Children changing their world

S. Stoepker

Understanding and evaluating children's participation in development

Prepared for Plan by

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with Thomas Feeny

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Children changing their world

Understanding and evaluating children's participation in development

About Plan

Plan's vision is of a world in which all children realise their full potential in societies that respect people's rights and dignity.

Plan is one of the world's largest child centred community development organisations. Plan staff and volunteers work with children, their families and communities in 45 countries, building the skills, the structures and the resources to give all children an equal voice and an equal chance to develop into healthy, educated and responsible adults.

Plan also works through 15 national organisations. Staff in these offices work to develop an understanding of Plan's approach among current and potential supporters, and campaign on behalf of children worldwide. By doing so, they build committed partnerships with individuals, organisations, companies and governments, all of which means that Plan has reliable funds available.

Plan believes that children should be encouraged to express their own priorities alongside those of the adults. No project is undertaken unless it will have a positive impact for the children and there is a deep commitment to its success. Once the priorities have been identified, Plan works with a community to build its collective skills and resources to enable it to take a leading role in designing, executing and managing the projects.

Plan supports this work by developing partnerships at all levels to increase the impact of programmes, influence policy, improve resource and service provision, and ensure that children's voices are heard.

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Foreword by the Chair of Plan's International Board

Children changing their world

A report on understanding and evaluating children's participation in development

One Sunday in a slum area close to Delhi, I and a small group of other Europeans made our way through the mud to meet the Children's Council. We were welcomed by between 15 and 20 children, mostly girls aged between 8 and 14. Their self-confidence and pride were clear as they told us how they communicate with their peers to raise awareness on issues important to young people, including sexual pressure, child labour and child abuse. That day, they had orchestrated a rally in support of birth registration when hundreds of children marched through the slum with banners claiming the right to be registered.

This visit made me realise the expertise of children. The Children's Council are in fact the true experts on what life is like for a child living in the slums of Delhi. Similarly, it is the children involved themselves who are the real experts on the realities for child soldiers or children left as orphans when their parents die from AIDS.

Children's participation, therefore, must be seen not only as a means of preparing the young for their future role as adults but also as an important tool for the social and economic betterment of children now.

Children's participation remains largely the preserve of child-focused non-governmental organisations. Following the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, these organisations started to work more directly with children and to explore how to support and facilitate their participation. The last 10 years have seen the development of many innovative activities, such as children's media programs and peer education groups. The inclusion of children and young people in community development processes is also slowly gaining ground.

Those who have witnessed what children can achieve are in no doubt that their participation contributes greatly to the development process. Visitors cannot help but be inspired by their enthusiasm and energy and, while often initially sceptical, their parents and community leaders usually become very supportive when they see what their children can do.

The anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of children's participation is compelling and some child-focused development organisations are now systematically trying to incorporate children's participation into their work and to advocate it to donors and governments. This involves overcoming real challenges and provokes many questions. Key among these are:

- Why should we spend scarce resources on children's participation?
- What will be the result?
- What will the implications be for the way that organisations work?

This report tackles some of these questions.

The report pulls together the evidence of the impact of children's participation from a number of sources - from the literature, from interviews with staff from a wide range of organisations and from engaging with children and young people involved in participatory projects. The impacts are mapped under the personal, family, community and institutional 'realms of impact'. These help us to see the impressive range of benefits that children's participation can bring and to glimpse how much more dynamic the development process might be if children were systematically provided with opportunities to participate.

Capturing these impacts in a systematic way, however, is no easy matter. Most are qualitative changes whose expression varies from culture to culture. This report discusses how these impacts could be monitored and evaluated, providing examples of the types of methods that could be used and the ethical and practical issues that need to be considered.

Participatory processes require those in charge to give up some of their power. This is challenging and threatening at the best of times but how much more so when those concerned are children? Do we have the courage to let go and follow where they will lead?

The final part of the report highlights some of the challenges to organisations that wish to engage with children. Over the years, small, flexible local and national organisations have had the most success in really empowering young people. How can the large international organisations with their hierarchical management structures and complex systems respond sensitively and flexibly to the challenges that will emerge when children are given a voice?

I recommend this report to development managers and practitioners who are trying to understand and come to terms with the implications and practicalities of children's participation, and also to the senior managers and directors who can provide visionary leadership to their organisations.

The work of developing this report culminated in a conference in London that brought together young people from developing countries and a wide range of practitioners and researchers. There were many expressions of interest to continue to work together. The content of this report is already being used by Plan as the basis of a pilot project to identify and use qualitative indicators for children's participation within its country programs. We hope that the report will inspire many such initiatives and we look forward to further collaboration between those who have been involved in preparation of this report and those who find it useful.

In a world where we are struggling to make headway towards achieving the goals set internationally for development by 2015, we cannot afford to ignore the contributions of over six billion children, the majority of whom will be adults by the time 2015 arrives.

Steinar Sivertsen

Steinar Sivertsen
Chair, International Board of Directors

Executive summary

This document brings together the findings of a literature review of current thinking about children's participation and its evaluation with a field study undertaken in three different countries (Ecuador, India and Kenya). It is also enriched by discussion at a one-day conference in London in November 2003, which was hosted by Plan UK to review findings from the research.

The process leading to the production of this document began in March 2003 at a one-day seminar hosted by Plan for the UK development community, entitled Children's Participation in Development – Challenges and Ways Forward. Participants at the seminar identified a clear need for further thought about the evaluation of children's participation. Since then, delegates at a global meeting of the Save the Children Alliance have expressed a similar view.

The introductory section of the document describes the background to the project and explains how it has been pursued. Attention is also focused on the issue of participation itself. We raise questions about the way in which this is understood by development agencies, arguing that the conceptualisation of children's participation by each organisation will reflect their underlying philosophies. Limits will always exist to the extent to which agencies may be prepared to support undertakings by children and this will be shaped at least as much by values as by practical conditions. A similar argument can also be made for approaches to monitoring and evaluation.

We also note in this section that children's participation may take different forms. In common with other agencies, Plan is keen to promote children's participation in wider community-level processes of development, as well as their involvement in different fora at national and international level. However, at this present time, participation most commonly seems to occur within child-led initiatives. The findings and discussion contained in this document relate particularly to children's participation in this form.

Section 1 is focused on the changes ('impacts') – both positive and negative – that children's participation may bring about. These are grouped into four distinct areas or 'realms' of children's lives: personal, familial, communal and institutional. We cite examples from fieldwork and from the literature. Even from this relatively brief synopsis, it should be clear that good participatory programming has immense potential to bring about positive change in children's lives.

The focus on impact in relation to different realms is partly a means to provide a defined starting-point to what may otherwise seem a very random process of data collection and analysis. More than this, however, we suggest that evaluating projects in relation to these different realms promotes an holistic approach, ensuring that positive change in various areas of children's lives, including their own personal development, remains firmly in view.

In addition to the discussion of positive change, we also consider possible negative impacts that may arise through the implementation of children's participation. Issues discussed include the personal security and well-being of children, family and community relations, overburdening participants or giving them unrealistic hopes.

Stephen Makau

Section 2 discusses various issues relating to evaluation. Possible tools and methods are described and consideration is given to the manner in which evaluation activities are conducted. We also focus on ethical issues in relation to evaluation practice. Our aim is to draw attention to the need for detailed consideration of the many aspects involved in conducting a safe, effective and beneficial evaluation process. Overall, we argue for an approach to monitoring and evaluation as a progressive aspect of each project, and a part of activities in which all participants may play a role.

In Section 3 we consider the challenges for agencies in seeking to develop children's participation further, including the introduction of a participatory approach to evaluation itself. The results of the literature review, field visits and the London conference all pointed clearly to the danger of focussing on evaluation in isolation from the rest of the process of children's participation. Therefore the final section contains discussion of various challenges that agencies may need to face in order to implement children's participation that is worthy of rigorous evaluation procedures. These challenges are conceptual and organisational as well as purely technical. Ultimately, we argue that vision and commitment on the part of senior management are required for agencies to become able to support and promote children's participation and its evaluation more effectively. We end with a small number of specific recommendations for further action in relation to both evaluation and organisational development, as follows:

Recommendations for future action

Evaluation

- Assessment of capacity-building needs and training for evaluation
- Development of strategy for progressive realisation of monitoring and evaluation as an integrated aspect of participatory projects
- Consideration of indicators that may be used at a global level and allow for full articulation of local, project-based indicators
- Production of guidelines to assist development of in-project monitoring and evaluation procedures, including the creation of indicators

Organisational development

- Dialogue within and between agencies in order to develop conceptual clarity and strategy regarding:

  - the assessment of children's evolving competences

  - power relations between adults and children and among children themselves

  - mainstreaming children's participation

  - internalising the philosophy of children's participation across the organisation
- Development of training strategy for facilitators that grounds ideas contained in manuals within local context
- Work with donors to develop greater appreciation for the specific monitoring and evaluation needs of children's participatory programming

Conduct of the study

This document is the product of a three-fold strategy. It represents the initial response by Plan to the challenges of evaluating children's participation. Firstly, Plan commissioned a review of contemporary literature about children's participation in general and the evaluation of participatory projects in particular. This review has endeavoured to take in both the theoretical literature as well as studies of participatory programming in practice. It also incorporates the insights and experiences of a number of key figures within the field that were elicited through interviews.

With the literature review as a departure-point, a team of three researchers (Ackermann, Hart, Newman) then undertook brief field visits to countries where Plan is engaged in the promotion of children's participation. Kenya, Ecuador and India were chosen in order to provide a diversity of cultural context, each with its own specific difficulties and opportunities for participatory programming. The aims of these field visits were as follows:

(1) to meet with child participants in a range of different projects to explore with them the processes by which their activities were run and the impacts of involvement on their lives

(2) to discuss with parents and other community members the impacts of children's participation from their point of view

(3) to learn from staff in Plan and other child-focused agencies about their understandings and experiences of children's participation and the potential impacts of this

(4) to explore possible methods and approaches that may be used in the evaluation of participatory projects

As the third element of Plan's strategy, the key findings of this field research were shared with an audience of development practitioners, young people and academics at a one-day conference in November 2003 (referred to hereafter as the 'London conference'). These findings, together with observations from a number of speakers with particular expertise in this field, provided the basis for discussion among over 60 participants. The outcomes of our discussion are also incorporated in this document.

Introduction

Since it emerged in the late 1970s, the notion of 'participation' has gradually gained acceptance as a basic operational principle of development programming. To some, it is a means to an end, a process whereby local people cooperate or collaborate in an externally introduced project; to others it constitutes an end in itself, with the goal being to help people acquire the skills, knowledge and experience to take greater responsibility for their own development and, ultimately, be empowered to transform their lives and their environment. For the most part, development agencies have sought to involve only adults as participants.

During the 1990s, however, child-focused organisations became increasingly interested in the participation of children. Many are now explicitly seeking to create or support opportunities for young people to express themselves and be involved in decision-making. The motivation for this is partly explained by a general shift in agency thinking towards seeing children as bearers of rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which was adopted by the United Nations in 1989 and ratified almost universally since then, has played a vital role in encouraging and shaping this change in attitude. According to one commentator, Marta Santos Pais, the CRC provides "a new vision of children". It brings together the familiar view of the child "as a vulnerable human being that requires protection and assistance from the family, the society and the State" with the perception that she or he "is a subject of rights who is able to form and express opinions, to participate in decision-making processes and influence solutions, to intervene as a partner in the process of social change and in the building up of democracy"[1]. Furthermore, participation is not only a right in itself, as specifically expressed in Article 12 of the CRC, it may also be a means by which children's rights generally may be realised[2].

Discussion of the benefits of children's participation is not always framed in terms of rights. Many observers of actual projects are simply impressed by the positive changes that seem to result from children's participation without relating these explicitly to the CRC. Most commonly noted are changes in the outlook, self-confidence and sociability of children. However, impacts on the family and wider community are also often noted.

In addition, the case has been made that projects that involve children as participants are more effective and efficient. Whether in relation to child-led initiatives[3] or within processes of development in the wider community[4], children's participation is considered to lead to better decision-making.

In short, child-focused agencies are becoming increasingly aware of the tremendous potential that participation offers in terms of benefiting not only those children directly involved but also their peers, families and wider communities, and even the agencies themselves. This current enthusiasm is demonstrated by the fact that the 2003 edition of the highly influential UNICEF report on 'The State of the World's Children' took as its theme 'child participation'. In addition, in June 2003, the Save the Children Alliance held a global meeting in Addis Ababa focused specifically on this same subject. For their part, in March 2003, Plan hosted a seminar for the UK development community, Children's Participation in Development – Challenges and Ways Forward with the aim of sharing ideas and experiences and identifying necessary next steps.

[1] Santos Pais (1999:4)
[2] Lansdown (2003)
[3] Ibid
[4] Phillips (2000)

James Sparshatt

The strong recommendation that the evaluation of children's participation should be a priority area for action arose from these latter two initiatives. Participants at the Plan seminar were aware of the impressive changes that children's participation could bring about based on their first-hand experience. However, they expressed the need for a means of evaluation by which to capture these changes in a more systematic and rigorous manner. The data produced in this way should inform further programmatic development and strengthen the efforts of implementing agencies to advocate for the support of children's participation with donors.

Part of the challenge in creating a rigorous and replicable approach to evaluation is conceptual. First of all, we must clarify what we understand by 'participation' – a term that has become fashionable in development discourse without any necessary consensus about its meaning or the manner in which it should be realised in practice, particularly in relation to children.

There is also a need to develop our thinking about outcomes and impact of participatory projects. Inevitably, the forms of change that we look for will be determined by our understanding of children's lives. This requires us to make explicit our ideas and assumptions. For example, do we consider children's lives to be principally contained within the home and the school? Or, do we believe that children play (or could play) a significant role within their communities, and even within the formal and informal processes of governance from the local level up?

Finally, we must also consider how positive change is achieved within a specific project, and the process for identifying and evaluating such change.

The actual process of evaluation must itself be thought through carefully and a clear understanding of the practical, conceptual and ethical aspects developed. Why, how, when and by whom is an evaluation to be undertaken? What actual methods and activities should be employed? What skills are required of evaluators to ensure that the process will be effective, safe and beneficial?

What is meant by 'participation'?

In one sense, children's participation is nothing new. As a recent study points out, "children have always participated in life: in the home, in school, in work, in communities, in wars"[5]. What, then, is 'participation' in the sense in which development agencies seek to promote it? And how, if at all, does it differ from children's activities that happen anyway?

The fact is that, although children are often highly involved in the practical aspects of family and community life, their participation may not always be recognised. Even when this is recognised it is unlikely that children will be included in local decision-making processes. Certainly at the level of the state, the right to elect representatives and vote on policies is not usually extended to those under 18 years of age.

Within the development community, there appears to be a general agreement with Roger Hart's definition of participation as "the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives"[6]. With the championing of women's participation by development agencies, it may be that children remain the last population group excluded from decision-making processes: a situation that child-focused agencies are seeking to correct. But to what ends? What limits, if any, ought we apply to the empowerment of children and the opening-up of decision-making processes to include them? What role could and should children, as a section of the population, play in society?

For international NGOs and UN agencies, children's participation is commonly envisaged as a means of preparing the young for their future role in a liberal democracy. In other words, they are to be empowered in order to play a part in existing decision-making processes and structures of governance.

Some practitioners, particularly those working at the grassroots level, adopt a more radical stance. They argue that participation (or 'protagonism') is a process by which children may confront and overturn practices that exclude them socially, culturally and politically in the here-and-now. As Cussianovich has written:

> **"Protagonism means a redefinition of power in society, a frontal questioning of power based on the condition of adults. It does not only make possible a new way to rethink a new children's culture in our societies, it demands demolishing and rebuilding a new adult culture"[7].**

The difference between the liberal and more radical view may perhaps be understood in relation to education. It has been suggested that participation can lead children to take greater control over their own learning[8]. Many school councils and 'parliaments' supported by international agencies appear to be aimed at the enhancement of the school environment and the learning experience of themselves and their fellow pupils.

Those of a more radical persuasion, in contrast, might look at the possibility that children come to question the value and purpose of the schooling they receive, and seek to effect profound change, or even abandon the existing school system altogether. It is unlikely that many international agencies would offer support to children in order to proceed far down this road.

[5] UNICEF (2003:3)
[6] 1992:5
[7] 1995: 60, cited in Ennew (2000:17)
[8] Roger Hart, Interview

To summarise, children's participation is most commonly conceptualised as both a right (in line with the CRC) and as a means of making local level development more child-friendly and more conducive to the realisation of children's rights as a whole. Partly, this is to be achieved through involving children in community-wide development processes – referred to as both 'child centred community development' (CCCD) and 'child-focused community development' (CFCD). Efforts in CCCD and CFCD are currently being made by Plan and other organisations in various parts of the world[9].

Although progress is being made in integrating children's participation in community development, this is still in its infancy. We would suggest that in the majority of cases 'children's participation' currently involves the establishment of initiatives that are, in theory at least, run by and for children. The role of adults in such projects is or should be limited to that of facilitation and support. In our visits to India, Kenya and Ecuador, the projects that we visited were all child-led initiatives – though the extent to which children took responsibility in practice varied a good deal. This document deals particularly with participation in this form.

In addition to local activities, agencies do sometimes facilitate children's participation in fora at national and even international level but this is generally on an ad hoc basis. While agencies will commonly challenge obstacles to the participation of children in their immediate environment, it is unlikely that they envision or would support children who sought to radically reshape society. As already mentioned, the political agenda, albeit implicit in many cases, is one of strengthening liberal democracy through the provision of opportunities for children to develop the attitudes relevant to good, engaged citizens of such a system. This is important to acknowledge because it points towards the limitations that an agency may place – consciously or otherwise – on children's participation.

The principles of children's participation

Achieving children's full participation in community development is a complex challenge for development agencies. It would seem to require organisations to subscribe to certain principles that will govern the way they work with children and their communities. The following principles emerged from the literature review, fieldwork and conference discussion. They may be discussed and adapted to the context of each project in which children participate.

Proposed principles of participatory programming with children

- Non-discrimination and inclusiveness
- Democracy and equality of opportunity
- The physical, emotional and psychological safety of participants
- Adult responsibility
- Voluntarism, informed consent and transparency
- Participation should be an enjoyable and stimulating experience

[9] For Plan's experience of this approach see Johnson (2000), Fowler (2003) and Plan International (2003). Also, Development Focus International et. al. (n.d.)

Monitoring and evaluation

The challenge of identifying indicators for children's participation

The need for a reliable means of evaluating and demonstrating the positive changes that participatory programming with children can bring about has already been highlighted. Practitioners and academics at Plan's March 2003 seminar, Children's Participation in Development – Challenges and Ways Forward, had witnessed many examples of such changes. However, many felt there was a lack of systematic procedure for capturing these in a rigorous and replicable manner.

In the initial period after the seminar, discussions between Plan and the researchers focused on the development of indicators that might be used in the evaluation of participatory projects. Indicators are a fundamental component of all monitoring and evaluation procedures employed within the development field. They are the basic tool of measurement and tend to be focused on clearly quantifiable change, such as the rate of infant mortality, primary school enrolment rates and so on.

In relation to participatory programming with children, however, the use of indicators is fraught with problems. In considering these problems, we come to see the considerable challenges of developing a system of monitoring and evaluation that fits with the ideology and practice of children's participation. On a technical level, indicators need to be measurable in order to be of any use and for this require precise definition. While this may be possible in certain discrete sectors, such as health or education, activities arising from children's participation will inevitably address a range of different issues across different sectors. Furthermore, the changes sought are, for the most part, likely to be qualitative in essence. Quantification may only be possible as a subsequent step when the relevant dimensions of qualitative change have been identified and data about achieved change for individual children, their families and communities is aggregated.

Beyond this, there is an issue about who identifies the indicators and what constitutes a standard of success. Conventional approaches to monitoring and evaluation are built around the concerns of management with efficiency and effectiveness: the achievement of 'benefit' in high proportion to unit 'cost' to ensure and demonstrate the maximum use of resources. Within such an approach, it is likely that management will feel compelled to employ a consistent set of its own indicators. Traditionally, these are used by outside evaluators at predetermined time intervals in line with the life of the project – itself determined in advance.

Implications of rights-based approaches to monitoring and evaluation

The gradual shift to 'rights-based approaches' by most large child-focused agencies has led to some modification of monitoring and evaluation procedures. The objectives of programmatic interventions are commonly defined with explicit reference to children's rights. Indicators may be derived from articles of the CRC. However, many of the articles of the convention are open to interpretation. For example, what is understood as 'the best interests of the child' (Article 18), 'a full and decent life' (Article 23) or 'spiritual, moral and social development' (Article 27)? Inevitably, different cultures, generations and social classes are likely to interpret such ideas in a variety of ways. Indicators based on the CRC that do not address this point may therefore have the same inherent problems as those produced by agency managers that focus on costs and benefits.

Clearly missing from the conventional approach, even when rights are taken into account, is the input of participants themselves. Some agencies, including Plan, endeavour to allow the space for further indicators to be developed within a country to reflect local circumstances. However, in the final analysis, it is questionable if locally-developed indicators carry the same weight as those determined at Head Office level for global use. In any case, 'locally-developed' does not necessarily mean that project participants have been directly involved in identifying indicators and measures of success.

A basic element of any genuinely participatory monitoring and evaluation procedure is the identification of indicators that are meaningful for participants themselves. Indeed, the whole monitoring and evaluation process, including the establishment of project objectives, must reflect the concerns and aspirations of participants directly and be of use to them.

The development of a more participatory approach to monitoring and evaluation that allows for project participants themselves to identify indicators has strong implications for the relationship of implementing agencies with their donors. Much work may be needed by agencies to achieve acceptance on the part of donors of a more qualitative and decentralised approach to monitoring and evaluation than is common practice at present.

Value of monitoring and evaluation activities to participants

In what ways might monitoring and evaluation procedures be useful to project participants? Firstly, the discussion of project objectives may lead to greater clarity and the building of a shared vision. Through implementing monitoring and evaluation activities, children are also likely to gain a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their activities. A well-integrated and ongoing approach to monitoring and evaluation can also help participants to identify the procedures and practices of the project that are beneficial and those that are obstructive or redundant. Furthermore, children may become more aware of areas in which knowledge and/or capacity need to be developed or additional support enlisted from facilitators, other adults or institutions.

In developing a procedure for monitoring and evaluation that reflects the needs of their project, participants will also come to reflect on the timing and mode of implementation. When should monitoring and evaluation activities be undertaken? Who should be involved? What happens with the findings?

A genuinely participatory monitoring and evaluation process that is of direct benefit to participants therefore creates obvious challenges for the implementation of a conventional, agency-wide, top-down approach. The ability to impose timeframe and mode of implementation, to manage the collected data and, of course, to use Head Office-produced indicators, may all become subject to re-negotiation. Overall, the awareness of participants about their project that is created through a participatory approach to monitoring and evaluation would seem to promote accountability on the part of the supporting agency.

More fundamentally, in the necessary process of discussing together project objectives, participants may find themselves at odds with the agenda of the supporting agency. Armed with their own monitoring and evaluation data demonstrating the strength of their work, they may approach other agencies and/or donors for support and conceivably choose to break their ties with the existing agency. In this way, both their empowerment and their ownership of the project would be strongly demonstrated.

From this brief discussion, it should be clear that a participatory approach to monitoring and evaluation is much more than an adaptation of existing systems to incorporate input from children themselves (and other project stakeholders). If pursued in a sincere fashion, agencies are likely to identify areas in which profound change is required of them in both outlook and practice. Arguably, participatory monitoring and evaluation is at odds with 'normative' programming – that is to say, programming that is based largely on values of agencies and donors (including child rights as articulated in the CRC). Supporting children in the process of establishing their own project aims derived from discussion and data collection about the particular challenges they and their peers face are aspects of 'evidence-based programming'. The implications of this must be considered in depth by agencies seriously engaged in the promotion of children's participation.

Finally, it should be stressed that in a participatory approach to monitoring and evaluation there is still an important role for external evaluators. As we found repeatedly in our field visits, as outsiders we were able to introduce fresh questions and perspectives that proved stimulating for project participants. In addition, evaluators can play a valuable service in facilitating, documenting and framing evaluation activities. Presumably, they would also need to mediate between the monitoring and evaluation needs and aims of project participants, on the one hand, and those of the supporting agency, on the other.

This document proceeds on the assumption that genuinely participatory monitoring and evaluation is still relatively rare. The shift to this way of working is likely to be gradual and progressive. At this time, outside evaluators, therefore, have the additional responsibility to assist each project with which they engage in moving towards such a goal. Their experiences in the field would also seem invaluable learning for agencies as they strive to achieve the full integration of participatory monitoring and evaluation processes.

1. The impacts of children's participation

1.1. Realms of impact

Why 'realms'?

The evaluation of participatory programming is fundamentally about qualitative change in children's daily lives[10]. This is not to rule out the collection of quantitative data as a means of demonstrating positive change, for example in terms of improved school attendance or a raised average age of marriage for girls within a village. It may also be possible to aggregate qualitative changes. However, the identification of the appropriate units of change that need to be counted should involve qualitative enquiry. Therefore there is the clear need to work with children, their families and communities to discover the kinds of changes that are meaningful in each setting.

Where should such an enquiry begin and how can we avoid getting lost in the detail that it is likely to elicit? In seeking a reasonably defined starting-point, it may be helpful to consider change in relation to a limited number of dimensions or 'realms'.

The four realms (personal, familial, communal and institutional) that we suggest are derived from both direct and implicit discussion in the literature. They seem broad enough to have relevance across cultures and were certainly appropriate to employ in the three countries visited for this project. Further research and discussion can and should help to elaborate these.

A further motivation for employing a framework based on different realms is that this promotes an holistic approach to projects, ensuring that positive change in various areas of children's lives, including their own personal development, remains firmly in view. In the normal course of events, people may not think about children's lives in these distinct areas. However, in our fieldwork they seemed to be readily understood by everyone and a relevant basis for discussing change. Having said that, it was noticeable that in some places the focus of discussion was more on one realm than another. For example, in the villages we visited in southern India, children spoke at length about the effect of their activities on the community but far less about personal changes. In urban northern India, this focus was, to an extent, reversed.

In suggesting these four realms, we are aware that the changes in one realm will have important repercussions in others. To some degree they will be mutually re-enforcing but we would suggest that positive change in children at the personal level is likely to be the basis for change within the family and the community.

Why 'impact'?

Much of the current practice of monitoring and evaluating participatory programming focuses solely or principally on activities themselves, that is to say on outputs: whether training sessions have been conducted, materials produced or regular meetings held, for example.

Our concern has been to move away from this focus on outputs and instead consider the changes in the lives of participants that may result. We refer to such changes in this document as 'impact'. Within development discourse, 'impact' is commonly distinguished from 'outcome'. The former may be understood as "long-term and sustainable changes introduced by a given intervention in the lives of beneficiaries"[11]. In contrast, the latter

[10] UNDP (1997); van Beers (2002)
[11] Oakley, Pratt and Clayton (1998:36)

commonly refers to "the more immediate tangible and observable change in relation to the initial situation and established objectives, which it is felt has been brought about as a direct result of project activities"[12]. In the context of this project, it would have been difficult to maintain a distinction between impact and outcome for two main reasons. Firstly, none of the child participatory projects we visited had started with a proper baseline study, nor did any have clearly established objectives, thereby making it hard to discern outcomes in line with the above definition. Secondly, the determination that 'long-term and sustainable changes' (i.e. 'impacts') have been achieved would require investigation after the elapse of a considerable period of time and to a depth which was not possible in the context of our own field visits. Nevertheless, we discerned changes in children's lives, which appeared to be profound, and, as such, had strong implications for such change.

We were therefore looking for something rather less precise than either 'impact' or 'outcome' in the strict sense. Instead, our purpose was to identify aspects of change – whether immediate or potentially long-term – that might inform a system of monitoring and evaluation that includes baseline and regular data collection over time. For the purposes of our study, we have used the term 'impact' to describe these changes.

The challenge and value of pursuing such a focus was demonstrated by our experience with young people in the Child Rights Information Centre (CRIC), part of the CASP project in Sangham Vihar, Delhi. The CRIC and the Bal Panchayat ('children's parliament') and Bal Sabha ('children's council') receive a steady stream of foreign visitors keen to witness sound examples of children's participation, of which the CASP project is clearly one. The young people whom we met were, therefore, very experienced in explaining their activities to outsiders. Nevertheless, our initial enquiry into the actual consequences of activities appeared to meet with some uncertainty.

Over the course of three days, some of the group accompanied and assisted us in other meetings. In a final review session, they explained that they had initially been confused by our questions. It appeared to us that we were possibly the first visitors to ask not only what they were doing but also what difference it made and, furthermore, how they knew it made a difference. This then led to a fruitful discussion about the potential value of incorporating a monitoring and evaluation component into their work and the possible means to do this. Apparently, both they and the CASP staff saw this as a useful way to enhance their activities and to demonstrate to visitors and potential donors the efficacy of their work and the value and validity of participatory programming.

[12] Op. cit. p.35

1.2. Personal

Summary of positive impacts at the personal level

- Self-confidence
- Useful knowledge
- Acquisition of life skills
- Personal development
- Social development
- Positive channel for energy and creativity

Self-confidence

Perhaps the most commonly cited impact of children's participatory programmes, particularly for girls, is increased self-confidence and self-esteem. This came out clearly in meetings with adolescents from the radio project 'Aquí los Chicos' in Ecuador. In a very lively discussion, the girls told us how their personalities had developed in the process of participating actively in the radio project. "About self-esteem I didn't know anything. I was very reserved, was afraid that they wouldn't listen to me. I didn't know how to value myself, how to love myself. I ask myself who I am? In the project I learned who I am."

According to one study sampling over 200 students in the United Kingdom, most said participatory activities had made them feel they can 'improve things' (94%), made them feel proud of their 'achievements' (97%) and made them feel 'more independent, trusted and responsible' (98%)[13]. The evaluation of a five-year participatory programme with street and working children in Kenya concluded, 'Children grew in confidence and self-esteem and this in turn enabled them to take greater control over their situation.'[14]

It is crucial, nonetheless, to scrutinise concepts such as 'self-confidence' and 'self-esteem' more deeply in order to understand their practical implications for children's daily lives. In other words, we must explore what it is that children have become more confident in doing.

In India, one adolescent girl illustrated for us a concrete manifestation of her heightened self-confidence as a result of participation within a Bal Panchayat:

> **She described a situation of sexual abuse, which she and a younger friend encountered while riding on a public bus. She related in detail how she had shouted loudly at the adult male offender, publicly shaming him until he hurriedly disembarked from the bus at the nearest stop. For her, this was an assertive action that she would have been much too timid to take before participation within the Bal Panchayat. It was through this participation that she had increased both knowledge of her rights and the self-confidence to tackle negative situations.**

[13] Hannam (2001:32)
[14] van Beers (2002:19)

Similarly, in Kenya, young women in a rural village indicated that their greater awareness of health issues and increased self-confidence meant they were able to voice their concerns regarding female genital mutilation to their parents and other elders.

Useful knowledge

As noted in the literature, the provision of relevant information to children is vital to their empowerment[15]. The steady expansion of knowledge enables children to act more effectively in the different realms of their lives. In Kenya, children in Msingi Bora ('good foundation') clubs were very well informed about HIV/AIDS and prevention activities, and articulated clearly the knowledge, skills and confidence they had gained around issues of sex, condom use and disease prevention. These children's increased knowledge and awareness of health issues had important practical implications not only for their own personal well-being but also for an extended population. They were able to engage in an exchange of relevant information with their peers and were increasingly involved in community-wide efforts to prevent disease proliferation.

In addition to the value of the knowledge or awareness itself, the information children acquire in participatory projects may also contribute to raising their status. In India it was suggested that increased knowledge elevated the status of children within their peer groups, families and even within the wider community. Children in a Bal Panchayat in Delhi pointed out that, via their projects, they were more informed about the various services available to them (for example, government health services), and often had greater familiarity with service-providers than their peers and even their elders. Furthermore, they had opportunities to gain recognition and respect from people such as government officials.

It must be acknowledged, however, that in the time available to us in the field it was not possible to learn about the longer-term effects ('impact' in the strict sense) of this enhanced knowledge in terms of sustainable change in children's lives.

Victor Brott

[15] For example, Reddy and Ratna (2002:6)

Acquisition of life skills

Participatory projects commonly appear to require and encourage children to develop an array of skills that are likely to prove useful beyond the project activities as well. This may include areas such as leadership, group facilitation, fundraising, accounting, public speaking and skills relating to health and environmental care.

In all three countries we visited, children who were involved in media projects – such as video campaigns, children's magazine production and radio programmes – expressed great pride in the practical skills they had learned through their projects. They were often keen to expand further the depth and breadth of these skills. In India, we met a small group of adolescents who had been involved in the production of two films (on child labour and child marriage respectively) that had won international recognition through an initiative called the One World Media Awards. This resulted in a very stimulating trip to the UK to receive the award itself.

As one girl explained, when she was first approached about the video project, she was very afraid and declined the invitation. She was fearful of all the video equipment and her mother discouraged her from participating in the production because she thought it inappropriate for a young girl. However, she was encouraged to continue by her friends. She related to us her pride and satisfaction in the end result and valuable interviewing skills she had gained from her role in the production. As she put it, "I'm good at making people talk. Now I feel I can achieve anything and I know I've contributed something important to society. When my mother saw the video, she couldn't believe what we had done." She is now interested in studying mass communications and would like to become a news broadcaster when she's older.

The impact of participation in the video project in terms of encouraging greater personal aspirations was echoed in the comments of one boy: "I think more about things now. I want to be a film director – I don't want to do commercial films but documentary films about people's problems. I want to make films to change lives and give people messages about issues that will help India develop."

Personal development

Good participatory projects appear to contribute significantly to children's personal development, as broadly defined within developmental psychology. This is manifest in such things as a sense of personal identity, cognitive and intellectual development, and the basic feelings that children have about life – optimism, happiness, security and stability.

One way in which participatory projects seem to promote a sense of personal identity, for example, is through providing a forum within which older children serve as positive role models. In Delhi, we heard from a group of adolescent boys that one of the challenges faced by male peers living in their community was the lack of role models other than violent action heroes in films. Within their project, however, they were able to engage with and learn from older youth who encouraged them towards behaviour that led to greater self-respect and respect for girls and women.

Certain recent thinking within the field of development psychology supports the potential value of participatory projects for children's development. Judith Harris challenges the view that it is parents who are overwhelmingly responsible for children's socialisation and the development of their personalities. She argues instead that the peer group exerts the most significant influence, particularly among adolescents[16]. The promotion of activities in which children take responsibility, cooperate and support one another in a spirit of tolerance and non-discrimination would seem especially valuable from this perspective.

Furthermore, in line with the school of thought associated with the influential Russian psychologist Vygotsky, such opportunities for social interaction should also contribute to children's mental development since, it is argued, "mental development is closely tied to social and emotional development. It is not primarily an individualised process...It is a social and cultural process"[17].

Social development

Children's social competence – in terms of communicative ability, sensitivity and empathy – commonly appears to be enhanced by participation. Working as a group towards a common goal is an invaluable means of developing such competence as well as attitudes of cooperation and tolerance that enable individual children to work effectively and enjoyably together. During visits to several projects, children openly discussed the rules and regulations that guided their meetings and the consequences of negative behaviour for group functioning. The emphasis in these rules was always on equity, transparency and collaboration.

In Kenya, India and Ecuador, projects provide valued opportunities for interaction between the genders that is often lacking in their everyday lives. Explicit discussions of gender roles and issues seem to occur fairly often. However, simply by working together and sharing responsibilities participants have the opportunity to develop greater understanding and confidence in their communication across what may otherwise be a significant gender divide.

It is not only children's competence in their social relations with peers that may be enhanced by participatory activities. Projects involving adults and children working together in an atmosphere of "mutual trust, affection and most of all respect" should provide a positive example for children in their efforts to build better relations with adults in general[18]. This atmosphere was striking in some of the projects we visited. In the CASP project, for example, mutual respect, good humour and close collaboration seemed to mark the relationship between participating children and adult facilitators.

[16] Harris (1998)
[17] Woodhead (2003:114)
[18] Reddy & Ratna (2002:14)

Positive channel for energy and creativity

The potential of participatory activities to channel children's energies and frustrations in a productive manner was noted by a participant in the London conference – Chernor Bah – based on his personal experience as a young person living in Sierra Leone. In some settings, participatory projects may provide a rare or sole opportunity for children to do this. It would seem especially important to provide such opportunities in situations of instability and violence, where the energy of young people and their desire for change might otherwise find expression in some military-type activity.

In June 2002 – a time of great instability in Gaza – a group of adolescents explained the benefit of their involvement in their own computer project as follows:

> **"Our mental health has improved. We now have the capacity to be able to give a new image of Palestine to the world. The world thinks we are backward and chaotic. America thinks it is better than us, but we can do things: we can handle advanced knowledge, we can be scientific, we can organise ourselves – we're not chaotic. By increasing our skills we can become more capable of fighting the Occupation with our minds"[19].**

[19] From Hart J. (2002b)

1.3. Familial

Summary of positive impacts at the family level

- Greater parental support and less abuse
- Enhanced status within the family
- Greater social freedom, particularly for girls

Improvement in family relations as a consequence of children's participation is noted often in the literature and was reported in all three countries visited.

Greater parental support and less abuse

Children involved in child rights and participatory activities may be instrumental in raising the awareness of their parents of children's rights. This in turn may result in increased parental support for children and/or reduced domestic abuse. Agency staff in the three countries we visited hoped that the establishment of children's participatory projects would lead to radical reductions in the levels of child abuse. While such social transformation is undoubtedly a long process, children suggested that, as a result of their new-found confidence, knowledge, abilities and respect derived from experiences in participatory projects, open discussions within the home of issues such as domestic violence, sex, and HIV/AIDS were much more likely than before.

Greater parental support may also be a response to positive changes perceived in children. Parents we met cited participatory projects as the catalyst for their children's increased self-discipline, positive behaviour and mature attitudes in the home. According to a community-based organisation (CBO) in rural Kenya, children's participation was contributing to the development of their self-discipline, virtuous character, and sense of personal duty or responsibility. One CBO member told us, "Children take life more seriously now. They know the value of their decisions."

In India, parents emphasised children's heightened understanding of the difficulties faced by the family and said that children were increasingly willing and able to share burdens and responsibilities. In addition, parents often claimed that the financial awareness and skills their children had acquired through participatory projects meant they had developed an appreciation of the family's economic situation, and therefore the need to curb their demands accordingly.

An alternative view put forward by children in a recent study of child poverty is that they are often acutely aware of family circumstances but are not given credit for this or encouraged to participate in discussions[20]. Either way, the important point is that children's participation seems to lead to better understanding between parents and children as well as greater dialogue around the challenges faced by the family.

[20] Jo Boyden, Interview

Enhanced status within the family

In field visits, both children and parents described how the enhanced knowledge and skills children had gained through their involvement in projects had enabled them to contribute more effectively to the well-being of the household. As a consequence, their status within the family was raised and they were more valued.

As children in a Bal Panchayat in India said, their parents now often consult them, listen to their advice on important family issues and engage them in family discussions and decision-making. "Now that I can argue my opinions convincingly," one boy told us, "my parents give importance to what I have to say."

Adults involved with a Msingi Bora club in Kenya noted that both children and families benefit when children set positive examples for their parents and bring home the knowledge, skills and values learned during their projects. As children encourage their parents to save money and participate in community activities, and teach them about income-generating activities, there are likely to be positive changes in both family dynamics and individual children's status. Furthermore, children described the mutual respect and trust that had developed with their parents and the positive implications this had for their lives.

Greater social freedom, particularly for girls

In some cultures, it is considered unacceptable for adolescent girls to socialise outside the home, particularly with male peers. However, evidence suggests that it may be possible for female participants to re-negotiate these constraints through building trust and mutual respect with parents. The confidence and ability to do this appear to derive from their experience within the participatory projects themselves[21].

> **In Thika, like many rural villages in Kenya, young girls are often held back from school in order to look after younger siblings, care for elderly relatives or attend to household chores. Many girls complained that they are treated like domestic servants or housewives while their brothers are given few responsibilities. They had to fetch water and firewood, and they were not allowed out to spend free time with friends or develop male companionship. Some girls said that since their involvement in Msingi Bora activities, their parents trust and respect them more, which results in less gender discrimination in the home.**

Moreover, some children – especially girls – suggested that, as a result of their development through the participatory projects, their parents' future aspirations and ambitions for them had grown significantly.

[21] Lolichen & Ratna (Interview); Hart J. (2002a).

1.4. Communal

Summary of positive impacts at the community level

- Peer solidarity
- Community awareness and concern for children's issues
- Improved status of children within the community
- Enhanced community development

Peer solidarity

Participatory projects may provide important opportunities for the building of strong bonds of friendship and solidarity among children. In all three countries, the social opportunities for girls are liable to be particularly limited. Therefore, projects that actively seek to involve them in a cooperative environment of respect and equality may be especially welcome. In Ecuador, adolescent girls from the radio project 'Aquí los Chicos' gave evidence for this point. They explained how the project was a space for developing solidarity, friendship, sharing affection, getting support, building networks and giving protection to each other.

All this becomes even more important for children living in an unhappy or abusive family situation. Until they joined the radio project, most female adolescents spent their time after school exclusively at home. "We didn't have friends before, felt very repressed and would never go out." A girl aged 15 added: "Saturday [when they go on air] is the nicest day of the week. At home I don't have anybody to talk to... It's necessary to have a space only for adolescents."

Through the building of strong, supportive networks, participants also appear to develop confidence as members of a group. Children in a Bal Panchayat in southern India suggested that an important impact of their participation had been the collective power resulting from their group cohesion and recognised presence in the village.

> **One of the major concerns of children was having to walk at night to buy food from the local shops since there were no street lights and the distances could be great. This had been a very frightening task, as they were liable to face abuse or harassment from adults along the way. They explained proudly that, due to the establishment of the Bal Panchayat, though there are still no street lights, they are no longer afraid to walk to the shops in the dark. As one young boy said; "Everyone knows we're in the Bal Panchayat, so now they can't harm us. Now we have courage to go, because we have unity."**

Community awareness and concern for children's issues

Awareness campaigns conducted by child-led groups give adult community members the opportunity to become more informed about and involved in challenges confronting children in their communities. Children in projects we visited in India suggested that community awareness about issues such as early marriage, child labour, female foeticide, child abuse and alcoholism has dramatically increased thanks to the efforts of Bal Panchayats and Bal Sabhas throughout the country. In Kenya, child clubs have been successful in raising community awareness and concern about female genital mutilation, HIV/AIDS orphanhood, as well as child abuse and alcoholism.

In Thika, adults involved in a Msingi Bora club described the numerous occasions when children had spontaneously decided to perform their songs, poems and dramas about HIV/AIDS at village functions. It is through such initiatives that children begin the process of raising community awareness of the challenges they face, and pass their newly-acquired knowledge and information to adults who often, they claim, spread talk of children's issues among themselves. These adults noted that public performances by children have proven an extremely effective means by which to draw community attention to children's problems.

Improved status of children within the community

One consequence of children's participation may be the enhancement of relationships between adults and children in the community. Through involvement in projects, children commonly develop inter-personal skills and increased experience in conducting dialogue with adults. Furthermore, well-facilitated projects often help children to acquire skills and knowledge that are valued by the community, thereby enabling them to raise their status[22].

Adults involved in supporting young people are sometimes reported to be "surprised" and "impressed" by what the young people are capable of doing and achieving. One observer found "a great deal of evidence of changes in attitudes", both personal and professional, including beginning to see young people as part of the solution rather than as part of the problem[23].

In addition, by drawing adult attention to children's contribution through a particular project or child-led initiative, it is possible that the recognition by adults of children's everyday contributions to family and community life will be increased[24].

Graduates of one Bal Panchayat in India explained that, having proven their newly-developed capacities, key resource people (such as service-providers and even government officials) now take their concerns seriously and are happy to work with them to improve children's living conditions within the community. We also heard of cases where project participants had been sought out by various authorities that wished to benefit from their insights and use their research and/or records, which were considered to be far better than their own[25].

Underlying such change is the basic fact that, in the course of their activities, children may be coming into contact with a range of people and institutions that they would otherwise be unlikely to meet and talking with them about substantial issues in a confident and well-organised manner.

[22] Kavita Ratna and Lolichen P.J. (Interview)
[23] Shenton (1999:23)
[24] Vicky Johnson (Interview)
[25] Kavita Ratna and Lolichen P.J. (Interview)

Enhanced community development

According to the literature, children's mobilisation through participatory projects may provide energy and motivation for community development, and that "actively involving children as a catalyst... activates the local community as a whole"[26]. The positive results of listening to children were apparent in one project in the northern Ladakh region of India, where a senior official admitted that:

> **"There was a tendency to neglect children, but now we have started this process of involving them, children have motivated their parents and villagers, they have made lots of positive changes..."[27].**

The children's clubs introduced in war-torn eastern Sri Lanka have elicited similar results:

> **"... in Sivanthivu the school principal reported that, prior to the establishment of the (children's) club, only five to six parents came regularly to the meetings of the Student Development Society, intended as a forum for support of the school and their children's education. However, as the club became active, attendance jumped and there are now around 150 parents involved. A general mood of apathy has given way to concern about ways in which the village may be developed"[28].**

It is also believed that children's participation attunes the project to community needs more effectively, including those of children. This in turn should contribute to a better, more cooperative atmosphere and projects that run more smoothly are less time-consuming and more cost-effective[29]. An increase in staff motivation, improved external relations between the community and the project, and more consistent and effective networking are likely further consequences[30]. These benefits were noted in our field visits. Agency staff suggested that entire communities were motivated and encouraged toward community learning and development as a result of children's active involvement. In addition, young people were taking direct action that benefited the community.

[26] Winter (1997:26)
[27] Quoted in O'Kane (2002)
[28] Hart J. (2002c:39)
[29] Phillips, (2000)
[30] van Beers (2002)

In the rural community of Higuerón Adentro in Ecuador, older adolescents were working together with younger children on issues of children's rights, physical and psychological abuse, and were promoting children's parliaments. They were also conducting literacy courses for adults and had initiated a health club for elderly people in the community that organises meetings every evening to do exercises intended to help prevent and alleviate illness.

Children explained, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, that the mayor of the children's parliament participates in community assemblies. The mayor, 11 years old, explained how he represents the children and how he makes a case for children in assemblies. The mutual understanding and engagement of the different generations in this community was very impressive. It seemed that community development was brought about by every generation.

Children, parents and agency staff also indicated that projects often had a profound effect on community life. They provided a model of a well-functioning social body and encouraged the development of positive values such as inclusiveness and non-discrimination. According to some children, setting a positive example for their communities has served to enhance community participation in development initiatives generally and has been particularly helpful for women, whose status has improved as a result of growing democratic values and processes.

In addition to having a positive impact on adults within the larger community, children discussed the similarly positive role they had played in other children's lives. Children in Kenya spoke of the leadership role they played among their own peers; how they counselled their friends and advocated for other children not involved in participatory projects. Furthermore, these children noted that the leadership positions they had undertaken in church and elsewhere enabled them to have a positive influence on the lives of younger children within their communities.

Environmental care and protection is one specific area of community development in which many child-led initiatives are already concentrated. In both India and Kenya, children's clubs were engaged in tree-planting projects, street clean-up campaigns and ecological education programmes. Communities therefore benefit from children's developing environmental awareness, understanding and skills related to good agricultural practice and management of natural resources.

1.5. Institutional

Summary of positive impacts at the institutional level

- Improvements in schooling
- Enhanced processes and institutions of governance
- Better functioning of agencies

The literature suggests that children's participatory projects have the potential to contribute to positive change in communal, national and even international institutions. Improved educational environments (improved relations between children and teachers, better school facilities, more child-friendly curricular material and so on), improved conditions for child workers, better health care and housing and enhanced legal protection are some of the areas in which we might anticipate positive impact as a result of children's participation.

Improvements in schooling

Some of the most frequently suggested changes resulting from children's participation anticipated within the literature relate to school[31]. For example, the Bilingual Teacher Training Programme of the Peruvian Amazon built on children's knowledge of their own community and daily lives using both their native language and Spanish. The result has been schooling that is more relevant with more motivated pupils, contributing in turn to the development of cultural integrity and sustainable improvements for their community[32].

A study of 12 participatory schools in the UK found that the overall rate of permanent exclusions was significantly lower than for other less participatory (but otherwise similar) schools. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the attendance of less academic and potentially alienated students, particularly boys, was also improved through involvement in participatory activities[33].

Enhanced processes and institutions of governance

Some writers have argued that participatory projects should lead children into regular participation or representation in decision-making processes, particularly at the local level[34]. UNICEF anticipates that, in the long run, establishing more frequent and far-reaching participatory programmes with children will effect a transformation of power structures at multiple levels, beginning with programme unit and community, and moving into larger local, national and international arenas[35].

Some suggest that participation may also prepare children for their full involvement in the social and political life of their societies. As Roger Hart has commented: "it is unrealistic to expect children suddenly to become responsible, participating adults without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities involved"[36]. The same author more recently noted that through: "frequent experiences with direct democratic participation in institutional settings...children can come gradually to construct authentic participatory democracies"[37].

[31] For example, Hannam, 2001; Saurin, 1998; O'Kane, 2002; Cussianovich & Marquez, 2002; Woodhead, 1999; Davies and Kirkpatrick, 2000
[32] Hart R. (1997:60)
[33] Hannam (2001)
[34] Karkara & Singh (2003), Hart J. with Khatiwada (2003); O'Kane, (2003); Kavita Ratna and Lolichen P.J. (Interview).
[35] UNICEF (2003)
[36] Hart R. (1992:5)
[37] Hart R. (1997:192)

The 'School Mayors of Iran' project was established in 1994 as a means of involving schoolchildren in sustainable development through the creation of organisations in which elected students take responsibility for school affairs and the areas around school premises. It would seem, however, that it has led to a far wider impact. The author of a recent report on the project has argued as follows:

> **"...projects such as School Mayors can be regarded as first steps toward the creation of a new generation of true citizens. The outcomes of these projects have been beyond anyone's expectations in Iran to the point that one of the leading figures of the Iranian right wing ...while pointing to the causes of their defeat and election of Mr Khatami, indicated that projects such as School Mayors have mobilised not only the middle schoolers but also their families and through them the entire nation"[38].**

Hart's comments and this example indicate that children's participation is or should be oriented towards the development of liberal democracy. In places where such a system of governance is already well-established, children's participation may therefore be a rather conservative endeavour aimed at peripheral change and/or enhancement of existing conditions. This is sometimes conceptualised as making society more 'child-friendly'.

In other societies considered by the West not to enjoy liberal democracy – such as in Iran – children's participation may be imagined as having a far greater and more profound potential impact. It may be one aspect of a broad endeavour to remake non-western societies according to an ideal held by a certain section of the world's population. While it is not our intention to criticise such views, it is clearly important for agencies to reflect on their own outlook and values and to ask themselves how these may shape their understanding of 'impact' and the aspirations they hold for children's participation.

Better functioning of agencies

As already discussed, one of the anticipated benefits of participatory programming for agencies is that projects may become more effective. Simultaneously, the organisation may benefit from an enriched and deepened understanding of issues affecting children, information is gathered that would never otherwise have surfaced, and children's perspectives, needs and desires in relation to those of the community become clearer[39]. Some local organisations we visited, particularly in India, suggested that working with children on participatory activities had had a democratising influence on their organisation, encouraging increased participation at all levels.

[38] Piran (n.d.)

[39] van Beers (2002)

1.6. Negative impacts

As with all programmatic activities, children's participatory projects can have negative impacts. Within our fieldwork, the potential for this was noted particularly in relation to the family environment. At meetings in India and Kenya, parents expressed concern that involvement in participatory projects was detracting from the time and energy children could devote to their domestic responsibilities, or from their school work and religious education.

We were also alerted to the possibility of a conflict of interests between parents and children when the latter began to work on community or domestic issues through their club or other participatory project. This may take the form of activities by children to raise awareness about practices that they feel threaten their well-being – such as early marriage or alcohol consumption. There is a real possibility that parents can be angered or feel humiliated by the public airing of private issues and that this may lead to punishment of the children involved.

> **In one Indian village, we noted a case of potential conflict of interest. The members of the Bal Panchayat were active in efforts to prevent the cutting down of trees for use as firewood in the local tobacco curing industry. However, for the parents of some of these same children, this industry was the source of their livelihood.**

The London conference discussion revealed other potential negative impacts. For example, Perpetua Kirby reported on research with children in south London demonstrating that a supposedly participatory project that turned out not to be so may actually have undermined children's self-confidence, leaving them with a sense of their own inability to effect change[40].

Neirisa Palada raised the issue of sibling relationships within the family and how the participation of one child and not of his or her sibling may create problems. Chernor Bah voiced a concern that participatory projects might lead to overconfidence in participants and therefore to actions that are directly in conflict with the values of parents and the wider community. This points to the wider issue of power relations within a local community and the potential tension or disruption that may be caused by promoting children's participation in a manner that is seen as inimical to others' interests or potentially threatening to existing modes of organisation.

Jo Boyden spoke of the disappointments for children when their projects do not succeed, and also of the risks associated with providing participants with access to information that they may not yet have the maturity to deal with properly.

In addition, concerns were expressed that participatory projects may overburden children. There is also the danger in community-wide projects that children become an exploitable resource for adults. They may be given a range of tasks without a real share in decision-making and a genuine opportunity to decline or to ensure a more equitable and appropriate division of labour[41].

[40] See also Kirby et al (2002)

[41] Development Focus International et. al. (n.d.); Hart J. with C. Khatiwada (2003)

Several people at the London conference also wondered about the impact of turning 18 and suddenly losing the opportunities that projects may have offered until then. This might be a particular issue for girls since participatory projects could provide the only regular chance for socialising with peers and playing a role in the community outside the home.

The field research and literature review suggest a need to be attentive to possible tensions arising from the fact that, while children are being encouraged to express their views and participate in decision-making processes, their parents may not enjoy such opportunities[42]. As one development worker in Kenya asked:

> **"What is the potential for children's participation in societies which have never been free? Which have been characterised by violent political repression and fear? To what extent should adults be expected to embrace and promote children's participation in society when they themselves have never experienced this luxury in their own lifetimes?"**

In such a case, there is a particular need for agencies to work closely with parents to ensure that efforts to empower children are not perceived by family members as a threat to their own position – experienced as one of relative powerlessness in the wider society[43].

Furthermore, caution may be required when projects encourage children towards specific values (for example, non-discrimination, secularism, gender equity) that are not widely held by parents and other adults in the community. Without simultaneous efforts by agency staff to discuss such values with adults, there is a risk that child participants can come into conflict at home and in the community. In any case, we need to consider the ethics of expecting children to hold attitudes that we do not expect of adults[44].

[42] Jo Boyden (Interview)
[43] Hart J. (2002a:19)
[44] Cairns (1992:125)

2. Evaluating children's participation

Our discussion of realms of children's lives in the previous section is intended to clarify what may be looked for in the evaluation of specific projects. In this section, we explore issues relating to how evaluation may be conducted. We begin by considering some of the main questions relating to the ethical and practical concerns in undertaking such an exercise. We discuss possible methods and processes that may be used with a group of children.

2.1. Ethical and practical questions

Summary of questions to consider before beginning evaluation

- Why is the evaluation being undertaken?
- Who is doing the evaluation?
- How is the evaluation being conducted?
- What happens after evaluation?

In some respects, the ethical and practical issues that relate to monitoring and evaluation are the same as those that apply to the entire process of participatory programming with children. These include issues of confidentiality, safety, transparency, informed consent and so on. There are, however, a number of important questions that specifically concern the process of monitoring and evaluation, and which should be considered before monitoring and evaluation is conducted.

In this section, we consider some of the main questions. This is a large and important topic that would merit much further discussion among practitioners.

Why is the evaluation being undertaken?

Before all else, we must establish clarity about the motivations for the evaluation. Is it solely to meet routine organisational requirements or is it a process meant to have value for the participants themselves, enabling them to acquire new skills and insights and to strengthen their activities?

It is vital to be honest about the evaluation process from the outset and to ensure that all stakeholders who may be directly or indirectly affected are informed about the aims. It should be made clear, for example, if evaluation activities are happening in order to inform a decision about the continuation of support for the project. The structures and process by which this or other relevant decisions will be taken must be made transparent, along with the boundaries of the proposed project, capacity for change, timeframe and potential competing interests[45]. There is also the need for adults to be clear and open about where their ultimate loyalty lies: with participating children, with the agency, with donors?

[45] Lansdown (2001); Johnson & Ivan-Smith (1998)

Ethical concerns about transparency and about the motivations and benefits of evaluation will be largely overcome if evaluation is a process rooted within a project as an ongoing component, rather than a solely external process conducted at intervals determined by outsiders. Vicky Johnson and others at the London conference stressed the importance of planning, together with participating children, the monitoring and evaluation strategy at the start of a project and ensuring that it is an integral part of project activities.

Who is doing the evaluation?

It is vital to consider the role of children themselves in any evaluation activity. This is not a straightforward issue. On the one hand, it would seem in keeping with the promotion of children's participation that they should have every opportunity to be involved in the evaluation. In practice, however, it may be that involvement in all aspects is burdensome or unwelcome – the principle of informed consent or dissent should always be upheld. What role would children in each project wish to play and what capacity needs to be built for them to do so effectively and safely? At a minimum, it would seem vital that children are involved in planning evaluation activities and in feedback and reflection at the end.

However, it is questionable if this minimal involvement really constitutes a participatory approach to monitoring and evaluation (see the discussion of 'monitoring and evaluation' in the Introduction). For this to be achieved, it would again seem vital that monitoring and evaluation procedures – including project-specific indicators – are developed by participants themselves as an integral part of their project. This may be done in partnership with facilitators and other adults with relevant expertise in this area. Any subsequent evaluation activities required by the supporting agency could then build on or incorporate these established procedures.

How is the evaluation being conducted?

Evaluations should not only be as participatory as possible, but should also serve to reinforce the values of the project itself, such as democracy, equality, mutual respect, cooperation and so on. Where project participants have developed their own rules and procedures relating to activities, these should obviously be followed by all persons involved in evaluation as well.

In order to avoid detrimental effects on children, consultation about the set up of evaluation activities should happen with participants regarding time and location of meetings and the nature of the activities themselves.

The paramount consideration is always for children's safety and well-being. They should not be exposed to any risks, whether psychological (shame, fear), social (family, community relations) or physical (abuse, violence). Poorer children, for example, may be reluctant to be seen at public gatherings because of their appearance, and efforts should be made to ensure that evaluation activities do not exacerbate or create feelings of inferiority or insecurity. Participatory evaluations should provide a safe, creative space where children feel that their thoughts and ideas are important. Within this space they should feel free to voice their true opinions and thoughts, without pressure from or fear of the facilitators[46].

[46] Padmavathi (2003)

It has also been suggested that some children may suffer from stress and depression following interaction with adult evaluators. This may be the consequence of raising issues that are painful and failing to make available appropriate and supportive follow up. Negative feelings can also result from creating unrealistic expectations or from leaving participants with a sense that their efforts have not been fruitful or worthwhile[47].

When evaluation activities occur with both adults and children present, particular attention should be paid to ensuring that children are able to participate fully. At the same time, it is important to consider how the involvement of children in the evaluation affects their relations with adults, and the potential conflicts of interest that may ensue from being offered the opportunity to express themselves freely.

What happens after evaluation?

It is very important that findings and lessons learned from the evaluation are fed back to all stakeholders at the end of any activities, particularly to those children who offered information. These findings should also be presented in ways accessible to children and adults of all ages, literate or non-literate, in the particular context[48]. With younger children in particular, attention should be paid to the means of communicating feedback to ensure that it is understandable and interesting. Visual methods may be helpful here, for example.

Careful consideration should also be given to the process by which findings are disseminated. Some of the information could be particularly sensitive. Differences in opinion, shortcomings and failings may all be revealed causing embarrassment, upset and disappointment. Through consultation with participants, possible risks should be identified and a strategy devised to deal with these. It may be necessary, for example, to anonymise the sources of specific information.

Efforts should also be made to ensure that findings are appropriately channelled back into the implementing/facilitating agency responsible for the project to inform organisational learning, policy and programme development. There may be particular lessons about the capacity-building needs of staff. However, from an ethical standpoint, accountability should be first and foremost to project participants.

[47] Blagbrough (1998)
[48] Wilson and McKeown (2003)

2.2. Methodology

Staff capacity

> **"Discussions on evaluation methodology are often limited to a discussion of 'methods' – tools to be used for data collection. But methodology is much more than methods; it is about human behaviour, attitudes, principles, beliefs about knowledge, power relationships, and it ultimately depends on our own deep-seated beliefs about why we are involved in evaluation"[49].**

As the above quotation suggests, 'methodology' should be understood as a term covering more than practical issues. It also refers to the philosophy that determines the manner in which any research or data collection activity is conducted. Therefore, the production of a 'toolkit' of methods is only part of the challenge that agencies face in the development of sound evaluation practice. There is also a strong need to enhance the intellectual and analytical capacity of those engaged in establishing or undertaking evaluations.

Whatever approach is taken it is important that this should be oriented towards the progressive integration of evaluation activities within the ongoing processes of individual projects. The alternative, which currently seems the norm, is to conduct a series of evaluations external to the project[50]. To achieve an integrated approach may require attitudinal change on the part of implementing agencies and, particularly, of donors.

The precise manner in which children are involved as participants in evaluation is an issue that itself needs careful consideration (see Practical issues opposite). However, some involvement will always be essential and this raises the issue of staff capacity in relating to young people and enabling them to offer their input in a manner that is safe, effective and of direct benefit to them.

Boyden and Ennew address this point at some length in their manual on participatory research with children. They argue that "training in participatory techniques should include learning, practising and **internalising** new kinds of interpersonal skills for communication with children"[51].

It also seems vital that staff are trained to deal with sensitive or difficult issues that may arise unexpectedly. Organisations committed to working with particularly marginalised or vulnerable children will often encounter challenging situations related to protection and general child well-being in the course of conducting evaluation activities. In Ecuador, for example, children related stories of child abuse both from parents and teachers, which necessitated a coordinated response from agency staff. Organisations need well-developed guidelines for staff to follow in such cases.

[49] Stubbs (1996:4)
[50] Jo Boyden (Interview)
[51] Boyden J. & Ennew J. (1997:56) emphasis in original

Practical issues

Adult – child dynamics

Adults involved in evaluation activities should be mindful at all times of the dynamics of their interaction with participating children. In most cultures and situations, adults enjoy a position of relative power in relation to children. It would be unrealistic to think that this can be overcome entirely. Nevertheless, it is vital to the success of any activity and entirely in keeping with the spirit of participation that all efforts should be made to address this imbalance. Simple actions such as sitting at the same level as children, using a first name to introduce oneself, entering fully into activities (such as singing songs, playing games, and so on) can help to reduce the sense of a generation gap and create a more relaxed and informal atmosphere in which everyone feels better able to contribute – or to decline to contribute – freely. Ideally, the manner in which activities are to be conducted should be discussed and agreed by all participants – adults and children – taking into account the rules or guidelines that many child-led projects will already have in place.

Group size

The discussions and other activities involved in evaluation are most profitably undertaken with a group that is reasonably small, perhaps no more than about 8 to 12 participants, although this will vary with the space available and with other factors such as the age of children involved. This group can then be subdivided further into smaller groups for particular activities. In India, Kenya and Ecuador, far larger numbers than this were often assembled to meet with us. Where possible, one researcher took half of the children away to another spot to work completely separately. On some occasions, the split was made according to age or gender.

Group composition

Dividing the group into girls and boys may make it possible to discuss gender-specific issues. In any event, it is important to ensure that groups are composed in such a way that participants feel comfortable working together and exploring different ideas. Meetings are also likely to be most fruitful when children are divided according to age, as young children and adolescents commonly possess different types of information and are capable of very different levels of attention, reflection, discussion and analysis. Different age groups often require different methods of interaction. With younger children, for instance, visual tools such as drawings are very useful in conveying information and stimulating discussion[52], while adolescents are generally more prepared for direct discussions.

Meeting place

In general, it is probably best to hold sessions in the regular meeting place of the project itself, so as to engage with children in a familiar environment in which they, hopefully, feel comfortable. It is also advisable to meet with children during their regular meeting times so as not to disrupt the normal functioning of community life. Extreme care seems necessary to avoid interfering with children's school, work and domestic responsibilities not least because they may incur disapproval or punishment if they fail to meet the demands and expectations of parents and teachers.

[52] For further discussion of working with younger children see Early Childhood Matters: the bulletin of the Bernard Van Leer Foundation February 2000 No.94 www.bernardvanleer.org

The methodological 'toolbox'[53]

No single exercise is likely to provide data about everything required for the evaluation. There is a need, therefore, to introduce a range of exercises with each group in order to build a properly rounded picture of children's lives and the impacts – both positive and negative – that projects may have had. This can obviously be achieved only when time is allowed for working with a single group. As a rough guide, it is probably counter-productive to work for more than a two-hour stretch, so it may take several days to conduct a comprehensive set of activities.

In order for evaluation processes to be fully participatory, it is also important to build local capacity, including that of child participants, to implement different methods. Our experience in the field suggested that the first aspect of capacity building may relate to understanding the difference between an action and its consequence.

Methods and exercises

A proper account of all the methods that we and others have employed and of the types of information that each yields is worthy of a study in its own right. Our aim here is to give some indication of the different types of method and exercise, how they might fit together and what we learned from some during fieldwork. The discussion is organised around the sequence in which different activities may be introduced. This is a vital issue to consider since it affects the trust and confidence that is created with participants and the quality and nature of ideas that are elicited. The sequence described is only a suggestion. It may well be possible to utilise the same or similar exercises in a different sequence quite successfully but even then it will remain important to consider how each one leads to another.

Initial exercises

In the initial stages of enquiry with children it is important to (a) set the tone and encourage a comfortable, relaxed and focused atmosphere (some brief games may help in this respect); (b) establish with participants the central themes of the research; (c) clarify basic information about the project and the lives of participating children.

Timelines

Participants chart the major events, different phases, successes and difficulties of their project and reflect on the goals achieved and not yet achieved. This provides a helpful orientation to the work of a particular project and its evolution, and is a basis for further discussion of impacts. Timelines may be constructed using large sheets of paper and pens, on whiteboards, or even using sticks and stones laid on the ground.

[53] Brian Milne (Interview)

Situation analysis

Participants work in small groups to identify the challenges, problems, risks and opportunities, good things and resources for children in their communities. This may be done as a general exercise or separately for boys and girls in order to identify the specific issues of each. A group exercise may be undertaken through writing, drawing, role play and methods derived from the work of Augusto Boal, such as 'image theatre'[54]. One approach is for small groups to produce 'maps' of their community drawing onto these different images to represent the various aspects of their lives, both positive and negative. On the same map may be found, for example, bottles to represent the threat of alcoholism, a building to represent the school, individual figures for family members or friends, and so on.

Case One: Timelines with a Child-to-Child club, Nairobi

With two groups of children in Nairobi, we drew a timeline on large sheets of paper and asked them to chart the development of their Child-to-Child club, including the major events, successes and difficulties of their club, and also the evolution of their organisational structure. This exercise provided children with an opportunity to reflect on their achievements and on those goals not yet achieved. For us, the timeline was a very helpful introduction to the work of the Child-to-Child club: it gave us both an overview of the project and a basis for discussion with participants about the inputs, processes and impacts of their project. However, it is important to point out that this was the first time that the children involved appeared to have been asked to think about their project in this way. It was therefore a fairly time-consuming and demanding exercise.

Follow-on exercises

Having established some basic knowledge about the project and children's lives, it should then be possible to identify the most pertinent issues to address and the means by which to do this. Here are some 'follow-on exercises' that we employed.

Analysis of change

The aim is to explore the changes that project participation has created for children. The focus might be on how particular challenges (identified in an initial exercise) have been met and overcome, on how social networks may have expanded, on new knowledge or skills. It is also important to allow the space to discuss any negative consequences of participation.

As with 'situation analysis', this can be done through small group discussion and feedback to plenary with the use of various materials such as 'sticky notes' for individual contributions and larger charts for plenary consolidation.

[54] Boal and Jackson (2002)

Case Two: Analysis of change with children in Delhi

At CRIC in Delhi, we divided a group of adolescents (aged 16-19) into two smaller groups and began by asking them to come up with a list of the types of people who were important to their daily lives. Each type of person, for example mother, police officer, teacher and so on, was to be written on a small note and all notes were stuck on a single board. The participants were then asked to group all the people on the board into no more than three categories according to the nature of the relationships that they had with them. What emerged were categories that matched with notions of 'family/friends', 'community' and 'institution' (especially the school). To this we added the category of 'children' as individuals.

We then asked them to identify ways in which their relationships with these people had changed as a result of their activities, and also how they had changed as individuals. What were some of the differences between themselves and other participating children, and children who did not participate? The young people worked in small groups and recorded their thoughts on large sheets of flip-chart paper. Through these activities, we were able to generate discussion about the impacts of participation – both positive and negative – on themselves, their families and their larger communities.

This series of activities appeared to encourage participants to consider the range of people and institutions they could draw on for support, and how such networks have changed both qualitatively and quantitatively as a consequence of participation.

Alternatively, discussion about change may usefully be generated through role-play or other drama techniques.

Case Three: Role play with girls in Nairobi

With a group of girls (aged 11-15) in Nairobi, we engaged in a role-play activity. The girls had all been street children involved in regular substance abuse and petty crime, and were living in a rehabilitation centre from where they attended school and became involved in national advocacy campaigns. In order to get a sense of where they had come from and what they had achieved on a personal level, we asked them to act out various elements of their lives on the streets. The short dramas proved to be very stimulating for the girls. Both during and after their performances, the girls were able to reflect on their past situations and debate collectively how they had changed as individuals since their rehabilitation and through their participation in the advocacy campaigns.

Considering process

As we discuss in Section 3, the process by which projects run is a vital area of enquiry for any evaluation. Each project will have its own dynamics, rules and procedures. To some extent these were apparent to observation. Furthermore, in some projects we visited, children had prepared for us an explanation of their activities, which included the description of rules and procedures. To move the discussion on with one child club, we found it helpful to introduce the following exercise:

> **"Imagine that I want to set up my own club back in my country and I don't know where to start. Can you make a list for me of the things that are important for running my club? I want to know about the rules to have, how we should treat each other, how decisions should be made, what sort of relationship with adults we should have in the club."**

If there is time and participants are interested, this could involve several different stages with a mix of group and plenary work. In our experience, children generally found it easy to articulate rules since these already exist in an explicit form. More challenging was the consideration of relationships. Great sensitivity is needed here, particularly when the discussion turns to evaluation of the extent to which the ideal that children have described is achieved in their own project. Overall, this can be a valuable area of enquiry for participants and for facilitators, enabling greater understanding and the expression of concerns and new ideas.

Additional/supplementary exercises

Enquiry with groups of children involved in projects is likely to form the basis of any evaluation practice. However, it is important to contextualise and supplement the ideas developed from this work with other activities in other settings.

Focus-group discussion with adults in the community and agency staff

In all three countries, we met separately with adult members of communities in which Plan had implemented child-focused projects and with groups of staff members. Most adult groups consisted of parents of children in such projects, community leaders, community volunteers and CBO members. In many meetings, we divided participants into small groups and asked them to discuss and record on paper their perceptions of the benefits and challenges of children's involvement in participatory programming. In Ecuador, discussion with adults also addressed the meaning of participation itself for children and community volunteers. In most cases, adult groups reported to each other in a plenary session. Such exercises were intended to elicit views about the changes they had seen in children as a result of the projects and the benefits experienced on a family or community level. In addition, it was a forum through which adults could express their concerns about the negative impacts they had witnessed in children, families or communities as a result of children's involvement in projects (see section 1.6). In some cases, the discussion led naturally into consideration of ways in which activities could be developed and strengthened.

Exploring the immediate environment

Having sat together in one specific spot – often a school room or community centre – it was very helpful to go for a walk together and give children the opportunity to guide visitors through the actual landscape in which they live. This process can bring out the nuance of issues that until then have been discussed in more general terms. It may also provide the chance to meet with children not involved in the project.

This kind of activity is not, however, without its own possible problems. Firstly, walking through a village with a group of excited children accompanied by adult visitors might underline the division between 'we the ones who were selected' and 'the others' who are watching the crowd passing by. Secondly, in some contexts, like the slum area in Nairobi that we visited, security issues meant that such walks were considered inappropriate by staff. They might also have given the impression of 'project tourism'. This illustrates the importance of choosing the right methods according to the context and coordinating closely with those who understand local conditions.

Case Four: A walk through an Indian village

In a rural village in south India, we went with groups of boys and girls (separately) on walks through their village and asked them to show us things they had worked on as a group or things that were of concern to them. Aside from building the relationship between us, this activity also proved important in that it made many things the children had been saying in general terms more tangible and specific. For example, in our previous discussions indoors, the boys had told us about the group's actions in relation to water and sanitation in the village. During our walk, the particular problems they had addressed were pointed out and the boys gave us insight into the dynamics of local power they had had to negotiate in order to achieve their objectives in each case.

Individual interviews

Everyone's experience of a project will be different and there is a danger in group work that discussion of such experience becomes generalised. It can therefore be very useful to conduct interviews with a small number of individuals – both children and adults – to explore particular issues or to consider in more depth the impact of projects from their personal point of view. It may also be that negative consequences of participation are revealed more readily in this way than in the group where participants may feel obliged to be positive.

At the same time, the selection of individuals to interview and the manner in which such discussions are pursued need to be considered carefully. Some people may feel intimidated by this focus on them alone. Those who are not selected, on the other hand, may feel left out. In addition, the information obtained in this manner will need to be handled with particular sensitivity to ensure that the individuals involved do not feel exposed in any way.

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Analysis of findings

Any of the above methods can potentially yield data that relate to the different realms discussed in Section 1. It is the task of the evaluators to review the information yielded and see how it may fit. Attention should be paid to the nature of the data overall. Are changes within all realms noted or only in some? If not all realms are covered, it is important to reflect on whether this is a problem with the evaluation process – the wrong questions posed or an inappropriate setting used for the discussion of certain issues, for example. Alternatively, the fact that impact in one or other realm is not revealed may, in itself, be an important finding and should alert the evaluators to areas in which further efforts might be required on the part of facilitators, participants or the supporting agency.

3. Organisational challenges of children's participation

The project that gave rise to this document began as a technical exercise focused on the development of a practical strategy for the evaluation of children's participation. However, as we progressed through the different stages of the project – literature review, field visits, and the London conference – it became increasingly clear that the most pressing need was to develop the organisational capacity to support the overall process of children's participation, including its evaluation. In this final section, we consider some of the main issues relating to such development based on the views of interviewees, our field observations and the ideas expressed at the London conference.

The promotion of participatory approaches to working with children in development firstly requires conceptual clarity. As one interviewee in India put it:

> **"Often, children's participation is treated as little more than a passing trend – organisations are jumping on the bandwagon of children's participation without really understanding it or believing in it themselves."**

We start Section 3.1, therefore, with some questions intended to provoke thought and discussion among agencies, contributing to better understanding of children's participation. The acquisition of technical competence and provision of appropriate practical support are addressed in Section 3.2 and the changes needed in organisational and staff attitude and behaviour are considered in Section 3.3.

3.1. Understanding children's participation

Key questions for agencies in understanding children's participation

- How do we understand power relations between adults and children?
- What account should we take of power relations among children?
- What do we take to be the competencies of children (in relation to their age)?
- What roles do children play in their families, communities and the wider society?
- What are our boundaries as an organisation in terms of the issues that we are prepared to address?

In this section, we explore each of the key questions for agencies in understanding children's participation in further detail. We seek to clarify the underlying issues and suggest how each question may profitably be addressed.

How do we understand power relations between adults and children?

While childhood relationships and those between adults and children are evidently construed and experienced in a wide variety of ways across the globe, it appears a universal fact that children generally enjoy less social power than adults[55]. Furthermore, in many societies, girls are even less empowered in relation to adults than boys. How, from a position of relative powerlessness, are children to protect and advance their interests when they differ from those of adults? The negative consequences of such inequality of power are witnessed, at their most extreme, in the physical and sexual abuse of children within the home, school, workplace and wider society[56]. Participatory projects in which children come together to address their concerns may be one important element of a wider strategy to address inequality of power and the abuse to which it gives rise. Through working in groups and through appropriate support or facilitation, it has been suggested, children may be able to negotiate "new kinds of relationships and partnerships" with adults[57].

However, for this to be achieved, agencies need to reflect on the ways in which participatory activities are pursued in practice: in particular how adults and children may best work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and openness. Roger Hart's 'Ladder of Participation' has been influential in this respect, describing different scenarios of adult-child interaction.

In the last few years, however, several commentators have questioned the unqualified use of the Ladder of Participation[58]. For Reddy and Ratna, the image of a ladder with different levels is unhelpful since "it implies a sequence, whereas in reality one level may not necessarily lead to the next level"[59]. In the place of this ladder, they suggest a more nuanced set of 'scenarios of adult-child engagement'[60].

In addition, the conceptualisation of levels of participation in terms of a ladder may also imply a hierarchy of value[61]. Each individual context in which participatory projects are pursued is likely to pose its own particular challenges and obstacles. It therefore seems misleading and indeed unfair to suggest that a particular initiative, for example, 'reached only level six'.

In some settings, it may be highly irresponsible to promote an approach in which young people initiate and undertake actions with little involvement of adults – as suggested by the highest level on the Ladder of Participation. In a country or region affected by political violence, for example, adults may need to play a far more directive role to ensure children's safety and well-being. Similarly, an approach to children's participation that is radically at odds with the values and behaviour of the community concerning how children and adults interact may also create risk for children and threaten the viability of their project. This point suggests the necessity to consider power relations between children and adults not only in a general sense but in each specific location where an agency intends to work.

Finding the appropriate approach to the management of adult-child interaction is therefore a complex challenge. It requires us to develop great sensitivity in ensuring that adults carry out their responsibility for children's well-being without impinging unnecessarily on the exercise of their creativity, sense of ownership and responsibility for their own activities. One project visited in Delhi run by CASP-Plan appeared to be achieving this delicate balance. The highly skilled and experienced facilitators seemed to be gradually stepping back to allow older children to take greater responsibility as their own skills and confidence developed. Nevertheless, they remained quietly in the background, ready and willing to offer assistance when really needed.

55 Boyden (1997)
56 Hearn (1989); Kitzinger (1997)
57 O'Kane, (2002:2)
58 Abrioux (1998) Kirby and Woodhead (2003:243).
59 2002:18
60 Op. cit. pp. 18-21
61 Jo Boyden (Interview)

When children's participation occurs in the context of a community-wide initiative or in other fora with adults, the issue of power acquires added urgency. How will it be possible to ensure that children are not dominated? What work will be required with adults to prepare them to listen to children with sincerity and openness? How should children's ability and confidence be built so that they can take part fully, pleasurably and profitably? Simply 'dropping' children into situations that have hitherto been the domain of adults alone may prove very frustrating and demoralising.

Finally, we need to ask about the extent to which these fora are themselves open and participatory, even for adults. For example, are they free of bias based on gender, age, caste, class and so on?

What account should we take of power relations among children?

Relations of power exist not only between children and adults; they are also present among and between children themselves. It is an uncomfortable fact that children can dominate and marginalise other children and even violate each other's rights, either consciously or without realising. Failure to appreciate this point led an evaluation, carried out in Tajikistan using children as the main evaluators, to run into serious problems. The children were trained in the necessary tools and techniques, including interviewing by local fieldworkers. However, when they set out with their task, it was noted that they were unsympathetic toward the children they were interviewing and their manner was aggressive. The fieldworkers had imagined that the children would be empathetic to young people in the same circumstances as themselves. In reality, they misused the techniques, dominated discussions and rushed through the sessions[62].

Differences, for example in age, gender, social or economic background and physical ability can become the basis for the unequal distribution of power among children to the direct detriment of some. Account should also be taken of individual personality and the tendency of some children towards dominance or submissiveness. Agencies need to develop a clear understanding of such differences and the power dynamics they create. It is important to consider these issues not only in a general or abstract sense but also in direct relation to the proposed location of activities. Each cultural context is likely to empower certain children in relation to others and this must be well understood by agencies if they are to ensure that projects are run in an inclusive and equitable manner.

Even with great attention to ensure that projects are inclusive, it is probably inevitable that not all children can be accommodated. What are the consequences of this in terms of differences between children? Particular attention may be needed to ensure that those who do not take part are not already marginalised due to factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, class and caste. Where agencies operate a sponsorship programme, it will be necessary to consider how this will affect the chances of non-sponsored children to participate. This is especially important if quotas exist for the involvement of a minimum number of sponsored children.

[62] Taken from Parry-Williams (1998)

What do we understand to be the competencies of children (in relation to age)?

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, commonly cited as the most explicit encouragement for children's participation, speaks of 'the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'. This statement points to the need for us to estimate children's development: their evolving capacities for thought and for the expression of thought. However, we currently lack a clear and common understanding of child development.

Psychologists inspired by Jean Piaget suggest universal stages of development through which all children pass at more or less the same age. However, these have turned out to be inappropriate or misleading when applied across cultures[63]. The approach associated with Lev Vygotsky that assumes a child's intellectual development to be shaped by the culture in which he or she grows up would seem to overcome this limitation. However, it leaves us with the considerable challenge of understanding how children in each specific cultural setting may develop their capacities for thought and communication.

Furthermore, since most societies are highly differentiated in terms of social class, ethnicity, gender and so on, we must anticipate the potential for children to develop in diverse ways and at various rates even within the same cultural context. Non-school children living on the street are liable to develop different, but not necessarily inferior, competencies to their peers in the same town or city who experience regular formal schooling and a more conventional family life. Children involved in sex work, for example, may develop a very sophisticated knowledge and understanding of issues related to sexuality that their peers might not acquire for many more years.

In relation to children's participatory programming, numerous questions should be asked about the intended participants. For example, what is their capacity to:

- understand the structures and social dynamics that obstruct or enable their lives?
- work together to identify and address issues of concern to them?
- articulate their concerns and aspirations?

When thinking about children's evolving competencies, it is therefore important to move away from rigid thinking that associates particular ages with the acquisition of specific skills. Development does not involve children acquiring some new ability overnight that enables them suddenly to participate. Even young children may have the capacity to engage in participatory activities. The challenge is to understand how best to facilitate their participation. Although there have been some important initiatives in recent years, this is an area that seems to have received less attention in comparison to engaging adolescents[64].

63 Hart R, (1998)

64 See Early Childhood Matters: the bulletin of the Bernhard Van Leer Foundation February 2000 No.94 www.bernardvanleer.org. Also Johnson et. al. (1995). SC UK have also done work in this area, both in the UK and overseas.

What roles do children play in their families, communities and wider society?

Children in some societies and from certain socio-economic backgrounds may spend their lives principally in the school, home and in various locations dedicated to leisure pursuits. In relation to these environments, they must bear the burden of family expectations: their aspirations for academic achievement and sporting prowess, fulfilment of domestic tasks and so on. Particularly in economically disadvantaged communities, in rural areas and in the countries of the South, children carry many other responsibilities as well. Both outside and within the home, they may undertake innumerable forms of work, supporting their household and caring for its members, particularly younger siblings. In rural areas, especially, it is likely that they will also participate in community life, in support of neighbours and the extended family, and labouring alongside adults in work parties. Such tasks and responsibilities should not, of course, be seen as necessarily abusive or in violation of children's interests. Indeed, it may be argued, for example, that engagement in some forms of work helps to build children's competencies and self-confidence, increasing their knowledge and experience, enabling them to build broad networks. Their work may also contribute invaluably to the survival of the family, enabling them to acquire a respected status within the household and community.

Agencies obviously need to understand the dimensions of childhood with its associated responsibilities and rewards in the actual settings where they intend to promote children's participatory projects. Such an understanding will help to ensure that projects are viable and beneficial for participants. The timing and location of activities should be such that all children may be able to take some part in activities, if they so wish. Furthermore, projects should be able to support children in fulfilling their responsibilities more effectively and pleasurably.

In addition, it is also important to consider how children's roles within their families, communities and the wider society can be enhanced in order that their needs and aspirations are more effectively met. Is there, for example, a possibility for children to play a regular and safe role within processes of governance? If not, how can their views and concerns be gathered and represented within decision-making fora at the local, regional and national levels? If they do participate, what opportunities exist for them to reshape the agenda of the forum or institution itself?

What are our boundaries as an organisation in terms of the issues that we are prepared to address?

In India, Kenya and Ecuador, early marriage, child labour, alcoholism, parental neglect, physical and psychological abuse, the access of girls to schooling, environmental protection and female foeticide were just a few of the concerns of projects that we visited. Additional issues addressed by participatory projects in various parts of the world include: the protection of street children and those engaged in sex work; drug abuse; school discipline; government social spending; ethnic, caste and gender-based discrimination.

Clearly these are not small, local issues that child-led initiatives alone can address in order to achieve real and lasting improvements. Supporting agencies along with other players also have a role to play in, for example, advocacy for attitudinal, legal and policy change. However, the capacity of some agencies or the sensitivity of their position in a particular country may mean that this lies beyond their mandate or scope.

Rather than run the risk, as one interviewee expressed it, of “kicking up an issue if you’re not prepared to respond”, it would seem advisable for agencies first to think through the nature and extent of activities that they are prepared to undertake. While children in different projects may bring up areas of concern that are not expected, for the most part these can probably be anticipated by a careful consideration of the communities in which an agency plans to work. If many children are engaged in exploitative work, for example, it would seem appropriate to think ahead and reflect, as an organisation, on what it may be possible to support. How should an agency respond to a request from children for assistance in establishing some form of union? How might an agency deal, if at all, with a company that is systematically exploiting local children or with governmental authorities that turn a blind eye to such practice?

These emerged as very real issues in India where, for example, one international agency was supporting children’s efforts to address child labour issues at the local level but felt unable to take action in terms of advocacy with the government. The result was an incoherent approach that ran the risk of leaving children to bear the responsibility of creating change alone.

It would be far better for agencies to acknowledge their capabilities and limitations in advance and, wherever possible, network with other organisations to ensure that children in difficult situations are reached. It might be necessary to develop outreach work to ensure that marginalised children who are presently unable to participate are nonetheless in contact with a view to facilitating their participation in time[65]. Local organisations are often better placed to maintain relationships with children who are, for example, living on the street, or engaged in hazardous or irregular work. They may also be better placed to tackle certain sensitive issues, especially if there are concerns about international agencies being seen as ‘colonial’ or interfering outsiders.

At the very least, it would seem advisable for agencies to map out the services and resources that are available in a particular area where they intend to develop activities. This information may then be made available to participating children as and when the need arises[66].

[65] Vicky Johnson, Interview
[66] Jo Boyden, Interview

3.2. Putting children's participation into practice

The literature review and field visits revealed several practical issues that need to be considered in order to promote effective participatory projects with children. We have grouped these issues under three headings: place, facilitation and funding. The manner in which such issues are addressed by an organisation must, we would argue, be considered in any evaluation process.

Place

Dedicated space

For many children, the exercise of adults' control over them extends to most or all of the formal spaces that they inhabit. The nature of activities that occur in the schoolroom, the home, the different institutional locales within their village or neighbourhood may all be determined by adults. Not surprisingly, therefore, children in many participatory projects express a strong desire to have a space that is effectively their own: where they can govern what happens, how the walls are decorated, who is admitted and on what conditions. Furthermore, the creation of such a space within a village or neighbourhood may serve to underline the seriousness with which children, as a distinct section of the community, are viewed.

At 'Aquí los Chicos' in Ecuador and at the project facilitated by CASP in Sangham Vihar, Delhi, we encountered groups of children who had access to their own dedicated space. The walls in both were covered with messages about the core values and goals of the group, with drawings by members and photos, and with lists of activities that they had undertaken or intended to carry out in the future. These different decorations were pointed to with pride by participants and were used to orient visitors such as ourselves to the group.

Even when it is impossible to provide a dedicated space for sole use for a project, it is still important to offer a secure means of storing the group's materials. This is not only a practical issue but a means by which to show respect for a project and its participants. In many homes, younger children in particular may not enjoy even their own cupboard space – this being a symbol or benefit of adulthood. The provision of a simple cupboard with a lock can therefore send an important message of respect to participating children. We were concerned to find in one project that although such a cupboard existed for project participants the key was kept by the adult facilitator alone. Such practice threatens to undermine the positive message that the provision of space should send to children.

In conclusion, we note that, although the provision of dedicated space may be important for the development of projects and for building the confidence of children, the ultimate aim of a participatory approach should be to achieve more and regular space for children in society as a whole.

Suitable location

Allied to the issue of space is a concern about the location in which participatory activities are conducted. Does the proposed location for activities offer an atmosphere that is conducive to participation: that is inclusive, readily accessible and comfortable to all children, and where the promotion of an open, cooperative working environment is not unnecessarily hampered? Schools and religious premises are obvious examples of institutions that may be considered as welcoming by only some members of the community. These may also be places that are commonly associated with prescribed and hierarchical ways of interacting, particularly between children and adults.

When a school is used as the setting for a project, it is important to consider the implications for non-school-going children specifically. It seems unusual to find non-school-going children in school-based projects. If this is the case, it raises questions about the aim of reaching the most marginalised children. The absence of any non-school-going children in the school-based projects visited in Kenya suggested that this choice of location effectively excluded them, although we acknowledge the agency staffs' conviction that the schools were the only viable location for the projects in this case.

Facilitation

The provision of on-site support from adults is of paramount importance for the success of any participatory project and the well-being of participants[67]. Indeed, in most cases, children's participation cannot proceed without adult guidance and involvement, not least for legal reasons. Adult involvement should meet the needs of children and of their environment and be facilitative rather than directive to the greatest extent possible. The effort to ensure such provision involves a number of issues: identifying the skills and duties of facilitators, training, selection of facilitators and quantity of provision.

Skills and duties of facilitators

For implementing agencies, there is a strong need to develop clarity about the elements of good and effective facilitation, and to support front-line staff to become models in this respect. Numerous skills are required to facilitate projects effectively, enabling them to achieve maximum impact for children. Of fundamental importance is the ability to communicate well with children, to assess their evolving needs and to respond in an encouraging and empowering manner. One study identifies seven different facilitation roles that adults may adopt when supporting children's participation, ranging from less directive roles (observation, facilitation) to offering input (challenging and developing ideas, advising) to more directive input (instructing and undertaking tasks on behalf of the children)[68].

[67] Reddy & Ratna (2002); Hart J. (2002a); Rita Panicker (Interview)
[68] Kirby with Bryson (2002)

Participants may have strong ideas themselves about the conduct of activities in which they are engaged. Nevertheless, it is ultimately the responsibility of facilitators to uphold the core principles of good participatory programming (see Introduction). At the very least they should ensure that:

- Children from all sections of a community enjoy equal access to activities
- The challenges to participation faced by particular children are addressed (for example, those faced by children with disabilities and non-school-going or younger children)
- Activities are conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation with equal opportunities for all participants
- Potential risks to participating children are identified as early as possible and preventative steps taken

It is also necessary for facilitators to have the vision and capacity to engage with the wider community within which projects are undertaken. Children's participatory activities may introduce new values and practices, causing some degree of unease or opposition from adults and even other children. In order to protect a project and to build on its achievements while ensuring the safety and well-being of participants, it is vital that good communication with the community and relevant officials is pursued continuously.

Engagement with the wider community is necessary if children's participation in local processes of decision-making and local governance is to be achieved. One initial task of facilitators may be to forge links between a child-led initiative and other organised groups such as local youth clubs, women's groups and religious organisations.

Training and support

Personnel at The Concerned for Working Children (CWC) in Bangalore suggested to us that the skills necessary for working with children are possible to acquire through training, based on an innate concern for young people and a willingness to reflect on power relations between adults and children. However, this may be a long-term and ongoing process:

> **"One of the major challenges is changing adult staff members' attitudes toward children – these changes don't happen overnight. It takes a long time, but you should be able to see the growth of your facilitators over the course of time."**

CASP Delhi, for example, has been working with children for 29 years. The skills and insight of their facilitators have been acquired by experience – negative as well as positive. The quality of their projects with children testify to this organisation's long-term commitment to providing support and training to their fieldworkers.

The achievements of CWC and CASP reinforce the view of many experts we met in the field and those of participants at the London conference, that there is a danger in relying too greatly on manuals[69]. For many agencies, manuals may be intended only as a starting or reference point for a range of capacity-building activities. However, it seems that, in reality, training has often begun and ended with the manual, possibly as a result of lack of resources, time or sufficient thought about the various other elements required. One element that seems generally necessary is for experienced personnel to assist in the 'translation' of core ideas and techniques contained in the manual to fit with local conditions.

Working with children who may be living in difficult circumstances can be very stressful. It is important that front-line staff receive regular support from colleagues who are aware of and sympathetic to the challenges they face. As Vicky Johnson noted at the London conference, some facilitators may have to go into dangerous areas, possibly at night, in order to meet with children. Their safety and well-being in doing this must be taken fully into account and appropriate support and guidance offered.

Selection of facilitators

What kinds of people are suitable as facilitators? Rigorous, ongoing training may enable individuals from diverse backgrounds to work effectively as facilitators. However, the work of some may be inhibited by their underlying attitudes or by their other roles and activities. For example, given the generally hierarchical nature of teacher-student relations, it is questionable whether teachers could necessarily switch into a more egalitarian way of working with children if they are engaged as facilitators in activities involving their students. In projects visited in Kenya, for example, it seemed that many teachers were employing the same approach used in regular school education. This is geared predominantly toward preparing students for national examinations by imparting fixed sets of information through rote learning.

The advisability of using volunteer facilitators also needs to be considered. In some cultural contexts, a strong tradition of volunteerism at the community level may mean that this is an excellent way to ensure that activities are well supported. Projects in Ecuador appear to demonstrate this. Where such a spirit of volunteerism is not deeply embedded, it may be unrealistic to expect a commitment from volunteers to support activities regularly and to take part in training initiatives and other additional duties. A group of Kenyan school teachers facilitating children's activities on an unpaid basis expressed their frustration as follows:

> **"We've had to go for many trainings and seminars and, as a result, we always lose out on money. We have to stay here [at the school] very late, after all the other teachers have gone home, and so while the other teachers are able to earn money, we are not. There are other...clubs in neighbouring villages that have died because the teachers refused to do this job. Even other projects – like the village health clinic – have failed because people can't afford to volunteer to manage them..."**

[69] Marsden, Oakley and Pratt (1994:23)

One way to develop good quality and sustainable facilitation might be to engage young people who have 'graduated' from participatory projects. In successful projects, we are likely to find potential fieldworkers who have been through the entire process themselves and have learned the appropriate skills and attitudes necessary to work with children. The graduates from the Bal Panchayat ('children's parliament') in Delhi whom we met were now running their own Child Rights Information Centre and facilitating the activities of younger members and newcomers. Many of these graduates were keenly interested in continuing to work with children on the challenges they face in their daily lives. To nurture young people such as these with a view to supporting their role in scaling up and extending participatory work may require consideration by agencies about the creation of a formal career path.

Sustained quality facilitation

It is our understanding that the effective facilitation of children's participation requires sustained and sometimes intensive interaction between children and adults, and so it is important to have sufficient staff dedicated to the support of each individual project. Inadequate staffing means that facilitators will be unable to work closely and consistently with a group of children to understand their needs and capacities, ensure their protection and help projects achieve their full potential.

How best to meet the requisite levels of support is a complex issue of resource allocation and relationship between agency and community. As mentioned above, the use of volunteers may be highly appropriate in one context but not in another. Working in partnership with a local NGO or CBO may be one possibility but this raises its own challenges in terms of management and training. Whatever the difficulties, it is vital that the issue of quantity as well as that of quality is placed firmly on the agenda of agencies.

In all three countries, we encountered programme areas in which there were only one or two staff members dedicated to the running of participatory programmes in several different communities. In Ecuador, there is one person employed for 15-20 communities, which means that he or she is only be able to visit each community once or twice a month. As one staff member remarked: "we started a process in the communities but we need more time with children." In any event, staff frequently stated that their numerous other responsibilities, particularly their administrative tasks, made them unable to dedicate appropriate amounts of time to facilitating participatory projects. Expecting staff to devote additional time to support participatory activities (which often occur at the end of the day or at weekends) seems unreasonable and ultimately unsustainable. "It's a physical and mental demand, we are also human beings," as one staff member pointed out. In India, it was remarked that the sons and daughters of agency staff are also unfortunate because they do not see enough of their parents.

Funding

Most children's participatory projects are fairly long-term or indefinite initiatives. One-off activities, such as children's involvement in a particular forum or the production of specific advocacy materials, may also take place. However, the greatest and widest impact on children's lives is likely to be achieved by projects that continue over several years. This, of course, means that agencies must be able to find secure sources of funding.

In addition, it is vital to recognise that effective children's participation is unlikely to be realised cheaply. The employment of sufficient staff, ongoing training initiatives for facilitators and participants, provision of material resources and support for travel are some of the diverse elements of cost that must be anticipated.

To ensure the scale and duration of funding appropriate for participatory programming, an extensive process of education and advocacy with donors may be required. Whether these are large institutions, such as governmental departments, or individual sponsors, it is vital that they come to appreciate the particular benefits and challenges of this way of working.

3.3. Integrating children's participation

> **"If there is a rigid, hierarchical structure which characterises an office, or relationships between international headquarters and country offices, true participatory programming is highly unlikely to be achieved in the field... If there is no promotion of democratic processes among adults in the office, then it is not possible between children and adults either. It goes even further than that – if such principles don't exist in the home, you won't bring them into the office with you. Children's participation isn't just a strategy – it's a mindset, an ideology, a value, a life philosophy that applies to everything you do."**
>
> **Development worker, Delhi, India, August 2003**

As this quote suggests, the challenge to develop children's participation does not exist only in the field. Rather, we might say that the promotion of children's participation begins with each staff member and with the organisation in which she or he is employed. Participatory programming is not simply a new manner of working. It is, as suggested here, a value and a way of perceiving ourselves in relation to others.

The need to develop an organisational culture informed by the ideology of participation can be demonstrated from various angles. For example, it has serious implications for the duties of field staff. As discussed in the previous section, facilitators bear the responsibility for encouraging ways of working among children in which all participants have the opportunity to speak and to be listened to with respect. Clearly, an organisation that operates with a strong hierarchy in which staff on the lower rungs do not feel able to voice their concerns faces a potential contradiction in this respect and is likely to find the progress of its work hampered as a result.

Many of our conversations during our research in the field revolved around the hierarchical, non-democratic structures and processes by which many large agencies function, and the negative, de-motivating effect this has on staff, particularly those at the field level who feel themselves at the bottom end of a long chain of command. This was also a key issue of concern for participants in the London conference. As one discussion group commented: "Paternalistic organisations can't make children's participation work."

How then can an organisation develop into one that is oriented appropriately towards the promotion of children's participation? Here are a few areas to consider:

Staff selection

Clearly, staff selected to work specifically on participatory programming with children need to demonstrate relevant attitudes and sensitivity. To ensure that such people are hired, the agency needs to have in place selection procedures that will bring this clearly to light. This, in turn, requires great clarity about the agency's own understanding of children's participation against which the responses of prospective employees can be assessed.

[70] Save the Children UK (2003)

Field staff should also be selected in light of the conditions that prevail in the particular locations where projects are to be pursued. Their gender, age, class, caste, ethnic or religious background may all be factors that affect their ability to work effectively with specific groups of children.

The development of an organisational culture fully conducive to the promotion of children's participation clearly depends not only on the outlook of those employed directly for this aspect of programming but also on that of all staff, regardless of their role. This suggests that all potential employees should be required to demonstrate a basic appreciation of the values of participation and a commitment to democratic and egalitarian ways of working.

Involvement of children in agency governance

Some child-focused organisations such as Save the Children UK are notable for their engagement in a process of experimentation around the involvement of children in the internal governance of the organisation[70]. Areas including staff selection and programme planning and review are obvious ones for such participation and, it is hoped, this will have a beneficial effect on the organisation.

The challenges of involving children in agency governance are obviously great and there may be a fair amount of trial and error involved. Furthermore, not everyone necessarily sees this as a wholly positive departure. For example, concern was expressed at the London conference that this may place an inappropriate burden on children. As one participant expressed it, the aim should be to "become social-change centred organisations rather than organisational-change centred organisations." In other words, the focus of children's participation should be the realities of their daily lives and not the workings of those agencies that seek to support them.

Interaction between agencies

The internalisation of an ideology of children's participation to the extent that all aspects of an agency are conducive to its promotion is clearly a lengthy and painstaking process. It would seem to require much honest reflection about existing structures and practices. It would also benefit from greater interaction between agencies in which strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures are discussed openly. While it appears unlikely that any agency has yet fully achieved such a transformation, some may be further along than others. This seems particularly true of certain grassroots organisations that in many countries of the South have pioneered the field of children's participation. The humility to listen to and learn from such organisations may yield tremendous benefits for other agencies that have come more recently to this field.

Vision and commitment of senior management

The transformation from a more traditional, top-down management style to one that fully reflects the ideology of participation needs a driving force and sound leadership. It seems that this would come most effectively from senior management. It is here that vision and commitment are particularly needed in order to steer an organisation in what may be a radical new direction.

Concluding comments and recommendations

This document and the process that led to its production have been oriented towards enhancing agency support for children's participation in development. We have focused particularly on evaluation in the belief that, if appropriately conducted, it can greatly strengthen participatory programming.

At present monitoring and evaluation procedures for children's participation appear to be at a very rudimentary stage. A growing awareness seems to exist among international agencies that this should be addressed as a matter of priority. We hope that this document will be useful for those eager to take up the challenge of finding an approach which reflects and promotes the aims and values of participation. Engagement in the actual process of developing such monitoring and evaluation practice will surely lead development agencies to become better able to partner children, their families and communities in working for positive change. In terms of specific next steps that agencies may consider we would suggest the following:

Evaluation

- Assessment of capacity-building needs and development of training for evaluation
- Development of strategy for progressive realisation of monitoring and evaluation as an integrated aspect of participatory projects
- Consideration of indicators that may be used at a global level which allow for full articulation of local, project-based indicators
- Production of guidelines to assist development of in-project monitoring and evaluation procedures, including the creation of indicators

Organisational development

- Dialogue within and between agencies in order to develop conceptual clarity and strategy regarding:

  - the assessment of children's evolving competences

  - power relations between adults and children, and among children themselves

  - mainstreaming children's participation

  - internalising the philosophy of children's participation across the organisation
- Development of training strategy for facilitators that grounds ideas contained in manuals within the local context
- Work with donors to develop greater appreciation for the specific monitoring and evaluation needs of children's participatory programming

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Appendix - List of interviewees

The majority of interviews were conducted by Jason Hart in the UK in July 2003, by phone, in person or, in one case, by email. The interviews with experts in India were conducted by Jason Hart and Jesse Newman during a field visit in August 2003.

Bill Bell, Save the Children, UK

Maggie Black, Independent Consultant, Oxford, England

Jo Boyden, University of Oxford, England

Shyamol Chaudhury, University of Bath, England

Judith Ennew, University of Cambridge, England

Roger Hart, City University New York, America

Vicky Johnson, Development FOCUS International, Brighton, England

Perpetua Kirby, Independent Consultant, Brighton, England

Julian Kramer, Save the Children, Norway

Gerison Lansdown, Independent Consultant, London, England

Lolichen P.J., The Concerned for Working Children (CWC), Bangalore, India

Brian Milne, Independent Consultant, Cambridge, England

Rita Panicker, Butterflies, New Delhi, India

Kavita Ratna, The Concerned for Working Children (CWC), Bangalore, India

Praveen Sharma, CASP, New Delhi, India

Neelam Singh, Independent Consultant, New Delhi, India

Silvia Stefanoni, Save the Children, England

Joachim Theis, Save the Children, Sweden

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