

Involving Children in National Plans of Action for Children

"Participating in the preparation of NPAs gives us [children] satisfaction that we are considered as citizens, that children are recognized as an important tool in realizing our rights".

Background

The UN General Assembly Special Session on Children was held between May 8-10th 2002. The purpose of the Special Session was to review how successful the world had been in achieving the goals of the 1990 World Summit for Children and to agree a new plan of action for the next 10 years.

Over 7000 people in total attended the Special Session, including more than 600 children. Almost 300 of the official government delegates who attended were under 18 years of age, while the remainder attended as NGO delegates. During the Special Session children were involved in the proceedings as speakers, discussants, side event presenters and chairs of meetings.

Over 400 of these boys and girls, coming from 154 countries and aged from 8 to 18 years, also took part in a three-day Children's Forum. This was a meeting that was held just before the Special Session to discuss children's own response to Special Session agenda. The children involved produced their own statement at the end of the Forum, 'A World Fit For Us'.

One of the issues highlighted by those involved in the Children's Forum was the need for children and young people to be fully involved in the follow-up after the Special Session. The same view had also been expressed by the thousands of children involved in the many national and regional events that had occurred in preparation for the Special Session.

In order to explore these views, Save the Children and its partners organised a consultation before the Special Session with over 4000 children and young people in 14 countries. One of the main ways in which they expressed an interest in being involved in the follow-up was in the development and implementation of their country's National Plan of Action for children. All countries participating in the Special Session agreed to prepare National Plans of Action [NPAs] after the Special Session or to integrate the achievement of the Special Session goals

into their other development plans, such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers [PRSPs]

Purpose of the NPA Briefing

"We must be involved from the beginning! In the entire process!"

On the basis of the consultation mentioned above, Save the Children has already produced a number of documents including separate guidelines for children, governments and civil society organizations on how children can be involved in NPA processes¹. The Global Movement for Children has also published Save the Children's 'child-friendly' version of 'A World Fit for Children' which is the global Plan of Action agreed at the Special Session². All these documents are available in English, French and Spanish.

Over the past year a number of countries have already begun to involve children in the development of their National Plans of Action. This NPA Briefing is being produced to share information and ideas on how boys and girls are being involved in the process in individual countries. It is hoped that this briefing will help children and others to learn from each other and encourage them to share their experiences. While this first issue of the NPA Briefing is dedicated to the process of children's involvement in the development of National Plans of Action, it is hoped that later issues will also provide information on children's involvement in the monitoring and implementation of the NPAs.

This issue of the briefing shares experiences from Bangladesh, Bolivia, Canada, Romania and Tajikistan. If you have questions about any of the country contributions, please contact the person who has submitted the information. Their names and email addresses are provided for your information. After the country case studies, the final part of the Briefing considers some of the 'lessons learned' so far from these and other experiences.

Country Case Studies

Bangladesh³

Local and national NGOs met in August 2002 and March 2003 to look at issues and opportunities for collaboration in the NPA process in Bangladesh. These NGOs have formed a temporary and informal working group to build networks with wider groups of children, NGOs, the Government and civil society, in order to give the NPA process a momentum in Bangladesh.

As part of this process, NGOs will assist with divisional / sub national consultations with children and civil society about their views on issues that should be the focus in the NPA and ways in which they can be part of the process. Input from other consultations with children will also be taken into account including, for example, consultations on an NPA on abuse and exploitation, hazardous work, violence and Child Rights Week.

The GMC/Say Yes partners in Bangladesh⁴ worked together in October/November 2002 to draft a proposal on the NPA process in Bangladesh. During this process the need was stressed for the transparent and meaningful participation of children and wider civil society throughout the NPA process. Both UNICEF and Save the Children are in dialogue with the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs to take this further.

As part of the follow-up to these meetings, a number of steps have been taken to support children's involvement in the NPA process in Bangladesh:

Young people as facilitators

A series of workshops aimed at developing the facilitation skills of targeted children and young people between the ages of 13-17 years are being planned. These aim to provide young facilitators with the opportunity to practice facilitating in any situation on their own initiative. The initial workshops are being pre-tested⁵ with the children involved with Save the Children's NPA Task Group with the aim of enabling them to be involved in the divisional/sub national consultations in Bangladesh. 20 children and 3 adult facilitators attended the first training. Children from outside Dhaka could not attend that workshop but were prioritized for the second workshop held in early April. Children and young people themselves will lead the process as facilitators, with adult facilitators as support.

Creation of a child friendly information pack

A 'child friendly' information pack in Bangla has been prepared, including the Save the Children

guidelines for consultations on the NPA which have been adapted to the local needs.

Children-Adult Dialogue

A core group of children from NGOs in Save the Children's partner network had two round table discussions in March 2003, mainly to improve the level of communication between children and adults working with different agencies. The children have met several times since the Special Session, but the adult group has met less frequently. Everyone agreed to decide on the frequency of meetings, ways to keep each other informed of decisions from meetings, decision-making processes on representation from organizations, resource commitments from agencies and how to sustain the involvement of children over a prolonged period of time.

Sub-national / Divisional Consultations

To ensure that as wide a group of children are consulted, the core group of children working with Save the Children are going to the rural areas to talk to other children about their issues, needs and hopes. In the process they have been developing their own networks and contacts across the country.

There will be children's consultations in 8 regions around the country.

Prothom Alo Roundtable

Prothom Alo⁵, Save the Children and one of the 'Say Yes' partners in Bangladesh jointly organized a Roundtable called 'Children's Rights in National Policy' with a selected group of children, policy makers and civil society. This was an interesting discussion among ministers and representatives from the Ministry of Planning, General Secretaries from the ruling party [the BNP] and the opposition party Awami League, representatives from the private sector, the media, civil society, NGOs and children.

Among the public comments and commitments the next day was the headline "Children's Issues Are Too Important To Be Hijacked By Party Politics".

The newspaper published the report from the meeting on March 8th in a two-page supplement. Save the Children will publish a booklet in Bangla and English from the supplement. Other information sheets from the roundtable will be used from advocacy.

TV Spots

As a preparatory initiative to raise awareness on children's participation in policy and decision-making, Save the Children produced 3 TV 'spots' of 1-minute duration. These spots were focused on: the importance of a NPA for children; children's right to participate in national policy making and implementation; and 'Say Yes for Children'.



Bolivia⁷

The Bolivian Alliance for Boys and Girls [ABNA] is the name for the Global Movement for Children in Bolivia. The ABNA has been mobilized for the past 2 years involving 2,000 boys and girls, representing over 70 child led organizations, approximately 30 civil society organizations and the government. It aims to promote awareness, gather public voices and build support for 'A World Fit for Children'. In the 'Decalogue' written by the children and presented at the UN Special Session on Children they noted that:

"The children of Bolivia claim their right to be born, to have their rights respected, to an education, health, to be protected, to preserve the family, to an identity, to freedom of speech, to not be discriminated against and to a family..."

The participation of children in all stages of the process to date has strengthened their organizations and helped them gain confidence that what they have to say will be heard and taken into account. It has also raised the awareness of the general public of their potential. As a result of this process, the Government of Bolivia, through the Vice-Ministry of Children's Affairs, agreed to include representatives of child led organizations in the drafting of child related policies and the preparation of its 5-year strategic plan.

Children in Bolivia will be meeting to plan the next steps of their involvement in the preparation of the National Plan of Action, and sharing their recommendations with both local governments and the Government of Bolivia.

One of the areas already being addressed is the issue of representation in the Bolivian Alliance for Boys and Girls. Children who are members of child led organizations in urban areas are already well represented in the Alliance. Save the Children is now supporting the involvement of rural and working children in this process. This needs to be done while at the same time ensuring a legitimate representation of the children. Another concern has been coordinating with the children to ensure they are responding to their own expectations rather than those of the adults with whom they are working.

With the current level of political instability within Bolivia, the drafting of the National Plan of Action has been postponed. It is very much hoped that once political stability returns, the Vice-Ministry of Children's Affairs will be ratified as the competent authority and that children will continue to play the role they have played to this day.

Canada⁸

In August 2002, five young people that had been members of the Canadian Government's delegation to the 2002 UN Special Session on Children met in the federal capital, Ottawa. The meeting was held to discuss the next steps required in seeing how the commitments made at the Special Session could be fulfilled in Canada and specifically, ways of ensuring that Canadian young people play a meaningful role in the process.

The young people agreed that the establishment of a resource team would be very important to facilitate and organise the involvement of more young people in the initial planning stages for the National Plan of Action. As a result, the Child Engagement Experts Resource Team [CEERT] was created in order to educate, enable and ensure that young people are meaningfully involved in developing Canada's National Plan of Action and its implementation and monitoring. CEERT aims to ensure that young people, including marginalized young people, have a voice in the Plan of Action processes. CEERT works with a vision of creating a long lasting sustainable network of young people, with a long-term goal of promoting children's participation.

Children, NGOs and Government Working Together

CEERT was created in August 2002 and the full list of participants was confirmed by October 2002, including Aboriginal young people, children in care and young people with disabilities. The young people involved in CEERT range in age from 14 to 18 years of age.

The CEERT steering committee⁹ met in early February 2003 to discuss the most recent developments in the NPA planning process. It was an important opportunity for young people to meet and build on efforts to ensure their meaningful involvement in the development of Canada's National Plan of Action and to feed into planning processes that were already underway. During this meeting CEERT had the opportunity to learn more about recent planning and developments and to provide suggestions regarding future developments. On February 10, the young people in CEERT presented their recommendations to the government's Consultative Committee on Canada's National Plan of Action in Canada's parliament building. The committee consists of approximately 30 officials representing various government departments.

Developing Canada's NPA with Children and Young People

Planning and preparation for the development of

Canada's National Plan of Action has steadily gained momentum over the past year, with significant progress being made since November 2002. In December 2002 young people from CEERT were invited to take part in a meeting of the government-coordinated NPA Steering Committee. During that meeting, one of the young people asked if they could be included as official members. Shortly thereafter, it was confirmed, the young people of CEERT would be included in the NPA steering committee.

Following initial consultations in December 2002, a series of discussions relating to the National Plan of Action were then scheduled for March, April and May 2003. Four regional roundtables were planned to give government, NGOs and young people the opportunity to meet and discuss Canada's NPA. These four roundtables, involving approximately 40 participants each, were the subject of lobbying by CEERT to increase the number of young people involved and extend their duration. CEERT agreed to select the young people that will attend the regional roundtables, defining the selection criteria and reviewing applications. In order to ensure that other Canadians across the country also have an opportunity to participate, a discussion guide is being developed and NPA discussions are being included in other events that are scheduled to take place.

Lessons Learnt

Timely preparation

It was very important that the young people met in August 2002 to develop a strategy for their long-term engagement in the NPA process. As a result, young people were well organized and ready in November and December 2002 when the Canadian government started to move forward in their work relating to the NPA.

Unique Partnerships

Of significant note has been CEERT's ability to bring young people, NGOs and government together to discuss the NPA. From the list of potential CEERT participants, as drafted by the young people, all but one organisation (a NGO) were interested in participating.

The February meeting was the first time this partnership was seen in action. During the first day of the meeting the young people drafted a set of recommendations. During the second day the young people shared the recommendations with a small group of adult representatives from government and NGOs and also discussed the realities and barriers to having them realized. Together the group negotiated and agreed new recommendations that were presented to a larger consultative group in Canada's parliament buildings.

Designed By Young People

CEERT was created and designed by young people. From the list of those to be involved through to the mission statement, young people created it all. During the first meeting, the young people asked if Save the Children Canada would be willing to accept the role of coordinator. This work has included sending out the invitations to the various participants, finding initial funding, co-ordinating the first steering committee meeting, report writing and sending out updates.

Romania¹⁰

Three weeks after the United Nation's Special Session on Children, Save the Children and UNICEF organized a Forum hosted by the Romanian Presidency. This National Forum reunited 142 participants, including 125 children from 6 NGOs actively involved in the field of promoting children's rights promotion¹¹. The objective of the Forum was for children and partners to come together to plan how the commitments made at the Special Session could be included in a National Plan of Action for Children, including children's involvement in the process. The Forum proposed establishing a Children's Action Group for the National Plan.

The Children's Action Group is made up of 11 children from the NGOs who participated in the Forum, including children with disabilities. In addition, 15 local Groups of Action were established.

The local Group of Action in Bucharest, for example, includes 30 young people between the ages of 12 and 17. Their first meeting looked at different ways that they could be involved in the development of the NPA under the themes of participation, education, environment, health and protection against harm, exploitation and abuse. Within each of these themes, the young people identified problems in each area and solutions, both in the short term (1-2 years) and over the course of the NPA (10-15 years).

The evaluation from this local Group of Action meeting found that the involvement of young facilitators who were well prepared and trained worked very well. It was also felt that the national Children's Action Group is a very effective way of communicating directly with the government.

A national-level Children's Meeting with the theme of 'Children's Rights to Opinion and Participation' was also held in July 2002. The outcome of this meeting was a declaration that is the basis for the children's version of the National Plan of Action. Furthermore, the 'child friendly' version of 'A World Fit for Children' has been translated into Romanian and is being tested within the country.

More than 5000 children and young people have already gathered in local meetings and met with government representatives to share ideas and proposals on the best ways for children to be involved in this process.

Tajikistan¹²

After the Special Session, a Children's Forum was organized in Khatlon Province, the largest province in Tajikistan. This was held in order to test and ensure that different approaches and methods for children's participation would be incorporated into the guidelines for the involvement of children in the NPA given to the government.

The Khatlon Province Forum brought together more than 220 participants, including children, representatives of children's organizations, NGOs and different government structures. Five Working Groups were formed to carry out research to inform the development of the NPA the drafting of guidelines for involving children. Plans also began to be made for a Republican Children's Forum in November 2002 in Dushanbe

Research for 'My Tajikistan fit for Children'

In order to facilitate the consultation process and equip the Working Groups with the necessary skills, Save the Children conducted a 3-day training on facilitation and research skills. Together with children, they developed a questionnaire as the basis for research with children on the NPA. This questionnaire was then piloted and found to be too complicated for most children for whom it was intended (children with disabilities, street and working children etc.) Therefore, the suggestion was made to use more participatory tools that do not involve writing and filling in questionnaires. These were used to take forward the research used to prepare 'My Tajikistan fit for Children'.

Planning for the Republican Children's Forum

A steering committee was formed with participation from the National Commission on Child Rights [NCCR], the Republican Youth Committee (RYC), NGOs, UNICEF, Save the Children and children themselves. A document was drafted outlining objectives, agenda, and role of stakeholders. The steering committee developed a draft agenda for the Forum, discussed Save the Children's plans on research to be implemented by children, the selection procedures for those attending the Forum and the plans for the Children's Working Groups.

Selection criteria for children

- Members of child-led groups and organizations
- Members of children's clubs
- Children from vulnerable groups and poor fam-

ilies

Representatives from all provinces in Tajikistan

How many participated?

In total 42 children representing all parts of Tajikistan attended as delegates to the Forum. The National Forum also had more than 150 people from local and international NGOs, Government, children and young people's groups, school children, children from special institutions and mass media present as participants and guests.

The Outcome Documents from the Children's Forum

Statement by the children

Description of the focus groups of children who have been involved in the process of NPA guideline development

Matrix of (a) problems, (b) solutions, (c) executive and responsible organizations, and (d) partners.

Follow-up to the Forum

It is planned to form a Children's Reference Group within the NCCR to ensure close collaboration, the empowerment of children as rights holders and their participation in decisions affecting them through collaboration with adult decision-makers/duty bearers and to follow-up on the process of the NPA development.

Training and workshops

Bimonthly coordination meetings held by the NCCR within the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan headed by the 1st Deputy of the Government.

Working Groups were formed within the NCCR on the main areas of health, education and social welfare.

What issues/barriers have been faced?

Lack of knowledge and skills of teachers, community members, parents and NGOs staff on children's rights, participation, citizenship and governance etc.

Negative attitudes towards children and their rights

Gender issues

The poverty of the target group

Collaboration and mutual understanding between NGO partners

Lack of financial resources



Conclusion: bringing together the lessons learned

The country case studies presented in this first issue of NPA Briefing forcefully demonstrate that children and young people can be - and are being - involved in the development of their country's National Plan of Action. Some of the common issues that have emerged from these 5 initial case studies include:

- The benefits of involving young people as facilitators to explore with other children and young people the different ways in which they can be involved in the development of their country's NPA.
- The importance of building coalitions within country, including the government, civil society organisations and children and young people. Such coalitions can help to build wider support for the commitments made in the UN Special Session on Children outcome document 'A World Fit for Children'. They also give the NPA process a momentum and can be used to create partnerships between adults and children to ensure that children and young people have a clear voice and role in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of NPAs. As the case study from Canada highlights *"A close, ongoing partnership between NGOs, government and young people is a new concept for many of the participants. ... Although challenging, it is being recognised as a learning opportunity."*
- Some countries see that one of the crucial barriers to children's genuine engagement in their country's NPA process can be a negative attitude towards children and their rights. Their involvement, on the other hand, is helping to raise awareness of children's participation in policy development and decision-making within countries. It is also helping children gain confidence that their voices are being heard in the process.
- One of the major difficulties and challenges to date cited in several of the case studies has been to ensure that more marginalised groups of children are also included in the process. For example, several case studies highlighted the need to bring children living in rural areas into the process to ensure that NPAs also bring in their issues, needs and hopes.
- Lack of adequate financial resources hinder the process of children's involvement, especially those of more marginalised groups. Securing sufficient funding remains a challenge.

¹ For copies of these documents in English, French or Spanish please contact Sarah Stevenson (npa@savethechildren.ca) or go to www.crin.org/docs/themes/SpecialSession/NPA-Final.doc

² Available at www.gmfc.org

³ This information has been provided by Save the Children. For further information please contact Asif Munier via email at asif@scsdhaka.org

⁴ The informal group formed at the time of the Say Yes launch in April 2001 consists of BRAC, UNICEF, Prothom Alo, Save the Children and Plan

⁵ The draft Child Facilitator training module and the concept note, adapted from previous material is available upon request via Asif Munier

⁶ The Bangla language daily newspaper Prothom Alo has a circulation of approximately 250,000 across Bangladesh and is also available online

⁷ This information has been provided by Save the Children in Bolivia. For further information please contact Marcela Vallejos via mvallejos@savethechildrenbo.org

⁸ This information was prepared by Alana Kapell (akapell@savethechildren.ca)

⁹ The Steering Committee has approximately 18 participants, 8 adults (4 NGOs representatives and 4 government representatives) and 10 young people.

¹⁰ Salvati Copiii [Save the Children Romania] submitted this information. For further details please contact Gabriela Alexandrescu at rosc@mb.roknet.ro

¹¹ The NGOs included Motivation, ASCHFR, Trebuie, Chance for Life, Adolescentul and Master Forum plus representatives from 15 Salvati Copiii branches

¹² For further information please contact Mandal Urtnasan (mandal@scftajikistan.tajnet.com) or Alinazar Shambiev (alinazar@scftajikistan.tajnet.com)

Please contact the editor, Sarah Stevenson, if you would like to contribute to the next issue of the briefing (you can email her at npa@savethechildren.ca)

NPA Briefing No. 1 May 2003

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