

'CHILDREN AS PARTNERS'

A CONSULTATION WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND INTERESTED ADULTS

What is 'Children as Partners'?

'Children as Partners' (CAP) is a global initiative which seeks to encourage and support partnership between all those working to make a reality of children's right to participation.

CAP's¹ long term goal is to create the conditions in which a true partnership of mutual respect and support can develop between all children and adults - a partnership that results in changes to the values, attitudes and behaviour of millions of people.

Building on the many successful examples of work that are already in place, CAP aims to connect everyone around the world who wants to promote the participation of children in matters and decisions that affect them. This would include a wide range of actors: children themselves, young people, university researchers, project workers and facilitators, politicians, child care professionals, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and UN organisations.

CAP wants to rally widespread support for children's participation and to be a mechanism for new partnerships, renewed commitments, greater accountability and practical action. The kinds of partnerships that CAP would like to support and encourage include those between:

- Children and other children
- Adult organisations and children's organisations
- Children's organisations and youth organisations
- Adult workers and children's groups
- Children and their parents
- Community groups and children

¹ This document is using the word children to be consistent with the UN CRC referring to all who are under the age of 18.

Who is involved in CAP so far?

The **Children as Partners** initiative is currently being developed by a group of university researchers, international Non-Governmental organisations, the UN organisation for children (UNICEF) and individuals from the fields of politics, youth empowerment, international development and child rights. Organisations include:

- World Vision, Plan International and Save the Children
- The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
- The Canadian International Development Agency
- The International Institute for Child Rights and Development based at the University of Victoria, Canada
- UNICEF in South and East Asia
- The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (A Canadian organization)

These organisations all share the belief that societies should ensure that children can exercise their right to be involved in decisions that affect them, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

More recently some young people have also been involved in working with the adults. These young people, mostly from Canada, have played an important role in ensuring that children and young people have a strong voice in the development and work of CAP.

Objective of this Consultation

For this initiative to succeed, the organisations developing CAP need your ideas about what CAP could look like, how it might work and what it might do. We need your help to identify the most important things that CAP could do to support your work and help you achieve your goals. For CAP to be both useful and successful, we need to know what people already working with children and young people think of this idea before it is developed further.

It's important to realise that CAP is still at a very early stage of development. Many things about it are still in the process of being clarified. The CAP partners are undertaking a widespread international consultation to ensure that this initiative addresses the real needs and

priorities of children and adults and that it does this in as inclusive and transparent a way as possible.

What has happened so far?

The idea of creating a forum for documenting and promoting child participation experiences first emerged in August 2001 following the 2nd International Conference on Children's Rights in Education hosted by the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) in Victoria, Canada. Children as Partners (CAP) then began work in early 2002 with IICRD taking on a literature review of some of the latest research and best practices on child participation with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Those involved in the early stages of vision building for CAP consulted with a wide variety of sources within the children's rights community about the research initiative and the broader possibilities of CAP. From these consultations it was confirmed that CAP:

- is needed;
- must be fully international in scope with strong regional, national and local context dimensions;
- should be formulated and conducted through partnerships with leading child rights oriented international agencies and organizations, including child led organizations; and
- should incorporate elements of research, analytical and practical hands-on work reflecting the everyday participation experiences of children and youth.

In August 2002 an expanded group of organisations and individuals met in Canada to explore some of the ways in which the CAP initiative might be taken forward. One of the key outcomes from that meeting was agreement to undertake a wide ranging consultation with civil society organisations and individual adults in parallel with a similar consultation with children and young people.

Why Do We Want to Consult with Children, Young People and Civil Society about CAP?

Children, young people and civil society all need to be consulted on the future of CAP because CAP strives to be an equal partnership between children and their partners. Children therefore will be giving direction

and vision to CAP, as will NGOs and others in your community/country. To do this, we need you to give us your views.

How might CAP work?

There are many national, regional and international initiatives supporting children's participation which include a range of agencies. There is no forum, however, through which these experiences are drawn together, analysed, disseminated and fostered. This gap suggests the need for a focused international effort to bring about the widest possible sharing of children's and adults' experience and to provide the tools and resources which are needed to enable others to play their part in supporting children's participation. **Children As Partners** is proposed as a way of filling this gap by acting as a focal point that could:

- Develop an international network of children's organisations, NGOs, governmental agencies, organisations of young people, a wide-range of professional groups, researchers and others to serve as a forum about the participation of children and young people of all ages up to eighteen;
- Gather, organise, analyse and disseminate a knowledge base on children's participation.
- Improve dialogue between children and adults from the local to the global level to facilitate links between theory and practice, networking, alliance-building and information dissemination;
- Work with children of a wide range of ages and experiences in the running of the network, in a manner consistent with the principles it intends to promote and recognising the value of a range of participatory models;
- Develop shared frameworks for high standards of practice for programming, research, policy dialogue and advocacy;
- Promote a collective agenda to engage in high level advocacy to realise children's right to participate in decisions affecting all aspects of their lives;
- Support the development of child-led organisations and participatory research by children and young people.

CAP is committed to expanding the involvement of other interested organisations with a genuine commitment to implementing the CRC.

What Might CAP Do First?

There have already been a number of suggestions about what CAP should do as the initial steps towards its goal. The suggestions included:

- Facilitating information gathering and sharing - acting as a 'clearing house' or resource centre on children's participation e.g.

through collecting and sharing information and responding to requests for information. Information could include descriptions of projects, evaluations, annotated bibliographies, databases of experts and resource materials. Such information could be made available on the internet where CAP could also encourage discussion groups, provide links to relevant organisations and identify upcoming events and activities.

- Increasing the quantity and quality of the evaluation of children's participation - firstly, to encourage greater learning and secondly, to generate better evidence of the impact and benefits of participation. This work might include identifying, assessing and sharing reliable evaluation methodologies, as well as setting up a small number of evaluations specifically to demonstrate impact.

- Support to child-led organisations to enable them to achieve their goals. Child-led organisations play an increasingly important role in organising and expressing children's interests. CAP could support this by identifying and responding to their needs for organisational support and by helping to encourage greater co-ordination in their activities.

HOWEVER, these are only the results of initial discussion and until CAP has heard from a wide range of both adults and children involved in this area of work, no decision on the work of CAP will be made.

The Consultation

The main purpose of this consultation is to ensure that the views and opinions of some of those most directly involved in furthering child participation - including local and national NGOs, project workers, researchers, parents groups, etc - have an influence on the way CAP develops in the future. We are therefore, asking you to give us your ideas and comments on the following questions:

- Do you think that there is a need for an initiative like 'Children as Partners' to encourage meaningful child participation at all levels of decision-making? Is anyone else doing this work?
- What could CAP do that would be of most help to you in your work?
- What could CAP do that would make the greatest difference to promoting and supporting children's participation in your country/region?

- What would be the best way for CAP to build a meaningful partnership between NGOs, academics, children and others in this work? How could it do this globally and regionally?
- How would you want to be involved in Children as Partners whether at the local, national or international level?
- Do you have other comments that you would like to make about CAP e.g. about its role, structure or activities?
- Do you think that the name 'Children as Partners' is a good one or do you have alternative suggestions?

Where should you send your comments and what will be done with them?

You should send your responses and comments to the International Institute for Child Rights and Development by March 1, 2003. IICRD will then put your comments together with all the other comments we receive and we will share them with the current partners to help form the vision of CAP.

Contact information for the IICRD:

Suzanne Williams

Email: capa@uvic.ca

Fax: +1 250 472-4830

The main result of the consultation will be a document that will be posted on the internet at www.crin.org/childrenaspartners. A separate consultation is asking children and young people for their views on the same set of questions and a report from that consultation will also be made available on the internet.

A group of children, youth, children's organisations and academics will then meet in London, UK in May 2003 to review this material and discuss what CAP should be and what it should do. The results of this discussion will also be placed on the internet.