



Involving Children in National Plans of Action for Children

"We the children are better judges of our problems, issues and solutions. The adults cannot understand our perceptions unless they consult us. Some of our problems do not seem like problems to them. To understand our problems and solutions from our point of view, children and young people are to be consulted so that the NPA would address improvement of the child status in a better way."

Shaping a County's Future with Children and Young People, Save the Children, 2003

Background

The UN General Assembly Special Session on Children was held between May 8 – 10th 2002. All countries who participated 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].

The 'NPA Briefing' aims to provide a space for children and young people, governments and NGOs to share information and ideas on how boys and girls are being involved in the follow-up process in individual countries and learn from other examples. Please forward a copy of the NPA Briefing to others who may be involved in your country's follow-up process.

This edition of the NPA Briefing includes updates from some of the countries that were profiled in the first issue of the NPA Briefing (Bangladesh, Bolivia, Canada and Romania) -. It also contains new case studies looking at the processes being undertaken in Kenya, Malaysia and Thailand. If you have any questions about any of these contributions or would like further information, please contact the person named at the end of the case study. Their names and email addresses are provided for your information. The Briefing concludes by considering some of the 'lessons learned' from these case study examples.

As noted above, the follow-up to the Special Session on Children also includes the option of integrating the achievement of the Special Session goals into other development plans and programs (rather than preparing a specific National Plan of Action for children). For this reason, the next edition of the Briefing will look at other examples of children's involvement in national planning and policy decisions, for example children's involvement in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Please contact the editor if you would like to contribute an example from your country. We encourage submissions from all those engaged in the follow-up process including children and young people, NGOs and governments.

Country Updates

"Young people and adults have different perspectives and therefore must cooperate and work together. Together we are strong." Shaping a County's Future with Children and Young People, Save the Children, 2003

Bangladesh¹

National NPA Sub committee formed

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) of the Government of Bangladesh has officially announced the formation of a Sub Committee for formulating the National Plan of Action for Children (2002-2007), with the Joint Secretary of the Ministry as the Convener. The other members are 3 representatives from MOWCA and 1 from the Prime Minister's Secretariat, plus representatives from UNICEF, BSAF (the national network of child rights organizations) and Save the Children. Five sectoral advisory panels are being established in the areas of Health, Food & Nutrition, Education, Protection and Physical Environment.

The committee agreed on the importance of children's views to be considered in formulating the NPA. So therefore, two children representatives are being included on each of the advisory panels and other mechanisms will be put in place in order for children to be part of the process on a regular basis.

BSAF and the informal 'Say Yes' group partners (UNICEF, Save the Children, BRAC, Plan International, national newspaper Prothom Alo) played a key role in pursuing this issue with the Government. The Government was also keen and committed to move the process forward and sought support from all who are concerned about children. The child rights organizations are expected to assist in the selection of child representatives on the advisory panels and also to identify ways for children's wider involvement in the process.

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In the five meetings of the Sub Committee held between September and November 2003, the membership of the five sectoral advisory panels was finalized with both adult specialists and child representatives, their terms of reference agreed and the five sector consultants selected. A Coordinator was to be appointed in December and the panelists as well as the sector specialists are then due to begin their work – starting with a meeting with the national Sub Committee. It is hoped that the NPA can be formulated during the first quarter of 2004.



Consultations with children and youth: feeding into the NPA process

Two rounds of sub national and national consultations with children and young people were held during September to November 2003. The partners are now finalizing the consultation report – rich with information on child rights violations all over the country and their root causes from children's perspectives. A 3-minute video has been prepared from the consultation process, to be used for advocacy and media campaigns. Thematic papers based on the consultations and its analysis are to be presented to each of the five sectoral advisory panels.

12 priority issues were identified from consultations with a representative group of 1500 children and young people in 20 districts from all 6 divisions of the country. These were:

1. **Fulfilling Basic Needs:** education, clothing, housing, recreation and security
2. **Security:** addressing acid throwing, trafficking, drugs, children used in political activities and early marriage
3. **Discrimination:** based on dis/ability, ethnicity, gender
4. **Child Labor:** using children in hazardous and/or illegal work, exploiting children by not paying their wages
5. **Abuse:** sexual, physical and mental, including children in jails
6. **Health:** lack of medical equipment and hospitals, malnutrition, poor vaccination, no free treatment

7. **Participation:** children's opinions are not taken into account, no scope for participation in any aspect
8. **Education:** ethnic children's problems in education, admission problems, cost of education materials, discriminatory attitudes of teachers, stipend problems
9. **Recreation:** no playgrounds, less opportunity for recreation for different children (gender, class)
10. **Housing:** lack of housing for children living on the street
11. **River erosion:** causes children to become itinerant
12. **Pollution:** children suffer from black vehicular smoke

There will be a further round of thematic consultations with children and young people in January 2004 in 5 divisions of the country, with the involvement of the sector-specific advisory panels. These were approved by the National NPA Sub Committee.

Children's network monitoring the NPA process

To monitor and participate in the ongoing NPA formulation process, the children and young people who have been involved in consultations have formed a 36 member National Children Development Committee with 6 children from each division. An 18 member central committee will take responsibility for coordination. The children have already suggested that the government should open a wing or section for children to get an update on the process. They themselves will continue to communicate with the whole group and gradually expand their network all over the country. They also plan to bring out a newsletter and to work with the media for wider awareness on the importance of children's participation in national policies that affect children.

Save the Children's contribution

Save the Children is committed to assisting the development and monitoring of a quality and achievable NPA with the active and meaningful participation of children and civil society. To ensure children's meaningful participation in the process, Save the Children is supporting the children's network in the exchange of information on the NPA process. Save the Children also has its own representative in each of the advisory panels, so that they can ensure children's direct views are heard at the meeting and views from other consultations are seriously considered. Save the Children has also organized dialogues with representatives of the media and the government on the issue. In the coming months, Save the Children is undertaking:

- The production of a child friendly version of 'A World fit for Children' in the main local language (Bengali)
- Translation of the concluding observation on the 2nd periodic report of Bangladesh by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (30 Sept. 2003)

- Producing a 20 minute video on the NPA process in Bangladesh
- Organizing meetings with media, civil society and wider groups of children to mainstream involvement and commitment to children's participation in national policy issues
- Supporting the children's network on the NPA



Bolivia²

Though the government of Bolivia has not prioritized the drafting of a National Plan of Action and there is no sign presently of this happening, activities oriented to ensure the adequate participation of boys and girls in the future drafting of this document have been intensive throughout the country. So has the strengthening of children's organizations and the forming of local and national networks to consolidate a national movement - the Bolivian Alliance In Favor of Boys, Girls and Adolescents – ABNA (local name for the Global Movement for Children). Children's involvement and participation at different levels is making a difference.

In the past two years the ABNA mobilized over 4,000 boys, girls and teenagers and gathered 30 local and international organizations working in children's issues. As a result of this effort, children throughout the country have written a Decalogue identifying their main problems, they have actively disseminated their rights and participated in regional and national workshops consolidating a youth network, as well as strongly supported and participated in the creation of a children's parliament. This parliament met for the first time in April 2003 and continued throughout the year enabling the involvement of children in events such as the V Ministerial Meeting on the Social Inclusion of Afro-American and Indigenous Children and the Presidential Summit in November 2003. The children involved with the parliament and the agencies behind the ABNA

are now focused on overcoming some of the initial problems in the launching of the Children's Parliament to ensure its continuity but, more importantly, that it becomes a place where children genuinely exercise their right to participate and not merely mock adult institutions with no real decision – making power.

Parallel to the above, in the past year, Save the Children Canada organized over 10 workshops and events involving approximately 1,000 rural and urban children and local authorities, to inform them on the Special Session and the government's commitment to the drafting of a National Plan of Action. As well it has promoted the involvement of urban child led groups in processes such as the national referendum to decide the fate of the country's natural resources (especially natural gas). In the near future it also seeks to foster the partaking of rural children in municipal and community budget decision making and controls.

Canada³

The Child Engagement Experts Resource Team (CEERT) was created by young people to ensure the meaningful participation of children and young people in the development of Canada's NPA. It includes members of various non-governmental organizations, departments of Government and young people themselves. CEERT members made recommendations to the Government relating to its plans to dialogue with Canadians over the NPA throughout the spring and summer of 2003. The recommendations made by CEERT played a significant role in shaping and defining various aspects of the dialogues. CEERT helped to emphasize the importance of child participation and define how to make it meaningful. Four regional dialogues took place over the summer and included participants from every province and territory in Canada. Participants included youth, NGOs, community leaders, elders and local, provincial and national government representatives. Issues discussed



related to health, education, protection and enabling social engagement and collaboration. The nine young people in CEERT, together with adult partners, helped to ensure an additional 40 young people were invited to the regional dialogues across Canada. Although small in number, the young people involved have represented diverse views and contributed significantly to the issues being discussed across the country. More information on the outcomes of these discussions can be found at:

<http://www.sen.parl.gc.ca/lpearson/specialsession/index.htm>

Earlier in the process the government committed to releasing a draft version of the NPA in the fall of 2003. The government has recently communicated that this process has been delayed. Young people, NGOs and the Canadian public await the next steps and their next opportunity to review the country's NPA.

Romania⁴

Salvati Copiii (Save the Children Romania), recognizing the right of children to be involved in developing the government's NPA on children, has organized 16 meetings where children expressed their opinions, concerns, wishes, needs and suggestions, without discrimination, on the NPA. An outcome of the Children's National Forum in 2002 was the establishment of a National Group of Action made up of children working at the local level. These children were representatives of 15 local branches of Salvati Copiii and 5 children from partner organizations (Chance for Life, ASCHFR, Motivation, Master Forum and Adolescentul). This structure was established to coordinate the results from the local levels in order to share them with the government.

Workshops on the NPA were held in 2002 and 2003. The planning for the workshops lasted for 2 weeks. The group had several meetings to agree upon the schedule, the presentations, the workshops, the moderators and the follow-up actions. The adult involvement at this stage was minimal and they were only consulted when the children requested input. The themes chosen for the workshop represented the themes of 'A World Fit for Children' (education, health, HIV/AIDS and protection from violence, exploitation and abuse). Each workshop had children as moderators and other children as rapporteurs who summarized and presented the results. The evaluation later found that the child moderators worked well as they were well informed and prepared.

The schedule for the two day workshops included: information sessions on the UN Special Session, 'A World Fit for Children' and the National Plan of Action, the other workshops and the main themes. There were also workshops on follow-up and evaluation of the group work.

The results from each of the local and national meetings were compiled into a paper on children's opinions and vision for the NPA. This has been sent to the President of Romania and to the government so that it will be included in the final version of the NPA. The government appears to be anxious to evaluate the children's version of the NPA and to implement it in the near future. This consultation appears to have been a success both from the perspective of the decision makers and the children. Salvati Copiii has also asked the government to include a Children's Working Group on the NPA as an advisory body for the government in the process of implementing the plan.

New Case Studies



Kenya⁵

A child participation workshop was organized by Save the Children Canada in May 2003 for civil society and the Department of Children's Services. The workshop aimed to create awareness on the importance of children's participation in the development of the NPA, CRC reporting and the African Charter State Party reporting process. The 32 participating organizations in the workshop agreed to integrate children and young people's participation in the three processes simultaneously.

The participation strategy

The workshop developed a strategy aimed at ensuring countrywide participation of children. Ten geographic regions were identified and each of the regions is to hold a forum of children to inform the three processes (i.e. the NPA, CRC and ACRWC processes). Two forums were also proposed for marginalized children.

Institutional support and responsibilities

The National Council of Children's Services will coordinate the overall process with one of the aims being to complete the NPA by mid-2004. The Council is mandated by the Children's Act 2001 to spearhead the development of the country's reports on the treaties that Kenya has signed and ratified in relation to children's rights. The

Department of Children's Services of the Ministry of Home Affairs of the government is coordinating the technical aspects of the processes.

Civil society organizations working in each of the regions were identified to take leadership in supporting children and young people's participation in the processes. These organizations will mobilize financial support and conduct these regional meetings with children in collaboration with the Children's Department. The regional forums will each be held over two days.

Progress and Update

Following the recommendation of the May workshop, meetings have been held between the government, UNICEF, and NGOs (such as the Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of Children's Rights, PLAN-Kenya, Action Aid, Christian Fund, German Technical Aid Organization (GTZ) and others.) Most of the organizations have been constituted into a national steering committee chaired by the National Council of Children's Services (NCCS). This steering committee is mandated to fundraise, coordinate and provide technical guidelines to the planning and reporting processes. Within this structure Save the Children is responsible for developing guidelines for children's participation.

Proposed child and young people's participation methodology

The participants at the regional meetings will be between the ages of 10–18 with an equal balance of boys and girls. Attempts will be made to integrate children from existing child rights clubs in schools and out-of-school children. Two forums will also be conducted for groups of marginalised children.

Each of the forums will have 60 children i.e. a total of 720 children from across the country. Children and young people will be facilitating these forums with various thematic and clusters. Save the Children Canada has been asked to provide protection, care and facilitation guidelines for these forums. These forums will be held concurrently with adult forums. The Children's Department of the government has assigned a children's officer in each region to work with civil society organizations on the children's and young people's participation process.

Malaysia^{6\}

Malaysia has embarked on the path of fully involving children in its National Plan of Action for 2001 – 2020 (NPA2) and has allocated (human) resources, time and funding towards that goal. Structures have been put in place to assist this, such as the National Advisory and Consultative Committee for the monitoring of activities in the NPA2, and an Interagency Coordinating Committee has established 6 sub-committees based on the priority areas of the NPA2.

There is close collaboration with non-governmental organizations and with children that have been involved in the process to date. The process of children's involvement is based on 'learning by doing' and the experience of having children involved in previous consultations. The aim is to go beyond simple consultations with children and to have them involved in designing, implementing and monitoring the activities related to the NPA2.

The interagency Consultation Workshop on implementation of the Second National Plan of Action

This Workshop was held from 19–22 May 2003 and had 48 participants, including 16 children, 12 representatives from the government sectors, 8 delegates from NGOs and 7 officers from the Department of Social Welfare. Participants were divided into groups with 6–10 participants (adults and children) in each group. Participants discussed the issues as identified in the draft plan of action, reviewed the project for 2002 and went through a process of identifying pertinent issues and activities for 2003. This discussion enabled the participants to formulate a program within the identified areas in the draft plan of action for children. At the end of each day groups presented their work in plenary to receive feedback from others. The workshop concluded with a plan of action for activities in each of the six main areas that stretch over a period of one financial year. Children will continue to play a major role in planning, implementation and monitoring the program.

The involvement of children in the Strategic Planning Workshop

11 girls and 5 boys participated in the workshop, all between 14 and 16 years of age. They were school going children from a mix of different ethnic and religious backgrounds (Muslim, Hindu and Christian). A number of children came from (governmental and non-governmental) projects and included 4 disabled children. The group of children reflected a diverse spectrum of social and economic background. The children were approached through contacting non-governmental organizations who work with children and governmental institutions such as children's homes.

It is crucial to prepare adults to guarantee meaningful participation of children. Adults are in a position of "power" (reflected by age, experience, gender, education, status, authority etc.) in relation to children and as such they effectively "allow" or "not allow" children to participate. Even though children have the right to participate, their participation may easily be (intentionally or unintentionally) frustrated and overruled by adults. Therefore, before the workshop the Department of Social Welfare briefed adult participants on the importance of having children involved and they were requested to take children's views seriously and to facilitate their active participation.

Evaluations after the workshop showed that both adults and children showed appreciation regarding the quality of interactions during the workshop. Children felt appreciated by adults, they thought that their views were taken seriously and they felt themselves to be full members of the sub-committees. Adults were happy with children's presence and contributions. They thought the ideas and views of children to be relevant, insightful and well reasoned. Some expressed the view that children's input gave new perspectives to issues at hand which helped in designing relevant activities. Altogether both sides felt that children's involvement resulted in valuable input in the planning and design of activities.

The Department of Social Welfare requested an external consultant to look at the process of involvement of children in the NPA2 and to come up with recommendations on how children's involvement can be improved and sustained throughout the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of NPA2. He held discussions with representatives of the government and non-governmental organizations and with children who were involved in the process. Following are some observations and recommendations from the report by the consultant.

Lessons learnt

The involvement of children in the Second National Plan of Action was seen as beneficial to the government of Malaysia and children—the children come up with good ideas and they can provide perspectives on issues that are new to adults. It ensures that activities and plans are more child focused and child friendly.

To make participation of children in the Second National Plan of Action sustainable, consistent, meaningful and effective, it was suggested that their involvement should be a continuous process over a prolonged period of time rather than occasional consultations.

It was found that the involvement of children works best around issues of their interest. It is also more easy to prepare children for their involvement and to follow-up when children have been involved (before, during and after the event) around a certain issue (such as the environment). They have a common and concrete cause that does not stop with their involvement in a certain consultation or workshop. Those consultations and workshops are part of their involvement with the issue.

The evaluator noted that children need more time to be prepared before the consultations, especially those who come from disadvantaged background. Preparation should start at the "grassroots" level, i.e. in the agencies, schools, clubs, etc. where children are initially approached. All children need relevant and child-friendly information about the background, purpose, objectives, activities, extent and implications of their involvement. This enables them to understand

why they are consulted and what it means to be involved and it also enables them to make an informed decision to participate or not. Those children who participate in the actual consultations with adults may need further preparation in relation to building self-esteem and confidence, of speaking in public, debating, team work etc.. They may need to be equipped with (additional) skills regarding communication and participatory approaches. They will also have to be informed about what it means to work with children from very different background and how to interact in a respectful and inclusive manner with children and adults.

Children who have participated most actively thus far, were described in general terms as being "empowered" i.e. having been exposed (to public events, speaking in public), well educated, assertive and vocal. Most children who kept quiet during consultations came from so-called disadvantaged backgrounds. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds may need special consideration in preparation in terms of information, skills (communication, speaking in public, assertiveness). Group dynamics between children and adults, and among children themselves, need to be closely monitored to ensure that all children can participate freely and to prevent any (intentional or unintentional) discrimination. Sessions with adults and children together need skilled facilitation to allow children to participate meaningfully.

To allow the full participation of all children it was suggested that the spoken and written language used during children's involvement should be the children's mother tongue or a language that all can speak, read and understand. When this cannot be achieved, adequate translation needs to be provided.

It was found that the children who have been involved in the National Plan of Action process were mostly above 14 years of age. Project context shows that children younger than 14 years can participate meaningfully in decision-making and many other activities.

To promote children's involvement in implementation of activities under the NPA2, it was suggested that linkages will have to be made and contacts will have to be intensified with organizations throughout the country that work around certain children's issues, such as the environment, health, children's rights, schools, homes etc. (depending on the issue at hand) to see how the plans can be implemented jointly with those groups or with cooperation of children who are affiliated to those organizations.

Furthermore, to ensure a more representative voice of children the number of children needs to be increased, reaching out to other groups of children in rural areas, in other urban areas and in different states. Diversity should be reflected in terms of fair distribution according to ethnicity, socio-economic background, gender, religion, disability and

the like. The number of children in the actual consultations could be aligned to the number of adult participants (it can be decided upon together with children). The minimum number of children in each sub-committee should be at least two to assure peer support.

Those children who actually take part in the discussions with adults should have consulted with their peers and should have a mandate to speak on their behalf. This entails that the child representatives should be part of an existing group of organized children (either through school clubs, cooperatives etc., NGO's, government initiated clubs, etc.) in different parts of the country. These children's organizations need to be fully informed about the National Plan of Action process and purpose and extent of children's involvement. The organizations could elect and prepare their delegates to the NPA2 consultations. They could research and discuss issues of their concern and how these should be incorporated in the NPA2 implementation. Children's organizations could conduct their own consultations and surveys with other (non-organized) children to ensure a wider involvement of children. Further details need to be worked out together with children's organizations. Child representatives should be elected in a transparent manner, based on democratic principles. Election criteria should be agreed upon with the children and should be inclusive and fair.

Finally, to ensure the increase in number and diversity of children's involvement and to ensure a more representative voice of children during the consultations, contacts will need to be established and intensified with the above mentioned organizations, institutions and groups throughout the country. Management and staff need to be sensitized about children's participation and staff need to be trained in involving children (communication and facilitation skills, conducting research and workshops with children etc.). They will need to be fully informed and regularly updated about the NPA2 and its implementation.

Thailand⁷

207 children and youth aged 15-25 years of age from across Thailand, representing students and working children met recently to discuss follow-up to the Special Session. There are connections with other youth groups working with marginalized children such as homosexual youth, youth from other ethnic and religious groups and HIV/AIDS affected youth.

The key part of the involvement process was networking using the network of youth organizations in Thailand it . Some students were reached through the government schools, but most of them through youth organizations. Some of the youth are involved in ongoing child

rights initiatives, for others it was their first time being involved in finding resolutions to social problems.

Support for this initiative came from the National Council of Child and Youth Development (NCYD), an NGO that coordinates youth groups in Thailand, and the Government which supports the youth financially to run 'A World Fit for Children' meetings locally and nationally. The children and young people will meet with the Government when the results of their work is ready to shared with the adults.

The youth have translated 'A World Fit for Children' into a document that is easy to understand. They have also organized an activity called an "idea shopping mall" where children can brainstorm about their personal 'World Fit for Children' and could sell their ideas in the shopping mall and buy ideas from others. This activity was fun and motivated children, especially children from marginalized groups, as they could see a real chance to get their ideas into the National Plan of Action. The small group discussions were also very important, especially for children with little education such as street children.

Successes

All of the 207 children involved were able to share their opinions. Today there are more than 50 projects happening across the country, run by the young people, which will share their findings at the national-level forum with adults and government. More than 30 child and youth groups know about 'A World Fit for Children'. Khun Janista Liuchaleuhmwong, the Advisor of the Social Ministry, went to visit some of the activities the youth were doing and was very impressed by the methods used and the motivation of the children.

Obstacles

Although there has been considerable progress it is clear that difficulties have remained. Despite good will, there has not been sufficient financial support from the government to undertake all the work with children. There has occasionally been some tension between some of the groups of children involved, for example, some of the students look down on the children from the more marginalized groups. There are challenges around the children's lack of knowledge about complicated social problems. The government has not promoted 'A World Fit for Children' enough within Thailand.

Lessons Learned

The youth are strong in many communities and can come and work together. They have a great capacity of development. For example, children who are shy at first then begin to speak with government officials after the days of meeting with the other youth and having their opinions listened to with respect.

Next Steps

The joint conference of children and adults will be held in November. The children will evaluate the meeting, write reports and discuss with the National Youth Bureau.

Conclusion: bringing together the lessons learned

The updates from the first case studies and the new additions demonstrate the energy with which some children and young people are involved in developing their country's National Plan of Action. Some of the common issues that arise in this briefing include:

- Coalitions of children and young people, NGOs and government working together can help to build wider support for the inclusion of children's views in the NPA
- Ensuring that children have their own spaces to prepare can help to encourage the views of all children to be heard.
- To ensure that children's participation is sustainable, consistent, meaningful and effective their involvement should be a continuous process over a long period of time rather than occasional consultations.
- Involvement of children works best around issues that are important to them and that affect them.
- To ensure a representative voice of children, it is important to reach out to as many groups of children as possible, including children in rural areas. Diversity of children should be reflected in terms of fair distribution.

Next edition:

Contributions are encouraged and very welcome! Please contact the editor, Sarah Stevenson, if you would like to contribute to the next edition of the briefing. You can email her at npa@savethechildren.ca. Information about children's involvement in PRSP or other development planning processes — whether at national or sub-national level — would be particularly welcome.

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