommendations made in the report it is unclear if these recommendations are from the children or from the adults.

Country: India
NGO: National Movement of Working Children
Date: 2003
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.35/India_NMWC_ngo_report.doc

The child-written alternative report was submitted by the National Movement of Working Children in 2003. The children chose to write their own report because they felt that children should be involved in helping to solve the problems they face, and because they were not consulted when the government submitted its report. The children also saw the report as an opportunity to clearly convey their situation to the Committee and to ensure that the government did not incorrectly depict their situation. Lastly, they wanted to use the experience as a learning tool to find out more information about the CRC and how it is being implemented within India.

The National Movement of Working Children is a statewide coalition of working children's organizations. There are nine member organizations with approximately 14,000 children as active members. There is a diverse range of children involved with the coalition: the children work in both the formal and informal sectors; some attend school through the formal system or through NGO programs; they live in both rural and urban areas; come from various ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds; and are all under the age of 18.

The report consisted of four sections:
- the children's present situation as working children (in regards to their realization of the right to protection, provision of services and infrastructure, and the right to participate),
- initiatives that the children had made to improve their situation and recognize their rights,
- their review of the government report, and
- suggestions as to how their rights can be further recognized.

Each member organization held individual discussions within their state about the four areas. Next, 16 representatives from different member organizations met to "fine tune" the report. Adults and NGOs were also consulted regarding the procedure of the reporting process, translation and the logistics of the report. The report does not state how each member organization discussed the four topics, or how long the process took. It was mentioned, however, that one of the challenges the children faced was being able to obtain a copy of the report that the government submitted to the Committee.

Country: Jamaica
NGO: Jamaica Coalition on the Rights of the Child
Date: 1998
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.33/Jamaica_ngo_report.doc

An alternative report was submitted by the Jamaica Coalition on the Rights of the Child in 1998. Although

adults wrote the report, children's ideas were gathered through consultations. In all, there were five workshops, with a total of 126 children participating. The consultations took place in:

- Montego Bay, where 17 children participated,
- Negril, where 29 children participated,
- St. Mary's, where 21 children participated,
- Mandeville, where 27 children participated, and
- Kingston where 32 children participated.

The children involved came from all 14 parishes, ensuring that children from the entire island were represented. Each workshop lasted one day, and gave the children the opportunity to express their views on registration, abuse and abusers, violence, education and health.

This report is divided into three sections: the first section gives an analysis of the government's report; the second comments on the concluding observations of the Committee from the last review; and lastly, recommendations are provided. Unfortunately, it is not specified whether or not these recommendations are from the children. In a few instances, the report specifically includes the children's views on subjects such as abuse and neglect, violence, birth registration and access to education.

Country: Japan
NGO: Children's Group to Send Our Voices to the CRC
Date: January 2004
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.35/japan_children_ngo_report.doc

An alternative report was submitted in January 2004, by the Children's Group to Send Our Voices to the CRC. The report was written by children, and it contains three sections:

- a general introduction and thematic reports,
- basic reports, and
- an analysis of the questionnaire the group distributed in 2003.

Only the first section of the report was translated from Japanese into English, due to financial constraints. To gather children's views and opinions about the CRC, the children distributed a survey and asked children across Japan to write their own reports based on their own personal experiences, and to submit them to the group. A total of 25 basic reports were submitted; based on that information, the children came up with six themes that they then used to write thematic reports. The six topics for the reports were:

- School rules, school uniforms and corporal punishment which I experienced.
- What is the entrance examination for children?
- Students should be the main actors in school!
- Why did the principle neglect our voices?
- Is the family a place for children to be accepted as they are? and
- We do not want to lose any time in realizing the Convention!

One difficulty the children faced was being able to collect accurate information from other children. They found that children were often afraid of hurting the feelings of adults they knew. Overcoming the general view that children should be seen and not heard also posed a problem when trying to encourage children to reflect on their situations.

Country: Kyrgyz Republic
NGO: Youth Human Rights Group
Date: 2004
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.37/kyrgyzstan_ngo_report.doc

The Youth Human Rights Group (a group comprising seven organizations) submitted an adult-written alternative report in 2004. The group employed a variety of methods to collect the views of young people. The report mentions that data was collected through research activities, such as interviews, and by holding round-table discussions where both adults and children were present. The report also mentions that interviews were conducted with children in institutions, but it does not indicate how

the children who participated were gathered together, or how the methods used were implemented. In order to collect additional information, teachers, defense lawyers, international organizations, NGOs and government representatives were also engaged through interviews and round-table discussions.

The report covers all areas of the CRC, but more specifically addresses the changes that have been made since the previous reporting session. There are recommendations given in the report; however, it is not clear whether these recommendations are from the children or from adults.

Country: Latvia
NGO: Save the Children Latvia
Date: 2006
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/ber_zin_EN_ist.pdf

An adult-written report by Save the Children Latvia was submitted in 2006, which included the ideas and opinions of 9,000 children. The report states, that while adults wrote the report, their only tasks were to listen to the children, distribute questionnaires, process and compile data, and provide a brief evaluation of the data. The facilitators of this report stated that the viewpoints presented in the alternative report were quite different from the viewpoints given in the State report.

The report gave particular focus to the ideas and opinions of children at risk, which included children living in poverty, children who have lost parental care, children of ethnic minorities and children with HIV and AIDS. The facilitators gathered the opinions and ideas of these children by distributing questionnaires. The purpose was to solicit children's opinions on their situation using their own personal experience, and the goals were to "realize, summarize, and analyze" children's opinions and suggestions.

The questionnaire given to children who are living in poverty received 1,061 responses. While the questionnaire focused on the perspectives of children living in poverty, it also touched on how these children were treated within the school setting. These responses came from all four

areas of Latvia, with the highest response rate coming from Latgale (the poorest region in the European Union).

The questionnaire for children from ethnic minorities focused on finding out how to reduce and combat problems that were hindering the children's happiness. This survey was also completed in all four regions of Latvia, with the highest percentage of responses coming from Riga, as this is where the majority of ethnic minority children live. Children between the ages of nine-18 participated in the questionnaire, and in total 873 responses were received from 15 different ethnicities.

The questionnaire for children with disabilities was given to children who were enrolled in specialized schools. As a result, the responses only reflect part of the actual circumstances for children living with disabilities, as there are many who are not in schools. Children between the ages of 4–18 years participated in the survey, and results were received from all four areas of Latvia. In total, 178 responses to the questionnaire were received.

The questionnaire distributed to children who had lost parental care was given to 29 institutions, such as orphanages, social care centres and boarding schools. The children who participated were between the ages of 10–17.

Lastly a questionnaire was distributed to local newspapers, children's homes and refugee homes. Participants from a National Debate were also interviewed. The report did not include information about how the schools, institutions or other areas in which the questionnaire were given were chosen to participate. A total of 170 responses were received.

All of the questionnaires were written by volunteers at Save the Children Latvia, and were discussed repeatedly with experts in each of the "at-risk" areas; the results of the questionnaire were summarized and analyzed by experts. The NGO also posted results of the questionnaire on their website at http://www.glabietbernus.lv and http://www.rnc-rtb.lv.

Country: Netherlands
NGO: Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights
Date: 2002
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.35/
Netherlands_youth_ngo_report.pdf

The Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights submitted an adult-written alternative report in 2002. The opinions and suggestions of children were gathered through questionnaires and discussions. Adults developed all of the reporting processes, along with the questionnaires and interviews. In November of 2001, a daily newspaper published a questionnaire titled "Join the Discussion About Your Rights", and the facilitators received 6,600 responses from children between the ages of 8–20.

Discussions were also held in classrooms with a number of primary students between the ages of 8–17. The interviews were intended to be a theoretical approach to the questionnaire, concentrated on subjects such as teasing, discrimination, school and choice of school, their situation at home and sports.

Children who participated in the National Debate in 2001 also completed a questionnaire. Through the assistance of ATD Vierde Wereld (an organization which assists families in financial need), eight children from families in financial need were interviewed. A school located in Utrecht also helped the facilitators, and arranged for 11 children who had mild disabilities, six children with physical disabilities, and two girls with high IQs to be interviewed. The children who participated in this manner were between the ages of 11–19.

To gather the opinions and suggestions of children in children's homes, a questionnaire was published in a magazine called *House*, which is periodically distributed to youth care institutions. This questionnaire focused on topics such as regulations, group leaders, stress, pocket money and social workers. A total of 178 responses were received from children between the ages of 14–17; all of these children were part of youth councils in their homes.

Child refugees were also consulted through the assistance of Amabel (a meeting place for young asylum seekers), a total of 59 interviews took place. The interviewers found it was difficult for these children to open up, in part because of previous negative experiences. They found, however, that showing a video in which other young people were being interviewed, and allowing the children to have a mentor there with them helped the interview to proceed more smoothly. Additionally, a girl who was living in the Netherlands as an illegal immigrant was also interviewed; this was possible because one of the researchers knew the girl before the reporting process started, and a relationship of trust had already been built. The interviews took place at Amabel and in the children's homes. The subjects discussed in the interviews were school, home, health care, information, leisure time, the future and society in general.

To summarize the findings from the questionnaires, the team turned the responses into percentages. From the interviews, the team extracted the problems and suggestions given, and included direct quotes from the children in the report, which also includes suggestions that were given directly by the children.

Country: Sweden
NGO: NGO Network for the Rights of the Child
Date: 2004
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.38/
Sweden_ngo_report_NC.doc

The NGO Network for the Rights of the Child submitted an adult-written alternative report in 2004. The report was compiled using information gathered from hearings held by children between 2000 and 2003; the hearings are conducted once a year, and are a chance for children to ask their ministers how the CRC is being applied in Sweden. Each hearing is documented and then used to make an annual report that is disseminated throughout Sweden. These hearings are also the basis of the alternative reports given to the Committee. The report did not include any specific information about how the hearings are conducted, nor how children are invited to participate in the meetings.

There are two sections to the report: the first highlights the concerns of the steering committee of the NGO Coalition, and the second highlights the concerns that were raised by the children. Although adults wrote both sections, the only role for the adults was to take what the young people had said during the hearing and compile it into a report format. The second section of the report contains quotes from specific questions that children asked during the hearings. This report covers all the areas of the CRC.

Country: Uganda
NGO: Human Rights Watch
Date: 2005
Link: www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.40/ Uganda_hrw_aids_ngo_report.pdf

Human Rights Watch submitted an adult-written alternative report in 2005. A few dozen children were interviewed to gather their opinions; the children were from the regions of Kampala, Mbale, Mbarara, Kabarole and Kasese.

Most of the interviews conducted were in English; translation was provided to those who needed it. The report was focused around the effects of HIV and AIDS and did not include any suggestions from the children; however, it does include quotes from children to support the information being provided.

Children who attended school, as well as those who did not, were interviewed. Various NGOs that provide education and services to child labourers, street children and children involved in the sex trade were contacted in order to reach out-of-school children.

Government representatives from the ministries of health and education, as well as the President and First Lady's Office also assisted in the collection of additional information. Numerous organizations and individuals with experience in the area of HIV and AIDS were also contacted as well. The facilitators also reviewed information from previous NGO reports and peer-reviewed literature.

Country: UK
NGO: The Children's Society
Date: 1999
Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.31/ Children's_Society.doc

The Children's Society submitted an alternative report in 1999. The report was written by adults, but the views of 109 children between the ages of 12 months and 19 years were included, as well as direct quotes. The children who took part were already involved in other Children's Society projects; of this group, 56 per cent were under the age of 12. More girls participated than boys, and the majority of the children lived with their parents most of the time; however, there was a group of young people who were living in a young offenders institution.

Of the 109 children, 20 per cent were from ethnic minorities, and approximately 25 per cent said that they were following a religion; only seven per cent of the children said that they had a disability or a special need; though none had a physical disability or severe learning disability. The Children's Society recognized this shortcoming, and committed to addressing the views of children with disabilities in their next report.

Children were not asked about their economic status; however, most Children's Society projects are aimed at children living in "economically deprived" areas. For this reason, the writers of the report thought it was fair to assume that most of the children had some personal experience with poverty.

To gather the ideas and opinions of the children, discussion groups were organized for those 12-years-of age or older, and activity groups were organized for those under 12. However, these age divisions were not strictly enforced, as some children under 12 decided to participate in the discussion groups.

The discussion groups consisted of smaller groups of approximately six young people, who discussed what it

was like to be young in the UK, their understanding of children's rights, and action on children's rights. A total of 11 discussion groups, each lasting approximately two hours (with refreshment breaks) were held with 69 children. The discussions were tape-recorded with the permission of those involved.

Within various activity groups, children completed worksheets asking them to describe what it was like to be a child in the UK; to create a report on how well adults listen to children; to describe which rights they thought children should have; and to say what they thought could be done to make sure that children are happy, healthy, safe and have new opportunities. Children worked in pairs or in groups of three, with an adult close by to assist if needed. A total of 40 children participated. Each activity lasted for approximately an hour and a half, with time for refreshment breaks.

The children were also invited to send in their ideas and experiences of children's rights to the Children's Society's headquarters. These ideas came in the form of poetry, drawings, music, photographs and collages. Children under the age of five participated by creating collages and playing.

The activities took place across England and Wales, in 14 Children's Society local projects, throughout 1998 and early 1999. The activities were designed with the CRC and the UN Committee's Reporting Guidelines in mind, so that the information gathered would be as useful as possible. All children who participated received a gift certificate as well as a certificate to acknowledge their participation. For the children who were living in the young offenders institution, postal orders were sent, which they could use within the facility.

Before the activities took place, the facilitators provided the children with some additional information about why their participation was needed, and how the information they gave would be used. This included explaining the Children's Society's commitment to ensuring that the Committee had access to all the ideas, suggestions and

experiences that were presented during the activities. The Children's Society also let the children know that the information the children gave would be used by the Society when setting priorities and influencing public policy. As a final point, the Society reminded the children that their participation was completely voluntary, and that they could stop participating at any time.

The Children's Society hired two adults to carry out the discussion and activity groups, with the purpose of finding out how well children thought the CRC was being implemented, and how they thought children's rights could be improved. Although staff from the Society helped with the activity groups with younger children, most of the discussion groups were held in private and away from other adults. All of the group activities, with the exception of the ones in the young offenders institution, took place after school. The group in the young offenders institution took place during a time that was regularly scheduled for educational purposes.

Recommendations

Based on the review and analysis of the aforementioned reports, and interviews conducted with NGOs and other child participation experts, World Vision Canada has compiled the following recommendations to assist other organizations that wish to support children's participation in the periodic reporting process.

1) **Follow a comprehensive and ethical process:** Including children in the alternative reporting process requires careful planning and implementation, and it is critical that a comprehensive and ethical process is followed. All too easily, child participation can become exploitive or tokenistic. Having a set of guidelines or a process to follow can assist those including children in the monitoring and reporting process.[12]

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12   Supra note 7.

2) **Record the process:** As is evident from the 16 reports summarized, children's participation is often not monitored and documented as closely as it could be. Documenting the methodologies and procedures used in the report will assist other organizations that wish to support children's participation in subsequent monitoring and reporting efforts. Including information such as how the children involved were gathered, what steps were taken to solicit their ideas and opinions, child protection policies that were adopted, and methods used to ensure that the children's views were not skewed between the gathering and writing of the report is essential. It is also valuable to record how children's participation impacted the children themselves, as well as how it impacted government's implementation of the CRC.

3) **Use direct quotes:** Including quotations from children within the report adds greater weight and validity to what is being presented. Including what children have said in their own words gives them more ownership of the report.

4) **Don't exclude the very young:** Often the very young are excluded from the participation experience. All children have valuable information to share; the challenge is to find ways for children of all ages and levels of maturity and ability to participate. Methods such as dramas/plays, collages and drawings are just some of the ways to get younger children involved in the reporting process.

5) **Network with others:** When an NGO decides to include children in the alternative reporting process, it is important to find other organizations that interact with children to seek out opportunities to collaborate. By partnering with a number of organizations, it is easier to reach a greater number of children from a wider range of backgrounds. You will also ensure that work is not being duplicated, and make better use of resources.

6) **Value the process and not just the product:** The participation of children within the monitoring and reporting process should be a means of empowering children and youth and contributing to the realization of their rights. Through participation in monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the CRC, children gain the opportunity to learn about their rights and hold their government accountable. Moreover, the process should also provide children with the tools they need to continue contributing to the realization of their own rights and the rights of others. The information gathered in the alternative report, in combination with the Committee's recommendations, can and should be used to promote further child participation. The information presented in the alternative report should be based on what is important to the children, and can lead to other advocacy efforts at the local, national and international levels. For instance, the children who participated in the reporting process may become motivated to see how their ideas and recommendations influenced the Committee's Concluding Observations, and may become involved in advocating that the government take action to implement the Committee's recommendations. Thus, a follow-up meeting with the children is one way to provide the children with additional skills development, and to discuss opportunities for further involvement in advocacy for the implementation of the CRC.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the analysis of various case studies in this report, there are numerous ways to include children within the alternative reporting process on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, the review of several previous alternative reports demonstrates that there is significant room for improvement in enhancing children's participation in the reporting process. While much has been written on the importance of children's participation and

on documenting best practices, these lessons learned have not been utilized to the fullest extent within the reporting process, and many children's voices are still unheard. Additionally, scant attention has been paid to the impact of children's participation on the Committee's Concluding Observations and on the implementation of the CRC at the local and national levels; further research is needed in this area.

Nevertheless, this review has provided some useful information on how children have participated in the reporting process in the past, and has resulted in several recommendations for those that wish to involve children in the future. Based on this review, World Vision Canada has produced draft guidelines, *Children as change agents: Guidelines for participation in periodic reporting on the CRC*, on how to include children within the alternative reporting process. It is World Vision's hope that these guidelines will provide those seeking to promote children's participation within the monitoring and reporting processes with the tools they need to help make the participation more meaningful and effective. Most importantly, it needs to be emphasized that participation is the right of every child, and the onus is on adults—including governments and NGOs—to take the necessary steps to ensure that this right is fulfilled.