

CHILDREN AS INFORMED PARTICIPANTS IN GOVERNANCE

'Until the lions have their own historians, history will always be written by the hunter'

- A South African Proverb -

Children have been the objects of research for centuries. Some of this research has been conducted perfunctorily in very short time spans. Their parameters are often determined by the funding agencies that do not allow for even the basic rigor to be followed arriving at erroneous results. Unfortunately, much of this research has informed the design of policy and action plans of governments and organisations. It is not surprising therefore that many of these policies have little or no effect on the ground realities of children. Some of them also result in programmes and interventions that actually harm children.

However, in the recent past some progressive researchers have provided the space for children to 'participate' more intimately in the research process by giving them the role of information providers, key informants or data collectors. The impact of such research has been more beneficial to children and the resulting policies more constructive.

But by and large children, like all other marginalised groups; the poor, indigenous people, women and youth, have been left out of planning and decision-making processes and treated as mere objects of research and passive recipients of interventions designed by the privileged development elite.

This has led, across the board, to a general disengagement of the marginalised with political processes. At the most such engagement ends with the casting of a ballot during elections. This has resulted in diminished accountability of State and now many democracies the world over have been overtaken by corruption, vested interests and poor governance. The circumventing of democratic processes and the bending of justice systems to suit the needs of a fraudulent State are being interpreted as the failure of democracy that paves the way for the ushering in of Privatisation of basic services and Corporatisation of Governance, the new model of Globalisation advanced by neo-liberal lobbies.

People's participation is critical for maintaining a healthy democracy with egalitarian principles. However, if the socialisation process of individuals does not encourage this and they have no experience of this as children, the 'citizen' does not activate his/her citizenship rights. Children therefore need to experience active participation, where they are taken seriously and are heard. The way to validate such participation for children (so also for adults) is for such participation to be informed, mandated and skilled. The more informed they are the more robust is their participation. The impact and sustainability of participatory processes are determined by the nature, level and quality of participation. Their empowerment is therefore of critical importance.

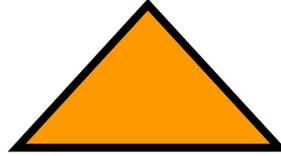
The three essential elements for the empowerment of any marginalised groups are ***Mandate, Information and Resources.***

MANDATE

- *Children's Organisations*
- *Identity*
- *Recognition*

INFORMATION

- *Design the process & methodology*
- *Collection & Analysis*
- *Documentation*
- *Communication or Use*



RESOURCES

- *Human*
- *Financial*
- *Material Infrastructure*

On the one hand, the Mandate validates participation. The Mandate to voice an opinion or negotiate a demand is the consequence of the collective voice of an organisation, movement or platform. It bestows an identity, recognition and strength. On the other hand, Information gives participation a strong foundation for negotiation. Informed participation provides an edge and that includes access to information through research, analysis and innovative communication skills to use the information effectively. If the Mandate and Information bases are secure, the access to resources to enable the process of participation becomes easier.

Like all marginalised groups, children too feel the need to participate in decisions made regarding their lives and children's engagement in research on issues that concern them is necessary for them to participate effectively. It is also their right. Therefore they need to be appropriately introduced to democratic processes and exposed to positive experiences that form their knowledge base. They need to learn processes that enable democratic participation. For a Democracy to be alive and well, we need to invest in our children.

Children are citizens NOW

Children's rights have been a highly prioritised agenda of many international and national policy makers, conventions and dialogues. Children are the focus of most aid agencies. The adult service providers have been vying with each other ensuring the best interest of the child. However, the right to participation is the least realised of all children's rights. Children are seldom consulted and almost never enabled to feed into policies and programmes that are designed for them. Children are ignored in decision-making processes and policy formation. Rather, they are discouraged from making any such attempts.

Children are citizens now and not of tomorrow. They have their own political and social identity. They have distinct issues and needs, which they are instinctively aware of. Their solutions to problems are also unique and distinct to themselves.

Children all over the world, especially child governed organisations, such as the many working children's unions and movements, have been concerned about the ethics of policy formulation that is informed by research, but does not include them as active subjects.

Most children have no access to information that is relevant to their lives. Though they are very eager to understand the various processes that take place all around them and in their own lives, their present sources of information are their peers or mass media. Both these sources provide them with information that is partial, selective or biased. They have a right to access and use comprehensive and accurate information, appropriate to their age, ability and need. However, the adult world either denies such vital information to children or makes the process of accessing information very complex and mysterious beyond their comprehension – thus discouraging them from attempting to access the information they need.

What is research by children?

Research by children is:

- NOT consulting children
- NOT taking the help of children as information providers
- NOT using children as key informers
- NOT children assisting adults in collecting information
- NOT children as information collectors

Research by children is a process where by children themselves identify research needs, set the research framework, design the methodology, develop and administer the tools, consolidate and analyse the findings and use the information to solve their problems.

Who are child research protagonists?

They are child researchers who generate information and use it to advocate and negotiate solutions to their problems. They are activist researchers who work towards improving their situations using a logical and informed process to bring about change.

In 1998, members of Bhima Sangha were interfacing with a data analyst, with regard to helping them tabulating the data of about 8000 households they had collected through a socio-economic survey. The children asked the analyst, 'why are you working as a data analyst'. He said 'I been doing this work over the last 6 years'. 'But why did you start this career?' children queried. He said that while he was doing his Masters in Bombay, the earthquake in Latur, Maharashtra took place; his college was actively involved in doing survey in the affected areas. Since then he was involved in conducting surveys and analysing data. The children were more curious, 'what did you do with the survey data?' 'We gave it to the state government'. 'What did the government do with the data you gave them?' asked the children. 'I don't know; they may have used it to provide houses to the people,' said the gentleman. The children persisted, 'did you go back and check, how many people had got houses, or anything else?' He said 'No!' The children shook their head disapprovingly and narrated to him their entire Survey Story.

In 1998 Bhima Sangha conducted a socio-economic survey of about 8000 households in Karnataka. During the process of the survey itself, children made very strategic interventions, of re-enrolling children to school, applying for ration cards for families without it, applying for widow and old age pension, rescuing children who were engaged in bonded labour etc. They shared their findings with every stakeholder in the community and authorities. Their entire survey exercise led to developing action plans for each of the Gram Panchayats, to address their pressing problems.

Why should Children do their Own Research?

According to Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own

views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being give due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child....”

Children have a right to investigate their situations and respond to them. They understand and present their problems better than anyone else. Children understand their problems best as they experience them in a way that adults don't. They are capable of arriving at solutions most suited to them.

Generally, the intensity of problems for children is much greater than that of adults. For example, when crossing a stream, the water might only go up to an adult's knees, but it will go up to a child's waist. Adults can somehow manage with the problems they have, but it is difficult for children to manage.”

- A child research protagonist

During their study on children's transport, mobility and access problems, India, 2005

Article 13 states, “The child shall have the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice...”

“We missed our playtime, free time and even marriage celebrations! But, we are very proud that we were able to do something for our village. We have identified our problems, we know the solutions and also how to get them solved.....”

A Child Research Protagonist, Transport Study, India, 2005

Children have the right to seek, receive and impart information that is appropriate to their age, ability and their need. Regrettably we adults decide what information children should have and should not have. We do not give any leeway for children to participate in deciding the kind of information that they require. We continue to take children for granted by taking important decisions on their behalf, ignoring this fundamental right.

In our experience of facilitating research by children we have found that children are capable of conducting their own research. Children can assess their research needs, design research framework, develop/adapt appropriate methodology, design tools and equip themselves with research skills. They are able to build rapport with communities, publicise their research, identify key information providers and administer their research tools. They can collect, triangulate, consolidate, analyse and update information that is of concern to them. Children are thoroughly committed and honest to the entire process of research. If the process is facilitated well, children ensure that the information is complete and correct. We have observed that Children are often better researchers than 'professional researchers' in their own right.

“Children have pointed out very specific problems and have also suggested specific solutions. All their points have been backed with detailed statistics. Most of the adult Panchayats or the concerned departments do not have such in depth information. I highly appreciate the fact that children first conducted surveys and held discussions among themselves before presenting the points here.”

(Vinay Kumar Sorake, Member of Parliament, India, at the first ever Children's Grama Sabha in India 2004)

Children are accountable and responsible to the stakeholders in their community. They ensure that the rights of the community are not violated during the process of the research. They develop their own ethical codes, which they strictly abide by. Child research protagonists ensure that they share the information they collect with various stakeholders in the community and arrive at appropriate strategies to deal with the problems by consulting with them. They put to best use the information they collect, so that problems that they and their communities face are solved.

The Process of Children doing their own Research

The Concerned for Working Children (CWC) has facilitated working children and underprivileged school children in the age group of 6 to 18 to design and conduct their own research on issues that they have identified, through their needs assessments. Their subsequent ability to use this information with the local governments to negotiate solutions and the non-confrontative way of dealing with adults in positions of power, converting these dealings into 'win win' situations have been astounding.

These experiences have been both exhilarating and educative for us. The precision and dedication with which these children have followed the steps of research, the honesty they have exhibited and their need for seeking the truth has been amazing. They showed us that they were capable of objectivity. That they had the ability to take a few steps back and review their work, separating reliable data from the unreliable. They had the willingness to look at multiple sources of information in order to cross check and verify their findings. They had the urgency to act on the information they had gathered and eagerness to share the information with their peers and community.

During a study conducted by Bhima Sangha in 1998, the child researchers reviewed and distinguished between reliable and unreliable data. For example, children classified the information they collected as:

<u>Accurate Information</u>	<u>Slightly Doubtful Information</u>	<u>Very Doubtful Information</u>
- Housing condition	- Income of the family	- Chronic diseases
- Primary & secondary occupation	- Amount of land owned	- Assets owned by the rich
- Assets owned by poor	- Age of teenage girl children	- Loans taken by families
- Land owned by poor households	- Expenditure pattern	- Expenditure on alcohol ¹

The children were able to make such analysis based on their observation and understanding, especially since the researchers were from the same locality. They were able to solve this problem to a large extent by consulting multiple sources, including the local revenue office, the government fair price shop, land registration office, local alcohol shop, bank, etc. However, they were not absolutely sure of some information.¹

Children are not less intelligent than adults, they are only less informed and experienced than us. They have proved that they are capable of abstraction, verification, rigor and meticulous work; objectivity and rational or logical thinking.

However, for children to successfully engage in research, the process and 'rules' need to be explained clearly and the process made engaging and simple. Children are capable of understanding complexities; so one needs to be careful not to water down the rigor of the process or make the process simplistic, but just simplified.

¹ Lolichen P.J., Children and their own Research: A Process Document, The Concerned for Working Children, India, 2002

Keeping in mind that one would be dealing with children of different ages and ability, the methods used need to be adapted to their needs, enabling all children to participate. For example the questionnaires and data collection sheets that the children developed during a recent study on their transport and mobility problems were designed to have graphic representations of the questions allowing illiterate children or even the very young to participate. Children have also shown us their ability to create their own very innovative tools and methods for data collection. Below are examples of some of the tools developed:

1. *Mapping tool – flash cards, which consisted of 5 different sets of illustrated cards, each set representing different indicators, such as the individual respondent, different resources the respondent accesses, mode of transport respondent uses, obstacles/hindrances in accessing the resource and seasons cards. Using these cards the respondent discussed and documented various mobility and access problems that he/she faced and possible solutions.*
2. *The plotting tool – paper scroll, an observation mapping tool, which consisted long scrollable sheet of paper. Children developed a list of indicators to be observed as they walked along a particular route, which they frequented. The children also assigned symbols for the indicators. Examples of indicators were footbridge, potholes, narrow path, thickly forested areas, lonely areas, shady trees, open wells along the roadside, ups and downs, streams, etc. As they walked they sketched the road they walked and mapped, if any of the indicators on their checklist appeared on their way.*
3. *Frequency tool - Traffic counts: Child researchers dressed themselves like traffic inspectors, stood at traffic junctions that children frequent, with weighing scales and data sheets, to take a count and collect details of children who carry loads. In this case too they used illustrated checklist to collect the information from their respondents².*

For child researchers the process of research is as, if not more, empowering than the outcome of the research itself.

In fact this is so for research by any marginalised group.

² These tools were developed and used by children during their study on their Transport, Access and Mobility problems, facilitated by CWC, India in 2005

Ghanaian children getting organised and doing their own research

We are children from Breman Asikuma Secondary School, Asikuma, Mankesim, Ghana. We attended a five-day workshop conducted by CWC, Bangalore, India, who helped us to do research by ourselves, on our transport and accessibility problems, in 2005. During the workshop, we learned the importance of us having information about our problems. We also learned about various methods of research and designing tools to do the research. Subsequently we conducted the research in the villages that surround our school. Most of us come from these villages. Some of us stay in the boarding. We collected information from school going and working children. The findings from the study were many, some of which surprised us as well. We discussed the findings of the study with our cabinet minister for transport, and other stakeholders during a seminar, trying to find solutions to the issues that we identified. We have already solved some of the smaller problems, which we ourselves could solve.

After we returned to our school from the workshop and the research, we discussed our research and all that we learned with our friends. This led to the forming of a child rights club. We have named our club 'Children's Rights Research Club'. We have over 30 members as of now. Our aim is to identify children's problems and find ways of solving them. We have developed certain rules and regulations for the club and criteria for membership. We meet together at least once a week.

We identified that some children in our boarding school did not eat in the dining hall and a lot of food was wasted. So we trained our other club members in some of the research methods that we learned and prepared appropriate tools for conducting focus group discussions and interviews. We also observed a group of children at the dining hall for a week. We conducted the study and presented the findings to the school management. Our study showed that older girls, who had boy friends, took them out to eat; some richer children who had pocket money would buy snacks from outside. Since many of the richer children were not keen about eating dinner, the authorities were not maintaining the quality of food provided. So poorer children suffered. When this was brought to the notice of the school authorities, necessary actions were taken to rectify the problem.

We want these clubs to grow both within the school and outside to the neighbouring villages.

*Kate, Ibrahim, Patience & Sebastian
Breman Asikuma Secondary School, Asikuma, Mankesim, Ghana, 2005*

Children as Informed Protagonists

Children are the best advocates for their own rights, for they know their situation best. They are able to advocate using win-win strategies. Their advocacy strategies are not party or class based; they are not manipulative, exploitative or discriminatory. Their strategies are backed by substantial information. Children do not spare any effort to advocate their cause.

Research and resulting advocacy by children has successfully enabled the active participation of children in democratic processes as informed citizens. Children we work with have been able to influence decisions at various levels, from the lowest social unit to the highest national/international arenas of governance.

Over the past few years, with a view to strengthen the process of decentralisation, the Government of India has been attempting to invigorate the participation of civil society in decision-making processes with regard to policy and governance. However, as there was little effort and commitment on the part of State, this vision had not been realised. Although the state of Karnataka demonstrated some interest, there has been no concrete step towards achieving this goal. Despite this, in 2004, a unique revolution took place in Karnataka state: for the first time in history, children not only participated, but also led the way for adults to participate, in the 10th National Five-Year planning process, in all 56 Gram Panchayats of

Kundapur Taluk, Udupi district. Children in each village and ward gathered together, consulted and discussed, with statistical information to base their case, prepared their five-year plan and presented to the Gram Panchayat. This has been incorporated into the 10th National Five year plans and is being implemented on a priority basis.

*This entire process was monumental because it not only rejuvenated people's eagerness to become involved in democratic processes; it was made possible through children's initiatives. For the first time, children had turned the traditional 'top- down' power structure on its axis. They demonstrated that they were fully capable of actively participating in decision- making processes and involving in civil society processes.*³

Children find that information is the powerful tool in their hands. They argue their case with facts and figures so that they are able to offer convincing arguments and to win over the case. Their advocacy is not emotional pleading or irrational orations. Their arguments and demands are backed by evidence-based facts.

"Information allows us to negotiate"

"It is only possible to solve our problems by sharing them with others, and seeking their suggestions."

- *Child research protagonists during their study on children's transport, mobility and access problems, April, 2005*

Children recognise the power of information; but when information concerning them is 'owned' and 'used' by others, they feel the sting of being rendered powerless to intervene and negotiate on their own behalf.

Children are their own best advocates. However, they should not be manipulated either by the facilitating adults or by the power lobby, to meet their own selfish ends. Children are vulnerable to manipulation to exploitation. Utmost care must be exercised by the most well-meaning adults, when they intervene in processes related to children.

Information is power. Information management by children enables them to share information among their own peer groups. It helps them to interact effectively. It provides them the basis to negotiate situations powerfully; it helps them to contribute significantly to consultations as well as advocate for their rights with various stakeholders. This entire process empowers them to take informed decisions, participate in governance, and thus take charge of their lives.

Children's participation in governance is not an end in itself, but a process that empowers them to become advocates for social change and transformation.

ETHICAL ISSUES FOR CHILD RESEARCH PROTAGONISTS

Rights:

□ Ownership of the process and outcome

- Children are very capable of setting the agenda, designing processes and implementing the research. Children should have absolute control over the research process.

³ A Unique Revolution: Children lead the way to decentralisation and civil society participation, The Concerned for Working Children, Bangalore, 2004

- The children who collect/generate information have complete ownership over that information. They can decide what to do with it. Their level of empowerment will determine how they will put it to use. The adult facilitators or any one else should take the permission of children to use any information generated by children.
- The information collected should be shared with the entire children's organisation, other children and the community at large.
- The drawing of conclusions from the study should be done in consultation with the entire children's organisation and the community affected, so that also their views are appropriately considered.
- In this way solutions arrived at will have a larger community mandate and accountability.
- It is preferable that children conduct research in their own socio-cultural and economic milieu. This will help them to collect reliable data. They will be more readily accepted and their comfort levels in such milieu will be high.
- **Right to protection**
 - Children researchers and other participating children must be protected from any harmful risks during the research; in case where such risky situations exist, the effect on children ought to be minimised.
 - Children must have access to supportive structures in case of any emotional or psychological disturbance during or after the research process.
- **Right to information**
 - The children who decide to be researchers should be well informed about the process and all it involves. The decision whether or not to participate in the research should be taken by the children themselves.
 - Children should be enabled to access appropriate information and equip themselves with adequate skills to undertake the research.
 - The information made accessible should be correct, complete, age-appropriate and need-based. Such information ought to be available to them in a child-friendly, understandable and interesting manner.

Responsibilities

- **Protection and confidentiality**
 - The researchers have the responsibility to maintain confidentiality of the information provided as well as about the background of the respondent.
 - As respondents, children and other respondents have the right to refuse to respond to certain questions or not give information regarding some issues if they wish to do so.
- **Consent**
 - The young researcher should take informed consent of the children and others who participate in the research as respondents. Children should clearly and completely understand all the implications of participating in the research.
 - Children should intimate their parents/guardian of their participation in conducting the research and provide them with complete information about the process. However, in rare cases, children may have to keep such information concealed from their parents/guardians to ensure the objectivity of the process (Eg. in some cases of domestic violence, abuse, etc.).
- **Honesty and transparency**

- The child researchers should raise the expectation of the community, unless they are absolutely sure of fulfilling them.
 - The community should be informed about the research in its entirety and their support and cooperation should be sought.
 - The information should be shared with the respondents and the rest of the community and conclusions and action plan should be drawn in consultation with them.
- **Objectivity**
- The methodology and the tools that children use to do their research should stand scientific scrutiny. The logic and principles of scientific research must be adapted by the children in the methodology and the process of the research to ensure the quality of the research.
 - They must verify the information they collect through multiple sources.
 - Information collected must be triangulated to ensure veracity of the information.
- **Use**
- Children engage themselves in conducting research because they have a problem that they need to solve. They will explore various ways to solve their problems using the information collected. However, adults should not manipulate to keep the information 'dead', rather support them to identify and explore ways of using them to solve their problems.
- **Accountability**
- The child researchers who conduct the research are accountable to those children who provide them with information. Prior to the research, they should clearly explain the purpose of the research to all information providers. The findings of the study have to be presented to all the information providers and the conclusions and action plans must be drawn together with them.
 - The children who participate, as researchers should be members of children's organisations or collectives so that they can jointly sustain the process of solving their problems as well as pursuing the process set in motion. If they do not have their own organisation, they should be facilitated to form one. If not, individual children, however committed and empowered, find it very difficult to sustain the process single-handed.
 - The members of children's organisation who participate in conducting the research should be representatives of their organisation. They should be selected on the basis of criteria set by the children themselves. This ensures that the researchers are accountable to their organisation and to the research process.
 - The children participating in the research should be facilitated to draw up a set of ground rules, which they strictly abide.

Adults as Facilitators

Adults have a very strategic role to play in the process of children doing their own research. Their role is of a facilitator, enabling the research. They should play a very balanced role, not taking over the research, not interfering or controlling the process. The processes initiated by children should be supported by adults to bring them to a logical conclusion.

Children should be facilitated to design their own research, based on their needs. Adults should not impose research agenda on them, nor should they manipulate or take over research initiated by children.

The adults must deconstruct research to children in such a way that children are able to grasp the scientific and complex aspects of research in simple (not simplistic) and child-friendly manner. Children should be introduced and oriented to various research methodologies so that they can adapt any and put them to use. They should be supported to learn adequately about various research methods and processes.

Adults must enable children to design methodology for their research. Children are capable of understanding the methodology that suits them most. They may either adapt any existing conventional methodology or they may design new methodology that is most appropriate for them. Children should be facilitated to develop appropriate tools. Children develop tools that are most convenient for them, keeping in mind the kind of information that needs to be collected.

Adults should deconstruct the complex myth of research into processes that are understandable and doable by children. Adults have the responsibility of helping children translate their 'desire' to use information as a tool for negotiation, into a 'process' of rigor and validity. Children should be helped to understand the intricacies of analysis of the findings and methods of drawing conclusions. They should be helped to equip themselves with skills of drawing conclusions scientifically. The children draw their own conclusions from the information they collect, which are quite often different from that of the adults. Adults should make sure that they do not interfere or influence the process of children drawing their own conclusions, in the way they understand their information.

One of the critical roles that the adults have to play is of creating appropriate environment for children to conduct their own research. Children should feel a sense of trust and confidence, both among themselves and in the process that they set in motion. Children require an environment where they can question everything and tear apart existing notions in order to re-examine them. Such an enabling environment should be democratic and transparent, where children feel and experience equality and mutual trust. It should be free of any kind of discrimination and bias. The environment should be such that it encourages/motivates the participation of children and enables their learning and growth. The children should also have an environment that is safe for them mentally and physically. It should give them a sense of safety and protection. While the whole process of research should be serious and responsible, it should also be enjoyable for the young researchers.

"(This was) the first instance where there was child participation in planning and decision-making. There was no gender inequality, no caste discrimination, and children were given a lot of respect. We were very happy in this environment."

(A child research protagonist, Children's Study on their Transport, Mobility & Access, India, 2005)

Children ensure that their information is shared among all the concerned parties. One of the most important roles adults can play here is to facilitate children to effectively interface with appropriate decision makers and decision-making structures, so that children can advocate with them to solve their problems.

ETHICAL ISSUES FOR ADULT FACILITATORS

- ❑ Adults should never impose research themes or research methodologies on children. Children themselves should recognise and identify the need for the research to meet a specified purpose prior to their study. If not, research by children should not be attempted at all. It certainly should not be imposed on children.
- ❑ However, adults do have a specific and strategic role to play as facilitators of the process. It is very important for us adults to recognise when to make observations and offer guidance – and when not to. Our experience clearly shows that the primary role of adults is to enable children with information and skills.
- ❑ Enabling children's participation does not mean letting go of the entire process and leaving children to fend for themselves. This is a grey area where children determine their frameworks and spaces. In a healthy adult-child partnership, there is possibility for negotiation between them and through discussions they arrive at agreements of what works best for the partnership – in terms of each other's roles and responsibilities. The more space children claim and occupy, their responsibilities increase proportionately. The parameters of this partnership are dynamic and vary from situation to situation. They may also vary within the same situation – based on the experiences and maturity levels of the individuals/organisations involved.
- ❑ Hence the facilitators must keep in mind not to rush the research; consciously create enough space for children and move in sync with the children's pace.
- ❑ The issue that children conduct research on should be chosen by them as a result of their needs assessment. Among the issues they identify, they shall short list and prioritise for their further in depth study.
- ❑ The resulting information is the property of the children and shall not be used by others without their informed permission
- ❑ The details of the research and the possible outcomes should be shared with the respondents and their community
- ❑ One of the most important roles adults can play here is to facilitate children to effectively interface with appropriate decision makers and decision-making structures.
- ❑ Adult facilitators should ensure that children who decide to be researchers are well informed about the process and all that it involves. The decision whether or not to participate in the research should be taken by the children themselves. Further, children themselves should decide on the criteria for choosing the child researchers and adults should not interfere with it.
- ❑ Demystifying the research process and transferring the methods and tools to children in an objective open-ended way that empowers children to adapt, develop and design tools and methods of their own to suit their situations is important. However, adult facilitators should ensure, through dialogue with the children, that the rigor of the research should not be compromised at any stage.
- ❑ The methods and tools used in the research should be child friendly and easily understandable to children and their community members. The tools used could be illustrated and be pictorial so that unfamiliarity with the written words is not a hindrance for comprehension.
- ❑ The adult facilitators should not raise the expectation of the children regarding the outcomes of the research or of the community; unless they are absolutely sure of fulfilling them and this should be explained to the child researchers as well.
- ❑ The adult facilitators should always consider and compensate where necessary or required the risks and costs children may face due to their involvement in the

research such as shortage of time, pressures at home and school, loss of wages, reduced hours to play, loss of holidays, etc.

- ❑ The adult facilitators must ensure that children have supportive structures in case of any emotional or psychological disturbance.
- ❑ The adult facilitators must ensure that children are not exposed to any harmful risks during the research; in case where such risky situations, efforts should be made to minimise its effect on the children.
- ❑ Active involvement of one or more adult organisations that are committed to promote and facilitate children's participation can enhance the impact of research by children.

"I did not expect such a marvellous experience and it was totally different from what I thought before coming here. The kids sitting here have been marvellous. They have taught me things that I have never known before. I have been doing research in transport for the last 24 years and I have learned more in these 5 days than those 24 years, from you children. I have also realised that I had ignored a very significant group of people in all my research that is children. The staff here have been excellent. I am carrying back to Ghana very memorable ideas. Something interesting is going on here that we have not seen before – children planning their own life. I will leave a promise with you that I will do my best to uphold what you are doing here in Ghana as well, which some day you could come and see."

Prof. Albert Abane, Head of the department of Geography, Tourism and Transport, University of Cape Coast, 2005(during a Research Design Training Workshop for Children, on their Transport, Mobility and Access Study, Karnataka, India)

If Adults are Initiating the Process

- ❑ Children identified to do the research should be representatives of a child led/governed organisation
- ❑ The issue that children conduct research on should be chosen by them as a result of their needs assessment. Among the issues they identify, they shall short list and prioritise for their further in depth study.
- ❑ The resulting information is the property of the children and shall not be used by others without their informed permission
- ❑ The details of the research and the possible outcomes should be shared with the respondents and their community
- ❑ If adults feel the need to conduct research on an issue related to children, they should do that themselves and take responsibility for the study and to translate that into action. They should still share the findings with the children and ensure that the decisions are taken in partnership with the children.

Conclusion

Children's participation in research and social planning is not an end in itself, but rather it a process that continuously needs to be re-evaluated, altered and evolved according to their needs. The research and advocacy by children has successfully enabled active participation of children in democratic processes. They are leading the way to making the governments accountable. Children have started a revolution for change and the adult world is yet to catch up with them and respond adequately.