

'CHILDREN AS PARTNERS'

A CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

What is 'Children as Partners'?

'Children as Partners' (CAP) is an idea developed by some adults and youth about how to encourage and support all those working to make a reality of children's right to participation. We use the word 'children' to refer to all children and young people under the age of 18.

CAP's long term goal is to create the conditions in which a true partnership of mutual respect and support can develop between 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 up 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 create widespread support for children's participation and to be a mechanism for new partnerships, renewed commitments to this sort of work, 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

Who has been involved in CAP so far?

Up to now the **Children as Partners** initiative has been developed mainly by adults involved in this area of work. They include adults working in universities, 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 for Excellence on Youth Engagement (A Canadian organization)

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.

The adults and youth share the belief that societies should ensure that children can exercise their right to be involved in decisions that affect them, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Objective of this Consultation

For this partnership to succeed, we need children and young people's own ideas and vision for the future of CAP. 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 a **real** partnership with children, we need to know what you think of this idea before it is developed any further.

Adults will also be trying to answer these questions but they need the advice and support of one of the key 'stakeholder' groups - children and young people themselves. We are therefore, asking you to give us your ideas.

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.

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

Children and young people need to be consulted on the future of CAP because:

- you have the right to participate
- **the effective involvement of children and youth will improve the effectiveness of CAP;**
- CAP strives to be an equal partnership between children and their partners.

We hope that you will agree that children themselves need to give 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.

What has happened so far?

The idea of 'Children as Partners' first emerged in August 2001 following the 2nd International Conference on Children's Rights in Education which took place in Canada, organised by the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD). The first piece of work that Children as Partners (CAP) did was in early 2002 when IICRD started a small piece of work designed to look at some of the latest research and best practice on child participation. This was funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Those involved in the early stages of thinking about CAP consulted with a wide range of people about the research initiative and the broader idea of CAP. From these consultations it was confirmed that CAP:

- is needed;
- must be fully international in scope with strong regional, national and local dimensions;

- should be formulated and conducted through partnerships with leading child rights 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. Save the Children offered to organise the consultation with children and young people.

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 central place, however, through which these experiences are drawn together, looked at, shared and discussed.

This gap suggests the need for a focused international effort to bring about the widest possible sharing of children's and adults' experience in children's participation. Such an effort could also 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 on the participation of young people of all ages up to eighteen;
- Gather, organise, analyse and disseminate all that we know on children's participation.
- Improve dialogue between children and adults from the local to the global level to make better 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, according to participatory principles;
- Develop shared frameworks for ensuring high standards of practice for programming, research, policy dialogue and advocacy;

- Promote a joint 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 first. The suggestions included:

- Supporting 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.
- 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.

How could Children and Young People be Involved in CAP?

There are many ways in which children and young people could be involved in CAP. These could include:

- Providing direction and vision to Children as Partners e.g. through making places available for children's organisations on the international 'management board' (alongside the international NGOs, academics and UNICEF);
- Providing support and direction to organisations that are trying to include children in leadership roles;
- Sharing your experience and any documents that you have produced on your work;
- Helping to improve communication between children and adults in all levels of society to create links between the theory of participation and the practice of participation;
- Helping to evaluate the impact of your participation.

But these are only suggestions.

What Kind of Support could Children and Young People Receive from CAP?

- The opportunity to link up with other children and children's organisations (and the adults supporting them) and to find out what is going on in other parts of the world.
- Support in arguing for children to be involved in local or national decision-making.
- Practical help could be given to children's organisations and groups to make sure that they can be involved in CAP's work e.g. giving them access to email and the internet.
- All CAP partners and coalitions could be encouraged to have an explicit 'outreach' strategy towards children's and youth organisations.
- 'Child-friendly' information could be prepared about new developments in children's participation.
- Advice could be given by other children or adults about to solve problems linked to children's participation.

The Consultation

The main purpose of this consultation is to ensure that the views and opinions of those most directly involved - children and young people - 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 children and young people to be involved in Children as Partners whether at the local, national or international level?
- Do you think that the name 'Children as Partners' is a good one or do you have alternative suggestions?
- Do you have other comments that you would like to make about CAP e.g. about its role, structure or activities?

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

Children and young people themselves who want to respond to this consultation (or the adult facilitators working with them) should record their answers to the questions below and send them to Sarah Stevenson at Save the Children by **March 1st, 2003**. They should be sent directly to Sarah at sstevenson@savethechildren.ca or fax number + 1 416 221 8214.

Save the Children, on behalf of CAP, will put your comments together with all the other comments we receive and we will produce a summary report of children and young people's views. The result of the consultation will also be posted on the internet at www.crin.org/childrenaspartners.

To help us in writing the report we would be grateful if you would tell us the age of the children and/or young people who were involved in the discussion. We are particularly interested in hearing from children and young people under the age of 18 but we would also welcome comments from those aged from 18 to 24 years old.

A group of children, NGOs and academics will be meeting in London, UK in May 2003 to discuss what *CAP* should be and what it should do. This report, with the report from the consultation with NGOs will form the basis of the *Children as Partners* initiative.

Note for Facilitators - How Might the Consultation Work?

In some cases adult facilitators may want to have a structured discussion with groups of children and young people. If so, we suggest that the consultation should begin by setting out why Children as Partners is doing this consultation (see above). It should be made clear that the main aim is to ensure that children and young people's own views about the future and/or the need of CAP are heard.

Then you might want to move on to the questions in the consultation and/or these questions:

- What are children and young people's goals for the work they're doing?
- How could CAP help children and young people, and their partners achieve your existing goals?
- What role should children and young people play in the leadership and direction of CAP in the future - at both national and international levels?
- What kinds of support do children and young people need to make your involvement in CAP meaningful?

On the basis of this consultation children and young people could then be encouraged to consider how they could engage with CAP.