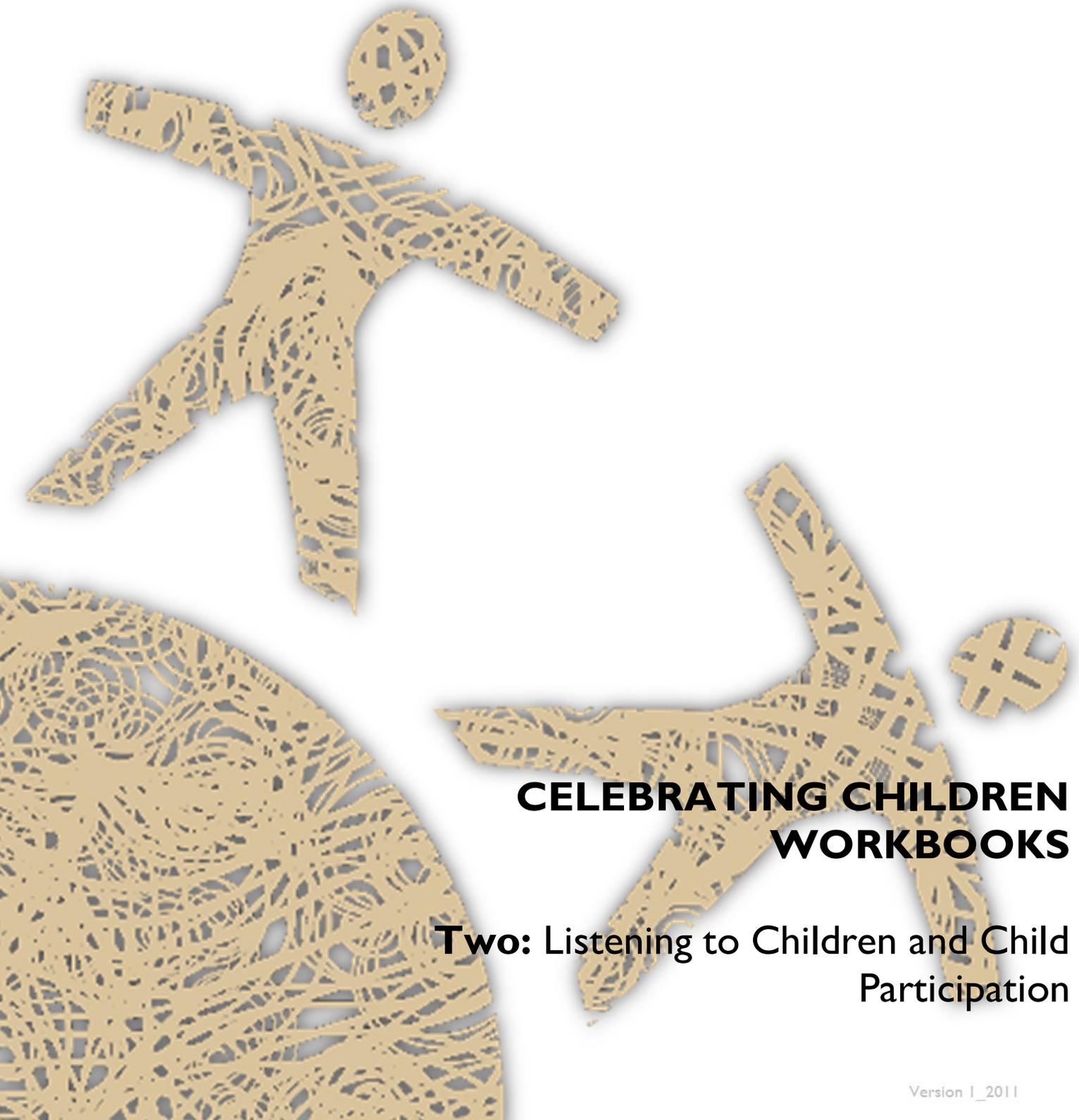


Viva Equip PEOPLE



CELEBRATING CHILDREN WORKBOOKS

Two: Listening to Children and Child Participation

Written by: Aimy Gabriel

With help from Chrissie Wilkinson (Case Study 1), Gundelina Velazco (Case Study 4), Glenn Miles (Case Study 5), Greg Burch (Case Study 6), Elisa Bechler and Mim Friday (Case Study 7 and 15)

Series editors: Kerstin Bowsher and Glenn Miles

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Introduction

*“... and a little child will lead them.”
Isaiah 11:6*

This Workbook aims to explain the basic principles and requirements on listening to children and encouraging children’s meaningful participation. This workbook is divided into three parts with a total of 15 lessons.

Part 1 addresses the rationale for listening to children. It also looks at the importance and benefits of listening to children, as well as the consequences of not listening to them. It then explores some of the skills and attitudes necessary for being a better listener to children, with a special focus on listening to children at home.

Part 2 aims to help us to understand what child participation means. It looks at different ways that children participate and different settings for their participation. It also sheds some light on issues on child participation among vulnerable and marginalized children and how these could be addressed. The section also discusses some models of child participation and provides some examples in practice. There is a special focus on how child participation can be encouraged in child-focused organizations, in churches and in the community.

Part 3 helps to give some practical ideas and settings for child participation with other children, in child-led groups and in advocacy. This section also provides practical information on how to empower children to participate.

Finally, this Workbook also provides links to guidelines, tools and resources for facilitating participation of children and engaging them in meaningful ways.

Part I: Listening to children

Introduction

The first step towards encouraging children’s meaningful participation in families, communities, projects and churches is to learn to really listen to them. The Bible affirms the value of each child and the UN-CRC states that all children have the right to be listened to and consulted on matters that affect them. This requires accepting that all children have valid and valuable perspectives and opinions and being committed to hearing and understanding them. In practice it means overcoming all sorts of barriers that prevent adults from listening to children and learning new skills and attitudes that will help us to listen to children and motivate them to speak.

Lesson 1: What does the Bible say about the value and role of children?

Summary

- All children are made in God's image with the same value and rights as adults
- God uses children
- Jesus brought children into the centre of his ministry

God creates every child in His image. He endows each one with inherent value and dignity. Whether boys or girls, and whatever abilities or disabilities they may have, every child is born with this dignity because they are created by God; for this reason they have the same inalienable rights as any human being.¹

“Dignity is not about capability, giftedness, culture, social conditions, or economic status. It is God-given. Accepting human dignity is recognizing and honoring God the Creator and Redeemer, as well as Jesus Christ who came as a child to save us. The incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ is proof of human dignity. He was born as a child and grew up with uniqueness as an individual person to do the will of his Father. Affirming and celebrating the uniqueness of individuals is acknowledging God’s purpose and destiny for them, determined by God, for the praise of his name.”²

In God's eyes, children and adults are of equal worth and deserve the same respect. It might surprise us, but in the Bible we see that God chooses children as well as adults to carry out particular roles in his mission. The stories of children in the Bible point to this. Throughout the Bible, we see how God uses people of different ages and with different capacities to fulfil His plans. He calls on old and young people alike to do particular work. At certain times, God gives a unique role to children, even when most people look down on them.

At one time in the Old Testament, God chose a young boy, Samuel, to rebuke the spiritual leadership of the nation and to communicate a serious message of judgment (1 Samuel 3). Another central character in the Old Testament is David. As a youngster God gave him courage to fight a lion so that later he was able to face a giant in order to defend the people of Israel (1 Samuel 16-17). David was an ordinary shepherd, yet he had a heart and a vision for God's people. His humble attitude and his caring heart as a shepherd and as a child made him a deserving choice for a leader. In his very young age, God enabled him to be the future King of Israel.

Most Christians would know the story of the child Jesus, in the New Testament, who himself demonstrated the capacity of a child to share the Good News when he spoke at the temple (Luke 2:41-49). Another less celebrated but equally powerful story is that of the boy with five small barley loaves and two fish in the feeding of the five thousand. We learn in this story that Jesus chose a child to become his partner in a miracle to feed the huge crowd (John 6:1-13).

¹ Workbook 1 lesson 2 and Workbook 4 look at what the Bible says about children in more detail. See also Workbook 1, lessons 13 and 14 for more on children's rights.

² Beeftu (2005).

As an adult, Jesus modelled an attitude of bringing children into the centre of his ministry. One of the most popular stories is found in the Gospel of Mark where we see how Jesus called and embraced the little children even when the disciples were trying to prevent them from coming to Him. Jesus said "...let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth; anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them." (Mark 10:14–16).

All of these Scriptural examples challenge us to recognise children as people who have a right to be listened to, to be counted and to be recognised as capable individuals who can play a significant role in our family, organisation or community. This is the foundation for encouraging and enabling children's active and meaningful participation in all arenas of life.

Case Study

Here are some inspiring examples of how God is using children today. May they inspire us to release these precious ones to their destiny in God.

Up until quite recently most testimonies of child participation in prayer relate to amazing stories of answers to children's prayers. Stories like one from a children's home in Malaysia. Children prayed to God regarding a 'temple' with a huge idol which was being built opposite their home. After a 24-hour prayer vigil the children were excited when lightening struck in the night and the head of the idol smashed to the ground. Since this time the home has been established as a house of prayer with children being raised in faith to believe God for great things.

Now we are also hearing inspiring stories of children moving on from the role of simply praying to becoming prayer leaders. Much hidden wealth of ideas and people resource is released as children take the lead. In these examples children are truly beginning to make all the decisions. It has been a journey of enlightenment for adult facilitators brave enough to release children in this way. It is astounding to see what children are capable of when freed to hear from God themselves and take the initiative.

Here is a testimony from a 13-year old girl about how she heard from God and the journey He has taken her on since:

"God has really been moving in me the last year. I went to a children's prayer event called 'The Roar' and really felt like God was listening to my prayers. The children were asked to pray in the flow of the Holy Spirit and I took the microphone and God's glory just hit me. I prayed over finances and having faith in God and really felt God was speaking through me to give a word to the adults.

As well as this, God really opened up my heart to praying for others and asking for a gift from God. It really changed me a lot and helped me pray a lot more and whenever I wanted to be close with God. The worship leader asked all the youth and children if we wanted a certain gift from God and we were all prayed for and I truly believed God was moving in me as I prayed for a gift of singing. From that day on I kept praying with faith and I felt God very close to me. A few weeks later I had a dream when God (a bright light) came to me and placed his hand on my chest and said I give you the gift of singing. This was amazing for me as I have asthma and I felt like this would not hold me back with what God has got planned for me. Also he gave me another dream of me leading a choir of angels which lifted my spirits to know he was working in me. It was a great answer to prayer and I knew that if I had faith in God anything could happen. Days after, God gave me song words as I woke up in the morning.

Following this experience I was asked to go to New York for a prayer event with the International Prayer Council with people from all around the world to pray for other countries and New York. We were very lucky to visit and pray in the United Nations building. I held the British flag in a small parade in one of the meeting rooms (God's presence was definitely there!). I had so much more confidence to go up to people and start praying from my heart. I didn't feel shy at all! Many prayers I prayed brought me to tears because of the hard backgrounds suffered by the people I met there, but God gave me encouraging words and prayers which I knew would change people lives."

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Children are made in the _____. This means every child has _____ and _____ and is therefore entitled to the same _____ that are given to any human being. In the Bible, we see examples of how God has chosen children to _____ in his _____ at certain points of history. One of the famous stories is that of _____ who at a young age was given the role of defending the people of Israel and was later to become a king.

In the New Testament, we find Jesus bringing children into _____, even when his disciples were trying to prevent them from coming to Him. We see this story in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus said

“.....”

There are other stories in the Bible that emphasize the importance of children being listened to. The Bible has always taught us that children are _____ who may take on significant _____ within their _____, _____ or _____.

Discussion Questions:

1. Scripture provides several stories of children being assigned by God to do a particular mission. Name other children in the Old and New Testament and share about how God chose to appoint them for a specific role. What principles can we learn from how God viewed and dealt with these children?
2. What kind of roles do children play in the Bible stories we have identified?
3. How does this biblical picture of children compare to the attitudes of our family, church or organization?
4. In Matthew 18:1-9, the disciples were rebuked by Jesus because they were trying to keep the children away from Him. In what ways do we sometimes keep children away from playing a meaningful part of the work we do in our family or in our work in the community or organization?
5. How do we listen to children in our family? In our church? In our organization? In our community?

Lesson 2: Why should we listen to children?

Summary

- Ethical reasons; they will have their own views on a situation
- Legal reasons; right to express opinions and have them taken into account
- Protection reasons
- Benefit reasons; for the child and the community

Listening to children is important because like any individual, children are made in the image of God and therefore deserve equal opportunities to be listened to.

Often adults do not listen to children, much less, take children seriously. We were all children once and perhaps many of us have had our own experiences of disappointments as a child. How many of you can recall an instance when adults did not pay attention to your ideas?

There are at least four main reasons why we should listen to children:

- Ethical
- Legal
- Child protection
- Benefit

First, we should listen to children because it is **ethical** to do so. Children are individuals in their own right. They have their own views, feelings and real experiences. Especially if it is about something that directly affects them, children will have their own unique and valid insights because they are part of the situation.

Often adults need a better understanding of children and what they think of their situation. Children have their own separate subcultures with their own traditions, values and rules but, because they are part of society, it is often assumed that their culture is the same as that of the adults.³ Too often adults fail to recognize this when they create policies or programs that are meant to benefit children. If adults fail to consider what children think, projects may not succeed either because they are not responsive to the needs of children or they may be unattractive to children.

Miles (2006) in talking about the key issues in listening to children explains that adults should listen to children “not simply because children are never wrong, but because adults are not always right”. It is necessary to listen to children because adults can make decisions that are often in their own interest instead of the children’s.

Another reason why we should listen to children is because it is **legal**. The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child enshrines the right of every child to be listened to. Article 12, states “Children have the right to express their opinions freely, and have their opinions taken into account in matters that affect them.” UN-CRC guarantees this right to every child and this right should be fulfilled, protected and preserved by adults.

³ Miles (2006), 98.

Here are articles from the UN-CRC related to the child's right to participation:

- Article 13 Right to express opinion and be heard
- Article 14 Freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- Article 15 Freedom to form own groups
- Article 16 Right to privacy
- Article 17 Right to access appropriate information
- Article 42: Right to access to information about the CRC

*"I have come to know about my rights: My rights to education, to protection, to health and play. Before I didn't even know I had rights. Now I have this information I can do something."
Indian boy rag-picker, aged 13*

The third important reason why we should listen to children is because listening to them helps them to be better **protected** from harm or from violation of their rights. When given the space and opportunity to speak up, children will make an effort to raise their concerns and in the process also become empowered to defend themselves. The more adults listen closely to children, the better informed they are of children's conditions and the more they called to act to prevent violations or provide appropriate response to children who need assistance. In the context of emergencies, children can be protected better against the risks of disaster if the community is willing to listen to them. Listening to children also contributes to building their 'sense of relief' and 'being accepted as they are (Lahad, 1994).'⁴

Finally, we should listen to children because it is **beneficial** not only for the child but to the larger community. When given opportunities to be heard and participate, children gain confidence and self-esteem, they learn new skills and develop their social responsibility. This contributes to other positive impacts to the child's self-esteem and willingness to function as an important member of the family and society.

Listening to children is also advantageous for policy making and programming. To create good policies and programmes for children, we need the best information possible. And what better way to find out than by listening to children?

⁴ Wright (2006), 66

Case Studies

But you never asked!⁵

There is a story of a program involving street children, for which program managers had built a brand new day centre. It had a kitchen, dining hall, day-cots, game rooms, showers and staff all ready to get started with a huge range of activities – but on the first night, no children came. The previous week, staff had gone out on to the street to invite children and their friends to come and use the facilities, and the kids had seemed to want to come, but when the day came the place was empty. The staff could not understand it. What had gone wrong?

Steve, the coordinator, went out for a long walk and bumped into Pablo, one of the natural leaders of the boys on the street, whom he had known for a long time. They sat down together and talked about things. Then, in rare moment of vulnerability, Steve admitted, 'I just can't understand why none of the street kids are using our new centre.' Pablo looked at Steve and asked him if he had thought about where the centre was situated. Even though it was around the corner, it was only 500 meter from the nearest police station. 'Most of the kids would be afraid of going that close to the police station even if they hadn't done anything wrong,' Pablo said. Steve had a horrible feeling in the pit of his stomach as he realized what he had done. 'But why didn't you tell me?' he asked Pablo. But even as he asked the question he knew the answer. Slowly and quietly Pablo responded, 'But you never asked!'

Children contributing to keeping their community safe⁶

After the landslide in Southern Leyte, Philippines, 'Plan' mobilized the children to help in identifying the needs of the families affected by the disaster. The children participated in activities to name the hazards and risks of disasters in their community.

In the process, the children gave their observations and raised their concerns about the location of their school. They said that they often felt tremors in the area and were worried of the possible dangers that might affect them. With the help of Plan Philippines, the children made a recommendation to relocate the school.

The process was not easy as they had to present their proposal to the local government authorities and other community members. It took them quite some time to convince the community leaders of their recommendations. After series of discussions, the local government, parents and stakeholders unanimously decided to take action in favor of the children's demand. As a result, the school has been relocated to a place where children feel safer. The children have also contributed to a plan to reduce the risk of disasters in their school and community.

⁵ Miles (2006), 97.

⁶ Source: Plan Philippines (2008)

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

We can cite least four main reasons why we should listen to children: _____, _____, _____ and _____. Listening to children is _____ because children are also human beings who have their own _____, _____ and _____. It is legal because there is an international mandate through the _____ that enshrines the right of children to be listened to. We should listen to children also because it enables us to better _____ from abuse or harm such as when we enable them to talk about their concerns. Finally, listening to children is _____ not only for the child but also to their families and communities. Child participation has many advantages. It contributes to increasing children's _____, _____, _____ and _____. It also helps create good _____ and _____ for children.

Discussion Questions:

1. Explain the underlying ethical reasons why it is important to listen to children
2. How could failing to listen to children put them at risk?
3. Name some of the benefits of listening to children
4. Give a concrete example from your own experience of the benefits of listening to children
5. What are the barriers in your family, church, organization, or community that prevent you from listening to children? How could you help remove these barriers?

Lesson 3: What are the implications of not listening to children or involving them in the decisions that affect them?

Summary

- Communicates children are not valued
- Lost opportunity for positive discipline and development; disruptive behaviour
- Risk of exploitation and marginalization
- Risk of continued abuse
- Risk of failing to help

There is a huge difference when children are involved in decisions and actions affecting them. As we saw in Lesson 2, children themselves benefit, as well as people and organisations who are working with them. There are also rewards for the wider communities that they belong to.

There are many serious implications of not listening to children. In this lesson we will concentrate on three different consequences for children:

- Self-esteem and discipline
- Exploitation and marginalisation
- Abuse

In the family

In the context of a family, busy parents often fail to listen to and notice their children. Psychologists say that when children feel they have something important to say or to show and are repeatedly ignored or 'tuned out' by an adult who is insensitive or too busy, children usually give up and fail to develop their communication skills. This further stifles the growth of the child's mind, personality, interpersonal skills and self-confidence. The child may learn to misbehave and manifest this by being noisy or disruptive in order to get the attention he or she cannot get in any other way. By contrast, listening to children can be a way of encouraging positive discipline.⁷

Research has shown that a major difference between strong and troubled young people is the amount of interest that family members show in their lives.⁸ To a child, an attentive ear is more important perhaps than a parent's advice and prodding. Listening to children shows them we are interested in them.

In the community

Any group that is deemed less important in society and whose views are not taken into account is more vulnerable to exploitation. Children who are undervalued in their communities are also the least heard in any decision or policy. From a policy perspective, failure of the government to listen to children can increase the likelihood of laws that are unchallenged and thus can become harmful rather than beneficial to children. When children's views are not listened to, any attempt to improve the situation of children – be it through policy, program or specific actions, may not pay off sustainably or may not address the best interest of the children. Projects may be irrelevant, unattractive or at worst, harmful to children.

⁷ <http://www.extension.umn.edu/specializations/youthdevelopment/components/6141-10.html>

⁸ Benson (2006).

We have already discussed that children have valid views and experiences especially about the problems that affect them. A failure on our part to listen to the views of groups of children who are traditionally marginalised in society helps to perpetuate their situation. Exploited children, for example, have their own valid perspectives on how exploitation could have been prevented. Disabled children have clear feelings and understanding of discrimination. Poor children definitely have their views on why their family is poor and how they might be able to improve their condition. We can name other groups of children who have real experiences of the situation around them yet often times their voices are unrecognized as if their views are insignificant.

Child Protection

It is vitally important to provide ways for children to be listened to especially in the context of child abuse. Child protection practitioners have always advised that keeping silent about abuse gives the impression that it is alright to perpetrate abuse. The less children are allowed to speak about it, the higher the chances that the abuse will recur or be inflicted on other children. Child protection practitioners also recommend that in the incident of child abuse, the child should be listened to no matter how far fetched her or his story may seem to be.

Case Studies

Denying children a voice encourages impunity for abusers

In the UK, a series of public inquiries in the 1980s and 90s documented widespread systematic physical and sexual abuse by staff in children's homes over many years, which had been surrounded by a culture of collusion, neglect, indifference and silence on the part of staff. One of the most forceful lessons to emerge was that the abuse had been able to continue because children were denied any right to challenge what was happening to them. Their stories were not believed and they were denied access to any channels to help them articulate their concerns. Indeed, if and when they did complain, they risked further abuse. In other words, the adults involved could, with impunity, behave in ways entirely contrary to the children's welfare because children were not listened to.

Failing to listen can lead to the wrong decisions⁹

In Bangladesh, children who were laid off from garment industry jobs after an American campaign to end the employment of children under 15 in this industry led to those children entering forms of employment that were less appropriate and more hazardous than the jobs from which they were sacked. Similarly, many programmes that have sought to remove children from the streets by providing them with institutionalized accommodation and education failed because they did not seek the views of the children themselves. Those programmes that have been effective are those seeking to empower children by working with them, enabling their own experience to inform the development of appropriate interventions and services. For example, Bangladesh is now creating appropriate education for children in all types of work through participatory workshops with groups of children from every occupational category.

⁹ Lansdown (2001).

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

There can be a number of negative implications when do not listen to children. In the context of the family, failure of parents to listen to their children could mean hampering _____ and could lead to _____. In the community, if children's views are not listened to, they are more _____. In the area of policy making, laws that are _____ can become _____ rather than _____ to children. Any _____ designed to improve children's situation can also be _____, _____ or _____ if their interest are not taken into account. In situations of child abuse, failure of adults to listen to children affected can mean acquiescence and could lead to _____.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does listening to children benefit our relationship with them? Give examples from your own experience.
2. How can listening to children have a positive impact on them?
3. What are the consequences of not listening to children? Can you think of examples from your own experience?
4. What sort of attitudes (positive and negative) do of adults in your community, church or organization have about listening to children?
5. How will you encourage others to listen to children?

Lesson 4: How can I listen better to children?

Summary

- Listening is a skill that needs to be learnt and practiced
- Understanding different levels of listening
- What makes good listening to children?

Since listening is a natural part of everyday life, it might come as a surprise to learn that listening is also a skill. As a result, adults who work with and for children need to develop and practice attitudes, attributes and behaviours that will enable them to listen effectively to children as well as motivate children to talk. This is especially important where children have undergone difficult or traumatic experiences.

Levels of listening

If we think about different situations through a typical day, we will be able to recognize that we listen in different ways. These are sometimes called levels of listening.

At the lowest levels, the listener may give the appearance of listening, even using phrases like “Uh huh,” and “Right”. However, their real attention is focused elsewhere. The listener may only pick up a few words or just hear what they expect or want to hear. An example would be a child telling his parent about a day at school while the parent is reading the newspaper or watching television. This is called **passive** or **responsive** listening.

By contrast, high levels of listening require us to pay attention not only to the speaker’s words, but also to body language, tone of voice and language patterns in order to understand the emotions, state of mind and other issues that are driving the communication. This is often called **active** listening. It requires hard work on the part of the listener to understand what is being said by using open questions, and techniques such as repeating what has been said in different words to check you have understood properly.

Empathetic listening is an even higher level of listening. It is about total listening and it requires a change in attitude of the listener. Here the listener fully immerses himself or herself in the perspective of the speaker becoming fully aware of the speaker’s feelings, emotions, values and beliefs. To achieve this requires acceptance of the person, not just what they are saying.¹⁰

Good listening to children

Children are highly sensitive to various verbal and non-verbal cues of people and they can tell if they are sincerely paying attention to the conversation. When we want to listen to children and encourage them to share their ideas, perspectives and experiences, we need to work at achieving the higher levels of listening – *active* and *empathetic* listening – so that children feel safe to share and so that we really hear what they are saying. Lots of factors make it hard for adults to be empathetic listeners to children. For example, in many Asian cultures, children are not encouraged to disagree with their parents’ views. Also, adults can often be preoccupied with their own concerns.

¹⁰ Van Slyke (1999).

The need for sincere and effective listening is especially true for children who have experienced traumatic circumstances: 'Many of the children with whom we work are used to listening with their eyes, scanning the world for threats, hyper-vigilant to incongruities between our words and our body language that may indicate danger and falsehood.'¹¹ In such cases we need to listen genuinely and create a safe space for children to speak and to be heard. This will involve factors such as:¹²

- Tone of voice and facial expression
- Culturally appropriate eye contact
- Seating arrangements that respect the child's need for personal space
- Active and reflective listening techniques
- Using the child's mother tongue wherever possible
- Giving the child space and time to think and reply
- Patience
- Reliability
- Confidentiality

¹¹ Wright (2006), 70.

¹² For fuller details see Wright (2006), 71-72

Case Study¹³

How can we listen better to traumatized children?

Nancy¹⁴ was born to a drug-addicted and prostitute mother. She was neglected, molested and tortured from a very early age. At 6, she was raped by her maternal uncle. At 7, she was completely abandoned by her mother to fend for herself on the streets. She survived on the streets by begging, scavenging, and stealing. She also experienced physical and sexual abuse and exploitation by other street people. She was rescued by the Department of Social Welfare and Development at the age of 8, and placed in a centre for abused and abandoned children. Soon, she was observed to be the most difficult child to handle in the centre. She manifested over-sexualized behaviour, destructive outbursts, poor performance in school, defiance, and poor communication. She was referred to Love I46 when she was 11 years old. Upon admission to the Love I46 safehome, we started to really “listen” to Nancy.

Children who have been severely traumatized may express themselves in unconventional ways, therefore, we have to learn to listen to those unconventional stimuli, or to things that cannot be directly heard, and respond in a way that would help the child develop insight and hopefully grow. We had to “listen” to how Nancy was trying to come to terms with, and master the traumas of her past. We discovered that she would sexually torture the cats in the safehome the way she was sexually tortured by her uncle in the past. Her mother would feed her stale pig’s food; in the safehome, she would eat the cats’ food when she thought no one was looking. She would cut out pictures of families from magazines, carry them with her wherever she went, and talk to them in the toilet, in her bedroom, in the bus, etc. She would suddenly smack other children in school and in the safehome.

Nancy had earlier shared what happened in her past. We heard. But we are also “hearing” what is happening in the present, as well as the connection between the past and the present. We had to communicate to her that we are “hearing” those as well, and that she could let us hear more.

Beyond empathetic listening is what I call listening that heals, wherein the person feels heard, understood, accepted, guided, loved, and given the opposite of the environment in which she was traumatized. Where there was brutality, there is now love and gentleness; where there was lack of dignity, there is now respect; where there was lack of voice, there is now freedom of expression. This kind of listening relies heavily on assuming a loving and respecting attitude toward the child that will inevitably be communicated through the favourable tone of voice, facial expression, eye contact, space arrangement, and sensitivity to the child’s thinking and feeling processes. The Love I46 safehome is rounded in structure and is called the Round Home. It symbolizes, among other things, that there are no sharp edges to the behaviour of caregivers there, that all children have equal access to the centre of caring, and that the roundness is the embrace of love and respect around each child.

Making use of all our listening skills and the factors of listening that heals, we told Nancy that we understood what she was trying to do and that these behaviours are because of the unfortunate things that happened in her past. Having been given this backdrop of understanding and acceptance, Nancy was then invited to express her feelings and herself more. She did. She has been waiting for a listener.

We knew that our kind of listening was effective because she requested that kind of conversation again and again and in those conversations wherein she was listened to, affirmed, and given alternatives, she gained insight and began to grow. Eventually she stopped all of her previous maladaptive behaviours, and finally because she has become a gentle, thoughtful, Godly girl that people around her appreciate.

¹³ “Aftercare” is defined by Love I46 as systematic care given to a victim right after rescue and up to reintegration.

¹⁴ Not her real name

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Listening is a skill that we need to practice. Adults who work with children need _____, _____ and _____ that will enable them to _____ children and motivate children _____. We listen in many different ways. It is possible to be a _____ or an _____ listener. An active listener uses _____ questions and other techniques to check you have _____. Understanding how we listen may also help us become more sensitive to listening to a child. It is said that the best way to listen is to be _____, in which we fully immerse ourselves in the perspective of the speaker. Children are very _____ and can tell if someone is really listening. Good listening is especially important with children who have experienced _____.

Group listening exercise:

Find 3 or 4 other persons in the group and work together to discuss a topic of interest. Select one member of the group to role play a person who is talking about a particular issue and would like to seek advice to solve it. The rest of the members pay attention to the speaker and respond when necessary. After the exercise, reflect together about what constitutes the qualities of a good listener, and how this applies with listening to children. Share it with the group.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss some of the qualities that make a good listener to children
2. Recall a recent conversation with a child or children. Describe how you paid attention to their message and what kind of responses you gave them. What sort of listening do you think you were doing?
3. Wright says that to be good listener to children, we should 'look at our own child within'. What difficulties or frustrations did you have as a child when you tried to explain your point to an adult but the adult failed to listen to you? Does this experience make any difference to how you pay attention to children now?
4. Being a good listener also requires you to understand the cultural contexts in interacting with children (e.g. how much eye contact is appropriate). Identify anything in your community that people should be aware of to so that they can be a good listener to children.
5. What listening skills (attitude, attribute or behaviour) do you need to build or enhance and how do you plan to improve on them?

Lesson 5: How can parents listen better to children at home?

Summary

- Barriers to listening to children
- Good parent-child communication

The family usually provides the first context for the child to speak and be listened to. The irony however, is that while adults acknowledge the value of listening to children, still relatively few adults are actively engaged in listening to and engaging in the lives of children.

This large gap between intention and action among adults can be explained by many reasons. Here are some to consider:

Cultural influences

Many countries in Asia, for example, emphasize the value of utter respect for elders. Adults' opinion is often considered as the rule and reasoning among children is seen as a sign of disrespect. In most cases, children are not heard in family decision making.

Power

In other contexts too, parents are concerned about losing control and power over children.

Time

It can also be due to the lack of time and conflicting priorities adults have. Mothers and fathers from both wealthy and poor families are spending greater time at work than at home and thus, the time to listen and talk to the children is reduced.

Inter-generational gap

Conflicting priorities and the increasing inter-generational gap is making it more difficult for parents to listen to their children. Some of the challenges identified by parents include negative values in society, the demands of their job and work-life balance, economic challenges in the family, lack of strong relationship with a spouse or lack of a support network that they can rely on.¹⁵

These challenges underline the importance of equipping and supporting parents, families and caregivers to provide a positive listening environment for children.

¹⁵ Benson (2006).

Basic Principles of Good Parent-Child Communication

- Let the child know that you are interested and involved and that you will help when needed
- Turn off the television or put the newspaper down when your child wants to talk
- Avoid taking a telephone call when the child has something important to tell you
- Unless other people are specifically meant to be included, hold conversations in privacy. The best communication between you and the child will occur when others are not around
- Embarrassing the child or putting him on the spot in front of others will lead only to resentment and hostility, not good communication
- Don't tower over your child. Physically get down to the child's level then talk
- If you are very angry about a behaviour or an incident, don't attempt communication until you regain your cool, because you cannot be objective until then. It is better to stop, settle down, and talk to the child later
- If you are very tired, you will have to make an extra effort to be an active listener. Genuine active listening is hard work and is very difficult when your mind and body are already tired
- Listen carefully and politely. Don't interrupt the child when she is trying to tell her story. Be as courteous to your child as you would be to your best friend
- Don't ask *why*, but do ask *what happened*
- If you have knowledge of the situation, confront the child with the information that you know or have been told
- Keep adult talking ("You'll talk when I'm finished", "I know what's best for you", "Just do what I say and that will solve the problem"), preaching and moralizing to a minimum because they are not helpful in getting communication open and keeping it open
- Don't use put-down words or statements such as dumb, stupid, lazy: "Stupid, that makes no sense at all" or "What do you know, you're just a child?"
- Assist the child in planning some specific steps to the solution
- Show that you accept the child himself, regardless of what he has or has not done
- Reinforce the child for keeping communication open. Do this by accepting her and praising her efforts to communicate

Case Study

A parent of three children shares his experience of learning to listen to his children.

“Being a parent is not easy and when children are teenagers it can sometimes feel as though they never listen to you, but as my second daughter recently became a teenager I am learning to be a better listener myself. As a result I am surprised to find that I am receiving more respect from my children. I am learning not to exasperate my children (Ephesians 6: 4)!

I recently was on a trip away from the family and my oldest (15 years) and middle daughter (13 years) explained that they had made up their minds about what they were going to do about their schooling and they didn't want me to interfere...

My initial response was to be alarmed and to say loudly that this was not how decisions were made in our family! This caused some anxiety. My wife gave me one of those looks that said, “Listen to your children or you are going to alienate them.” So I listened.

The day afterwards, when the ‘dust had settled’ and I had heard what my wife had to say and had considered the alternative options, I asked us to have a family meeting and we discussed it further.

I reminded them that as parents we will always try to listen to what they have to say and will take what they say into consideration and in this case we thought their ideas were very good and we were willing to consider them as a real possibility. We also reminded them that decisions involving the family must always involve hearing everyone's opinion and that the best interest of both the individual children and the family as a whole needed to be considered.”

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

It is in the _____ that the child first learns to share his or her views and experience the value of being listened to. Thus, empowering parents to become better listeners to their children is crucial. We need to recognize that _____ are confronted with many challenges that often influence how much they listen to their children. Some of these are to do with lack of _____, conflicting _____ and _____ gap that exists between them and their children. It is therefore important for organisations, churches or groups who want to help promote listening to children to _____ and _____ parents.

Discussion Questions:

1. In your experience as a child or as a parent, can you think of practical things that help good communication between parents and children?
2. Which of the challenges in this lesson do parents in your community tend to experience that make it harder to listen to their children?
3. Are there other factors that make it hard for parents to listen to their children?
4. What kind of support would help parents become better listeners to their children?
5. What opportunities are there to provide support for parents in your community, church or organization? What activities could you contribute to?

Part 2: Understanding child participation

Introduction

Now that we have laid the foundations of listening to children, it is time to introduce the idea of child participation in more detail. Child participation covers a wide range of situations where children play an active role in all kinds of different settings. At its heart, child participation is about seeing children as agents who can take a lead, make decisions and effect changes in their lives and the lives of their peers, families and communities; it is about not just seeing children as passive beneficiaries of programmes designed to care for them. Obviously, child participation requires mutual relationships of responsibility and respect between children and adults.

There are many barriers to genuine child participation and it important to be aware of the risks of activities that give the impression that children are given a voice and some power, but in fact, are just for show and do not really change anything. This section will help you understand better what child participation is and why it matters and will give you some ideas for encouraging true child participation in your setting.

Lesson 6: What is child participation?

Summary

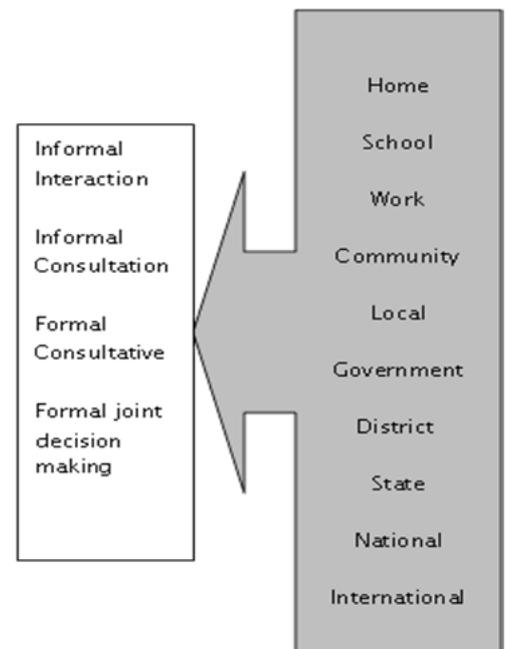
- What does child participation mean (more than listening to children)?
- Principles for child participation
- Role of adults in child participation

Listening to children is very important. It is the foundation for enabling children to participate in and influence decisions that affect them and their communities. In the next lessons we will explore what ‘child participation’ means in practice for people and organisations that work with and for children. We will identify helpful models and approaches for ensuring that children are able to participate in meaningful and constructive ways in all kinds of different contexts.

Where and how do children participate?¹⁶

As the diagram illustrates, there are many *arenas* in which children are able to participate – from home all the way through to national and international settings. The *forms* children’s participation can take also range from informal interaction and consultation (e.g. family discussion about how to spend the weekend), or formal consultation and formal and joint decision-making (e.g. children’s councils). Their role varies in different settings: children may represent themselves as individuals; they can be represented by their organizations or they may represent their organization. When they represent themselves, they tend to focus on issues that concern them personally. Children may also be a part of joint decision-making structures where children are an integral part of the decision making process. In this set up children have optimum impact.

Because there are so many types of ‘child participation’, we should not be surprised that some work better than others. Sometimes, children are mainly included as tokens, or they are manipulated for the adults’ agenda. Other times, children take the lead in setting the agenda and implementing an initiative.



¹⁶ Based on materials developed for Child Rights Workshop, CIDA. Source: Unicef Canada, 2005

Guiding principles for effective participation by children

One helpful way for adults to ensure that child participation is effective is to think of a “Wheel of Participation”.⁶ The central principle is ‘Give Children Respect’. This is the hub of the wheel. This is connected to three spokes: ‘Support’, ‘Opportunity’ and ‘Responsibility’. When one or more of these elements is missing, children’s participation may be slowed down or imbalanced, just like a wheel that is not functioning well.



Respect is essential in providing support for all the three principles (spokes) of child participation. Without this, the three principles will not be fulfilled. Respect involves listening to what children say, asking for their opinions, asking for explanation of decisions and actions and giving them equal treatment regardless of their differences.

Children need **opportunities** to actively participate and to contribute to solving the issues affecting them. Using child-friendly methodologies, children can be involved in activities and programmes that address their concerns.

If children are given **responsibility**, they will gradually become empowered as decision makers. It is crucial for the growth and well-being of children that they learn how to respond actively to issues affecting their lives, both on their own and with other children. The types and levels of decision-making and accountability should be realistic and appropriate for the children’s age and maturity, increasing over time as the children grow older and gain experience.

Finally, **support** for the children should be given if they are to participate meaningfully. Adults should help by providing information, teaching them skills and providing material or financial resources so that they can make informed decisions and participate well. Adults should also provide support to children who lack maturity or experience or have disabilities.

⁶ Stephenson et al (2004).

Case Study

As part of the overall philosophy of ministry within the Early Encounter strategy in Cochabamba, Bolivia, child participation plays an important role. There are currently nineteen projects involved in the city-wide strategy with over 900 children being helped through a variety of child-care programs. All of the children involved in the Early Encounter choose through a democratic election process two children from their project they wish to have represent them as ambassadors.

The ambassadors are elected to help represent and speak up for the children in each project. Once a year the children in each of the projects choose from among their own peers two representatives per project. Anonymous voting slips are deposited into an elections box and tallied. Those who are elected become the ambassadors. In addition, the children elect from their own group of ambassadors a board that will develop the annual plans and strategies for what they hope to accomplish during the year.

Monthly meetings are carried out by the ambassadors and are organized with the help of an adult facilitator who provides training and general orientation for the children. The ambassadors have represented their projects before governmental bodies, professional athletic departments as well as churches and other organizations. The ambassadors not only represent their projects but also develop community outreach ministries in which they participate on issues such as child abuse, HIV/AIDS prevention and food disbursement programs.

The benefits from the program are numerous. Not only do individual ambassadors grow in their own leadership and confidence as they represent their projects, but they also grow in their own understanding of their participation in the kingdom of God. No longer do they perceive themselves as victims in need of help, but they are encouraged to look to the needs of others.

Even though there is not space for all children involved in the projects to become ambassadors, all the children still learn a valuable lesson. When children choose their ambassadors and leaders they learn to become responsible for the decisions they are making. In addition, children are encouraged to be part of the decision making process with their ambassadors and thus they too learn leadership principles and gain confidence in their own decision-making process.

One of the significant achievements that has been identified is the increased role of children in helping to establish plans and strategies for the Early Encounter project. No longer are children just viewed as passive recipients, but they are now perceived by adult leaders, pastors and other children as leaders. Pastors and other local leaders now look to children in many matters that affect the direction of the work in Bolivia. As a result, they have children that are confident in their own leadership abilities and frequently have programs that are contextual to the needs of other children and youth.

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Child participation is more than just _____ to children. The aim is for children to participate in all kinds of different _____ in ways that are _____ and _____. Child participation can take place in different arenas and forms. It can be through _____ interaction or formal _____ and _____, starting from within their own _____, to _____ and _____ settings. Some child participation mainly uses children as _____ or _____ them for the _____ agenda. To be genuine, child participation should be guided by the following principles: _____, _____, _____, and _____. Without these, child participation can be _____ or become _____.

Discussion Questions:

1. Looking at the diagram, we can see lots of different arenas where children can participate in many different forms. From your experience or knowledge, give an example of some different types of child participation.
2. Can you think of an example where children's participation was mostly as tokens and where they were mainly fulfilling the adults' agenda? What about an example where children took a lead in setting the agenda?
3. In the different examples you have identified for questions 1 and 2, what were the advantages and disadvantages of children's participation?
4. Can you think of any risks or concerns associated with child participation in your context? How could these risks or concerns be addressed?
5. The 'Wheel of Participation' gives 4 essential principles for good child participation. Thinking about your church, organization or community, which of these principles are working well? Which could be improved? What strategies can you suggest to improve them?

Lesson 7: What are specific issues for including children who are often marginalized?

Summary

- Which groups of children are often not listened to?
- Consequences
- Challenges of listening to vulnerable children
- Ideas on how to support vulnerable children in expressing their views

Children are not a homogenous group - children are of different ages, values, beliefs, ethnicity, capacity, and so on.¹⁷ Regardless of their differences, every child should be treated with equal respect and be given equal opportunity to participate in an appropriate way. There are times that we will work with children who are particularly vulnerable and marginalized. Despite their condition these children also have their own views and have something to offer that will impact their situation. They also have the right to be heard and to participate.

What sorts of children are particularly marginalized?

In many cultures, **girls** are significantly discriminated against within families and their communities. They are denied access to education, afforded less freedom, subjected to abuse, have fewer opportunities for play and recreation, or even married against their will at early ages.

Children who express **different sexualities** such as those who describe themselves as homosexual or transsexuals suffer discrimination because of the identity that they have chosen or that has been put onto them.

Many children with **disabilities** are marginalized, denied education, exposed to abuse, emotionally rejected, and socially isolated.

Children from **minority ethnic groups**, low castes, or indigenous communities frequently experience negative assumptions of other people about their competence, integrity and their abilities to learn.

“When we walk down the street we get picked on just because you think we are different from you. But you’re wrong, we’re just the same, it’s just that our beliefs and culture are different. You think you can get rid of us. You think if you were us and we were you, what would you feel? You’d feel useless, you’d feel abandoned from everyone and everything. You wouldn’t like it at all.”

(Ethnic minority child from the UK)

“Disability is in the eyes of society. It is not in our eyes. If given a chance, we can prove our worth. Disability is a mental problem – one of attitudes.”

(Children with disabilities taking part in a consultation day in Nepal)

¹⁷ Lansdown (2001).

What are the consequences?

In all these cases, children's self-esteem and sense of self worth is undermined and their opportunities for growth diminished. If we also discriminate against such children, we will not have access to hear their stories or reach out to them. The more they are denied the chance to be listened too, the more marginalized they become.

It is important therefore for vulnerable children to be offered opportunities where they can express their views and for adults to listen to their concerns because these groups are the most neglected and silenced. This can be challenging but is well worth the extra effort.

Some ideas to help you as you support the participation of marginalized children include:

- Be extra diligent in understanding their background and employing creative ways to help them to speak
- Utilize a variety of methods of working and expression to enable all children to participate to the maximum. Learning the language of the child or children, his/her expressions or sign language (in the case of a child who is hard of hearing) may help you better listen and communicate with them
- Have enough resources (e.g. materials) you can use to encourage them to express their views in a way and form that they are most comfortable or confident with
- Choose a location where children feel safe, comfortable and relaxed and do not feel intimidated or threatened
- Consult with the children on the methods of involving them because they also know what will work best for them
- Bear in mind that you may need more time and be patient
- Projects will also have a number of different roles that children can fulfil according to their aptitudes, interests and abilities, each of which should be promoted and valued equally

Despite their difference or situation, children can work together but those who work with them will need to be sensitive and provide different levels of support as appropriate. It may be good to focus on specific groups at times; however, it may not always be helpful to separate out certain groups of children as this may result in an emphasis on difference rather than commonness. It may also create or deepen the stigma of discrimination that they may already be experiencing.

Children's ability to participate often depends on the openness and willingness of adults to support their exercise of this right. Adults need to understand and appreciate the various capacities that all children can offer in certain undertakings. They also need to recognize that children come in various ages, gender, ethnicity and culture, economic status, faith, language, abilities and that every child, regardless of their difference are entitled to the right to participate.

Case Study

Promoting participation of children with disabilities in Kampala, Uganda

“On your marks! Get set! Go!” The cheers of the children erupted as they hollered out encouragement for their friends. On the field were the children of five network projects from CRANE network in Kampala, jumping furiously in their sacks. Pauline shouted, “Jump, Okello, jump!” For her, the race wasn’t a competition, it was a proud achievement of the children with special needs from her project, Mukisa Foundation.

Allowing disabled children to compete with other children in a sporting event was just a dream for childcare workers in the network. It seemed like a lovely idea, but the practical issues seemed like too much to overcome. In a society where having a child with special needs brings social shame, many are locked in their homes and prevented from accessing the services that they need and deserve. However, because the dream seemed simple enough, the workers sat down together and talked through a plan.

By the time the big sports day arrived, children from Mukisa Foundation were very, very excited. Workers had carefully planned the games that they could compete in with others and the ones in which they would keep in their own group so that they could take part at their own speed. Sacks had been purchased early and taken to Mukisa so that the children could practice jumping all around their compound. Organisers ensured that the children had a special area with lots of shade so the children could rest from the unrelenting sun, with extra water provided to refresh them. The fears that the other children would react badly to them never came to pass. After cautious interaction to begin with, the sack race brought awe to everyone involved.

The other four children on the track raced ahead of Okello, but he continued with a happy but concentrated look on his face. He passed the sack to Rachel who was helped to crawl into it by Pauline. By the time Sam and Shafika had taken their turns, two projects had already finished. But Mukisa and two others were still going. Moses set off at a really fast pace and overtook New Hope’s competitor. “We’re not last! We’re not last!” Pauline shouted jumping up and down with tears in her eyes. Mukisa, represented by five children with special needs, finished 4th in the race and proved to Kampala that, when practical obstacles are overcome, the results are outstanding.

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Children have different _____, _____, _____, _____, _____ and so on but all of them have the same right to be treated with _____ and given the opportunity to _____. Children can also belong to what we call 'marginalised' groups or those who are often ignored and discriminated against. These include _____, children with _____, and children from _____ groups. Marginalized children like all other children are entitled to the same amount of respect. Without it, their _____ and _____ is undermined and their _____ are diminished. It can also lead to increased marginalization because the situation will remain unchallenged. In order to encourage effective participation among vulnerable children, adults need be extra _____ in understanding their _____ and be able to use a _____ to enable them to participate. Projects should encourage _____ for children, according to their _____, _____ and _____.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is it important for all children to participate actively and be listened to, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, capacity, etc.? Is it practical in reality?
2. Thinking about your context, which groups of children are most marginalized? What are the barriers that make it difficult for them to participate fully in activities in your community, church or organization?
3. Identify the vulnerable groups of children in your program, community or church. In what ways can you encourage them to voice out their specific concerns and situation? What methods would you use?
4. What is the importance of striking a balance between activities designed to focus on specific group of vulnerable children and activities that promote their integration within the broader group of children?
5. How can you ensure that vulnerable children feel safe in a particular environment in which they are participating?

Lesson 8: How committed are we to children’s participation?

Summary

- Where can/do children participate?
- How do children participate?
- Tool for assessing our own project

In Lesson 7 we saw that children can and do participate in many different ways in all kinds of different arenas, from family, local church, child-care project, and community all the way up to national and international forums. We saw some of the underlying principles that adults need to adopt in order for children to participate in meaningful ways.

In the remainder of this workbook we will explore the ways in which children can participate in three specific **settings**: the organization or project that they belong to; the community; and the local church. We will also look at three **forms** in which children are active participants in these settings: child-to-child activities; child-led groups; and in advocacy. These are just some examples of how children can be empowered and how they can make an active contribution.

Before we turn to these practical examples, it is good to spend some more time examining what child participation does and does not involve, as there are many misunderstandings on the part of adults that can create barriers to trying new approaches. The table summarises some key characteristics of true child participation and highlights what it is not.

Child Participation¹⁸	
Involves	Does not involve
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Recognizing the value of children’s knowledge and opinions ✓ Sharing experiences and expertise with children ✓ Learning from children ✓ Finding ways to make it easy for children to make decisions and implement them ✓ Helping children and adults to understand their rights and responsibilities ✓ Sharing power with children ✓ Working towards respect for the rights of children and adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Suggesting to children what they should think or say ✓ Thinking adults have nothing to learn ✓ Devaluing adults’ experience and expertise ✓ Using children to do adults’ work ✓ No rights for adults and no duties for children ✓ Handing over all power to children ✓ Keeping things the way they are now

¹⁸Regional Working Group on Child Labor, (2003).

Getting started

This lesson includes a simple tool for groups wanting to encourage child participation.

On the left hand side of the table you will see 5 levels of participation by children in the group or organization. The lowest level is level 1 – children are listened to. The highest level is level 5 – children share power and responsibilities for decision making.

Across the top of the table there are 3 different dimensions related to children's access to participation (Openings, Opportunities and Obligations).

Start at the bottom left hand side of the table. For each level of participation (1-5), check yourselves against the following questions:

1. Is the organization or group ready group to listen and work with children? (Openings)
2. Is there space or opportunities for children to share their views and be engaged? (Opportunities)
3. Is there a mandate in the organization that provides for child participation? (Obligations)

In this way you can work out what level your group is currently operating at with respect to child participation. You will notice that Level 3 is the minimum level for putting the CRC in to practice.

You can also use the tool to help you write an action plan for increasing the level of child participation in your project.

This tool can be used by individuals and organizations working with children and could be an initial step to building an action plan to enhance child participation within any organization working with children.

Case Study

In this lesson, the case study will be YOUR project, church or organization to see how ready and committed you are to children's participation and starting to think what steps you could take to change.

ACTION

Work with one or two of your colleagues in the organization to assess your current progress with respect to this model. Look at the following questions and take some time to discuss your response to each. Once you identify the gaps, please try to list down key action plans that will enable your group or organization to help children achieve a higher level of participation within your work.

Pathways to Participation¹⁹

Levels of participation		Openings	→	Opportunities	→	Obligations
5. Children share power and responsibilities for decision making		Are you ready to share some of your adult power with children?	→	Is there a procedure that enables children and adults to share power and responsibility for decisions?		Is it a policy requirement that children and adults share power and responsibility for decisions?
4. Children are involved in decision-making processes		Are you ready to let children join in your decision-making processes?		Is there a procedure that enables children to join in decision-making processes?		Is it a policy requirement that children must be involved in decision making processes?
						<i>This point is the minimum you must achieve if you endorse the UN CRC</i>
3. Children's views are taken into account		Are you ready to take children's views into account?		Does your decision making process enable you to take children's views into account?		Is it a policy requirement that children's views must be given due weight in decision-making?
2. Children are supported in expressing their views		Are you ready to support children in expressing their views?		Do you have a range of ideas and activities to help children express their views?		Is it a policy requirement that children must be supported in expressing their views?
1. Children are listened to	<i>Start here</i>	Are you ready to listen to children?		Do you work in a way that enables you to listen to children?		Is it a policy requirement that children must be listened to?

¹⁹ Shier (2001).

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

It is important to understand what child participation does and does not involve, because there are many _____. For example, child participation does involve _____ from children but it does not mean _____ adults' _____ and _____. Child participation does not mean handing all _____ over to children, but rather _____ with them. A practical tool that we can use to understand how our organization fares in promoting children participation is called _____. This tool looks at the _____, _____ and _____ that are in place in an organization to make it more suitable for child participation. It can be used by _____ and _____ working with children as an _____ to building an _____ to enhance child participation.

Discussion questions:

1. How do children currently participate in your family, community, church or organization? Looking at the 'Pathways to Participation' chart, what level of participation are you at now?
2. What opportunities can you see for increasing children's active participation? What do you think the main challenges would be?
3. How could you make use of the 'Pathways to Participation' tool in your community group, church or organization? Who would need to be involved?
4. Look at the table 'child participation involves/does not involve'. What concerns about child participation does it help to address?
5. How would you explain what child participation means to someone who is sceptical about it? What examples could you use and what benefits would you point to?

Lesson 9: How can my organization promote children's participation?

Summary

- Listening to children requires a culture change in organisations
- Positive ways to create a listening environment (include mechanisms from lesson 6)

Preparing an organization to listen to children entails a journey of learning and change. It could mean changing some approaches to doing work with children and it might even mean changing the whole culture of the organization: seeing children as partners, rather than merely having them as beneficiaries.

How much an organization can change will depend on its philosophy, strategies and approaches. Small community-based or grassroots organizations may be able to radically change and encourage children to be part of its programs and activities quite quickly. On the other hand, a big international organization might find it more difficult to change due to its more complex systems and structures, but it can gradually do it if it has political will and resources.

Whatever the organization is like, here are some simple steps that workers can take that will help to make an organization better at listening:

- A genuine willingness to listen to children and what they think. For example, listen to their ideas about their problems, about the project and how it could improve
- Create regular space and time where children feel comfortable and are able to communicate about their concerns and suggestions
- Make sure that children can see that you have taken their ideas seriously and put some of them into practice
- Develop mechanisms that will invite openness among children and that are readily accessible to them. Creative ideas like this example of a feedback mechanism for teachers in Mongolia is a good example of promoting an environment where children can be listened to

Feedback mechanisms in schools in Mongolia

Teachers may refuse to accept feedback from their students, especially regarding their own performance. In order to introduce monitoring mechanisms, schools in Mongolia set up anonymous feedback and suggestion boxes. An elected group of students checked the comments regularly and passed them on to the headmaster for follow-up.

A student committee also organized a series of competitions. For several weeks, children were asked to nominate teachers according to the topic of the week, such as: 'the most attractive teacher', 'the best dressed teacher', 'the friendliest teacher', 'the strictest teacher', or 'the grumpiest teacher'. Using humour helped break the ice and to make it easier for teachers to accept feedback from students.²⁰

²⁰ <http://www.unicef.org/mongolia>

Manager's tips

Here are some recommended ways that organisations can begin to encourage child participation²¹.

Changing work habits

You need to rethink the relationship between children and the organization so that children are recognized as partners rather than passive beneficiaries. Children should be informed about organizational activities and plans because they have a right to know what happening in programs that affect them. Information should be provided to children so they can decide when and how they wish to participate. Children must also be included as an audience for organizational reports which means routinely producing children-friendly resources. Appointing a member of staff to be responsible for promoting children's participation would also be helpful. This job generally involves overseeing sensitization on children's participation and training for staff and partners, as well as technical support and monitoring.

Building the capacity of the organization

Learning is a continuous process. Staff and leaders should be given orientation and training on child rights and the benefits of child participation.

Providing space for children

Organizations with regular contact with children should ensure they have appropriate spaces in the office where children can 'be themselves'. In adult spaces or offices, children tend to be uncomfortable and ill at ease. Their space could as simple as a table under a tree, provided that there is adequate shelter from sun, wind and rain or an open space where children have tools to play with or space to interact with each other.

Ensuring safeguards for children

Organizations should ensure that it has a child protection policy and standards in place before members of staff work with children. Please refer to Workbook 6 on child protection for more guidance on standards of behaviour for keeping children safe.

²¹ Adapted from Stephenson (2004) and Regional Working Group on Child Participation (2003)

Case Study²²

Together with other organisations taking part in a quality improvement programme in Kampala, Bambejja Child Support Project (part of Oasis Uganda) was due to receive a small grant to be spent on improving the wellbeing of children in the project. A significant part of the training received by staff at Bambejja was on the importance of children's active participation within the organisation. Therefore, when the time came, the project decided to let the children decide how the grant money would be spent.

During a child participation meeting one Saturday, over 70 children were able to express their views on how the grant should be spent. Many different ideas came up; some of them were quite ambitious, but all were listened to. One key thing the children revealed was that a major problem they faced was how they slept at night, as many slept on the floor on a mat without proper bedding. After much discussion, the girls themselves came to the consensus that they would like to purchase blankets.

Upon receiving the grant, Oasis therefore purchased blankets for 75 girls. The recipients of the blanket were very happy and excited. Some of their guardians came to the project to personally express their gratitude. This was an indicator that the blankets made a positive change in the homes where the girls come from.

This programme has been a great achievement in that the children were empowered to make a decision and take responsibility for resources, which has given them a greater sense of their self-worth. While planning for this programme, the project team asked the girls what they felt they needed most and they suggested blankets. This process has helped boost the girls' confidence in expressing their opinion and feel a part of the project. They have also benefited physically as they will be able to sleep better during the night which will make them better able to concentrate in school and hopefully achieve a good education.

Staff from the project report, *"One big part of this exercise was empowering children to make a decision and have a voice. So often children are 'seen and not heard' and their opinions are not really valued, rather taken as tokenism. The fact that the children received the blankets which was their self-professed need has strengthened the relationship between Bambejja and the children, and increased their trust in Oasis."*

Through the programme, the Bambejja Child Support Project has appreciated the need to involve beneficiaries in the project decision-making process.

²² From The Children at Risk Action Network report on Tearfund's QIS Improvement Grant (Kampala, 2008)

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Promoting child participation in an organization will need some time for _____ and _____. It is important that staff and the organization begin to see children more _____ rather than mere _____ of their programmes. Organisations that are determined to facilitate child participation can make small changes that will make them better at _____ to children, like _____ to listen, creating regular _____ and _____ for children to communicate and putting children's ideas _____. Creative _____ can also help children to communicate openly.

An organization may need to _____, which involves including rather than excluding children in organizational process that affect them; _____ staff and organizational _____ to work with children, provide _____ for _____ to be themselves, and ensure that there are _____ for children to be protected.

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the current practice of your organization in engaging children in your programs and activities.
2. Identify some reasons for people's resistance to and support of child participation within your organization. How do you feel about it?
3. How do you think these negative reactions to child participation can be addressed?
4. In the lesson, we discussed the need for time and space for children to participate in the organization. Assess your organization and workplace and identify existing or potential spaces for children 'to be themselves.'
5. Review the suggested ways of enabling the organization to prepare for child participation. Which of these can you already begin in your organization and how do you intend to do it? Whose help and support will you need?

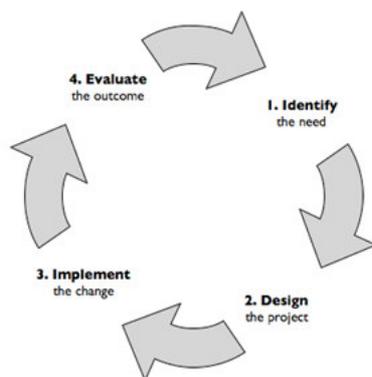
Lesson 10: How can children participate in development, monitoring, and evaluation?

Summary

- Project cycle
- Examples of children's involvement in different parts of the project cycle
- Advantages of children's involvement

We have already seen that children have a great deal to offer based on their real experiences and their views about the situation around them. This leads us to recognize that children are 'experts' about their own contexts. Therefore it makes sense to consult them when it comes to identifying or developing policies and programmes that are aimed to benefit them.

Organisations, agencies and individuals who are involved in community development work are increasingly in agreement that children should be actively engaged in all aspects of their programmes from identifying priorities, designing projects, putting them into practice (implementation) and monitoring how well they are working and finally, evaluating the projects and learning lessons for future work. This is a long way from just seeing children as beneficiaries of programmes!



It is helpful to think of a 'project cycle' that involves four main stages namely: identification of needs, project design, project implementation and monitoring, and evaluation. The whole cycle should be guided by the principle of ongoing learning and reflection from each of the stages process with a view of improving future actions and programming. Workbook 7 will look at these different activities in more depth. In this lesson we will look at some examples of children's involvement at each of these stages.

1 Identification of needs (also called situation analysis)

This phase involves collecting the right information to be able to assess the needs and identify what priorities the project will focus on. At this stage, it is important to seek the views of children on the issues that affect them and what priorities the project should focus on.

2. Project design

This phase involves carrying out further research about people affected by the problem and how they are affected by it. It then involves deciding what activities to undertake in order to address the needs. It also involves identifying the risks to the project and how the project's performance will be measured. At this stage, children should be consulted on strategic choices and priorities. They should also be given the opportunity to define the role they want to take in the project.

3. Project implementation and monitoring

Children can take different roles in the implementation of a project, which they themselves have defined. They should be supported by adults in the course of their participation so that they can perform their identified roles and meaningfully participate.

Monitoring refers to the continuous and regular process of checking how the project is working and using the findings to make necessary adjustments. Children can also participate in monitoring. Appropriate tools in child-friendly formats should be available so that children can easily understand them and contribute information necessary in monitoring the progress of the project.

4. Evaluation

This stage refers to the process of assessing the project's impact and sustainability and reflecting on the implementation of a given programme in order to draw lessons for the future. In evaluation, children should be involved by identifying the impact of the project in their lives. They can also do a particular role like data collectors, interviewers. To be able to engage as such, children should be supported with appropriate tools that they can use.

Case Study

Children's involvement in needs assessment

At the early stages of a community development programme in Lao PDR, children were asked to go around their village and take pictures of places or things that are important to them and give them a sense of worth and meaning. One place they photographed was a temple. The children said the temple is a heritage of their village and an important place where they make their offerings and learn teachings from the monks. They also took pictures of places like their school (importance of education), latrine (access to proper sanitation and child protection – i.e. so that they will no longer go to the forest), vegetable garden and fish pond (source of food and livelihood) and a playground (importance of a place for physical development and to keep them away from drugs). These later helped the community to identify the development priorities according to children.

Listening to children in evaluation

In focus group discussion held by World Vision in one of its programmes in Sri Lanka, the researchers gathered a group of teens to talk about their views of the impact of activities conducted for them.

Local staff were asked to facilitate the focus group discussions as they were familiar with most of the children and know the children's language. Using a tool called Most Significant Change (MSC), the focus groups engaged the children in story telling about the most important changes they have experienced in their lives as a result of their participation in the activities. At the end of the discussions, both staff and children acknowledged the importance of a listening time with children.

Many recognized that they have sometimes fallen short of this part of their roles whenever they make a visit to the community, as they have always been pre-occupied with the work they have to do rather than set a time to sit down and listen to the children.

"I have known some of the children before but this is the first time I am hearing their stories first hand... we should do this more because I think we can not support them effectively if we don't know much of their situation."

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Children are _____ in their own way, especially in matters anything that will particularly impact their lives. In development work, it is now accepted that children can participate at all the different stages of _____. The project cycles stages begins with _____ (or situation analysis), which then informs the _____ of the project. Children can definitely participate in _____ and _____ in which they can take on different roles. Finally, children can also participate in _____ the impact of projects on their lives and can be involved as researchers or data collectors. In all of the stages, _____ and guidance from _____ as well as appropriate _____ are key to realize children's participation.

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the stages of a project cycle and give your own ideas of how children might participate in each stage.
2. If you know of any real examples of children's participation throughout the project cycle, what were the advantages and disadvantages?
3. What challenges can you foresee in getting children involved in the project cycle?
4. What benefits could children's participation in the project cycle bring to a program? To the staff? To the wider organization, church or community?

Additional questions for leaders and managers:

5. How could you build your staff capacities to work with children so that their views are carefully considered and used in programming?
6. What organizational guidance (e.g. policy, programming tools, resources) is available to your staff to enable them to integrate child participation in your projects/programmes? Describe how they encourage child participation in the programmes or how you would like to begin to encourage it.
7. Organizational strategies and plans geared towards benefiting children can be influenced by children. Discuss the ways in which children are or could be encouraged to inform and influence your organizational priorities and strategies.

Lesson 11: How can children participate more in the life of the church?

Summary

- The importance of including children in church life
- How to make the church more child-friendly
- The church's role as an agent for change in society

Jesus' attitude to children is a big challenge to the role children should play within the church community. Jesus did not think that children should be 'seen and not heard', or that they should be 'entertained' until they are old enough to understand the real things of God. Jesus said, "Let the children come to me – do not hinder them." Why? "For the Kingdom of Heaven *belongs* to such as these." (Matthew 19:14) Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul expects children to be so well-nurtured and cared for that, according to 1 Timothy 4:12, no one will look down on them because they are young, but they must be examples to the believers in speech, life, love, faith and purity.²³ This goes to say that children must be seen as active members of the church community.

Based on this understanding of the place children have in the Bible's picture of the church, Dan Brewster points to 9 key things that children should get from the church:²⁴

- Teaching of the Word of God
- Discipleship
- Prayer, love and care
- Opportunities to participate in ministry
- A "child-friendly" church compound
- Qualified children's teachers
- Age-graded classes and curricula
- Family equipping and preparation
- Protection from harmful traditions

Notice that from this perspective, children need to be both receiving from and giving to the ministry of the whole church.

Child-friendly church

Brewster goes on to give some pointers for how to create more child-friendly churches:

"There are measures that the Church may take to make the programs and the compounds more nurturing, profitable, interesting and safe for the child. Again, these ideas are only a check-list. They should be used as starting points for discussion with your church leaders. Your church may build its own more extensive checklist that will stimulate thinking and help it respond to children's needs in your own

²³ Brewster (2008), 103-104

²⁴ Brewster (2008), 104-105. See his fuller explanation and discussion of each.

context and the particular environment of your church.” Of course, care must be taken to make sure that children are included in meaningful ways and not just as tokens, or even performing a decorative or entertaining role for the adults!

The check-list includes:

- The **worship services** should be meaningful to children and not just adult experiences in which children must conform to adult standards.
- Children should be **talked to and listened to** – before, during, or after church – about their worship experience. The children should be asked what they want to have done for them in the church, and they should participate in the decision-making.
- The agenda items of the **church elders’ meetings** and annual church programs should include matters relating to children and how to improve the church’s ministry to them.
- The Bible classes and teaching materials should be **age-graded** and suitable for the ages and maturity of the children.
- The **pastor** should be a regular visitor to the children’s ministry and should know many of the children by name.
- The church should have designated **days and times to bless children** in its annual program.”

Outreach to the wider community

Children should be fully integrated into in the church’s ministry to the wider community.

Christian leaders also have a significant role to play in modelling and encouraging children’s participation within the church community and beyond it. The church and its leaders can also play a catalytic and transforming role in making their community more sensitive to and respectful of children. The UNICEF report of 2006 underscores the importance of the participation of religious leaders and organizations in addressing sensitive issues of children: “Religion plays a central role in social and cultural life in most developing countries, and religious leaders and faith-based organizations are greatly respected and listened to.”²⁵

²⁵ Unicef (2006).

Case Study

Big brothers and sisters²⁶

Big Brothers and Sisters of Cambodia (BBSC) began as part of a community-based project to support the hundreds of children orphaned by AIDS in poor urban areas of Cambodia. A group of ten Christian young people were recruited as youth mentors for these children. Their enthusiasm quickly spread. Soon many other youth were asking how they could be involved.

BBSC now provides a simple but powerful way for Christian youth in Cambodia to put their faith into action by becoming a 'big brother' or 'big sister' to an orphan or child at risk in their own community. The big brothers and sisters commit to visit their little brothers and sisters on a weekly basis. Orphans receive a friend who will pay attention to them, notice when they are struggling and encourage them in their achievements.

Working through the local church

BBSC works with the youth department of the Evangelical Fellowship of Cambodia (EFC). This gives BBSC a profile within Cambodian churches and helps make contact with local Christian leaders. BBSC visits youth leaders' camps, seminars and training sessions for pastors or youth leaders, to talk about the needs of children who have lost their parents to AIDS. Pastors and youth leaders help to promote the vision in local churches and youth clubs as well as to check the suitability of potential new volunteers.

Big brothers and sisters form themselves into groups of between five and ten young people, so that they will have support and encouragement from their peers. Each big brother is then matched up with one little brother and each big sister is matched up with one little sister from their local community. The orphans are not related to their big brothers or sisters. It is important that brothers and sisters live in the same area to enable regular visits. During the weekly visit, the big brother or sister simply spends time with the orphan – encouraging, listening, talking, playing, praying, eating and having fun.

Sustainability

The big brothers and sisters are not given any financial support by BBSC. Instead they share what they have with their little brothers and sisters. In this way the community is not dependent on outside help, but is helping itself. It sounds difficult to expect young people from poor communities to give to others, when they may be struggling to be able to afford the basics themselves. Yet even without money, these young people still have legs to go and visit, ears to listen, mouths to give encouragement and hands to reach out in love. Little things can make a big difference. One young volunteer told us how happy she felt being able to give some of her clothes to the orphan who has become her little sister. Previously, her little sister had to wash her single school uniform and wait until it was dry before putting it on again.

Exercises:

²⁶ Philippa Miner, <http://tilz.tearfund.org/Publications/Footsteps+71-80/Footsteps+72/Big+brothers+and+sisters.htm>.

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

_____ challenges the role children should play within the church. They should be seen as _____ of the church community. Children should both _____ from and _____ to the _____ of the whole church. For example they should receive teaching, discipleship and prayer. They should be able to _____ in ministry. Children should be protected from _____ in the church and _____ should be prepared for child-rearing. There are also many steps churches can take to become more _____. _____ also have a _____ role in transforming society's view of listening to children.

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe the typical perception of the role of children in your church from the perspective of adults? What about from the perspective of children?
2. Brewster emphasizes that children should be receiving from and giving to the whole church ministry. How does this work out within your faith community? What about your organization?
3. What activities of the church do children have the opportunity to participate in your church? In your organization?
4. How would you describe the response of church leaders and adults to children's involvement in these activities?
5. In what ways can you encourage your pastor and church leaders, or organization leaders to influence their members to support the participation of children in your organization or church ministries?

Addition questions for managers and Christian leaders:

6. Discuss the attitude of your church or organization towards children. How does this help members/staff to acknowledge the value and role of children in the ministry?
7. How would you communicate to other managers or leaders in your organization about the God-given role of children to contribute to the fulfilment of the ministry?
8. In your opinion what are the changes you need to make within your church in order to promote a faith community that listens to children and recognizes their role in your church mission?

Lesson 12: How can we encourage the community to value children's participation?

Summary

- Cultural barriers to listening to children
- Practical steps to help communities listen to children

The culture and traditions of a community can become a barrier that stops people listening to children. It is helpful to identify cultural barriers in your own context and to try out strategies to break them down.

Common barriers to listening to children

Although many cultural and ethnic traditions and approaches are of great value, there are some common challenges arising from certain values and beliefs that communities hold that often prevent them from listening to children.

- For example, in South Asia, child participation advocates find it especially challenging to encourage girl children to speak up because, culturally, they are perceived as either less capable or less important.
- In many East Asian countries, it is not uncommon to find adults who find it hard to accept that they could share their power with children, and to believe that children have certain competencies and wisdom. In such settings, it is generally difficult for children to assert their views, because of the patriarchal and age-hierarchical culture.
- It is also a common concern for adults that listening to children can have negative consequences. There is a tendency for adults to think that children could become more powerful and knowledgeable than adults, particularly their parents. Parents fear that that children might disrespect and disobey their elders or at worst, resort to rebellion. Some also do not understand the integral value of listening to children as part of their development and self-esteem.
- In some other cases, even if the general attitude may be more favourable of children's participation, existing processes or approaches employed by adults may not be quite ready for the change needed to make them more appropriate for listening to children.

These concerns and issues are very difficult to change and can take time. However, people or organizations should not be discouraged or be prevented from taking small steps to influence the perspectives, attitudes and behaviour of communities regarding listening to children.

Strategies for breaking down barriers

Organizations working with parents and children can employ some of the following practical ways to encourage communities to listen to children²⁷:

Address negative attitudes. Many views about children become part of our culture and can be difficult to uncover. Engage the community in dialogue and take time to reflect on any negative views they have of children. Discuss ways that these views may affect relationships and interaction with children and also find ways that these views may be replaced with more positive ones. A helpful exercise would be to think about what it was like to be a child and recall how adults responded to us, both positively and negatively.

Provide avenues for discussion. Help parents and community members to talk about their commonly held beliefs and values about children. Help them identify the talents, gifts, capacities and resources that children have and how they can contribute to the family or community. Enable them to identify the ways that children are already contributing to their family and community, and to discuss the benefits and the difference it makes to their family and community

Promote opportunities for the community to listen to children. Invite community members to a presentation made by the children about something that they have achieved together. You could also invite parents to observe participation for themselves. For example, inviting parents to visit the project or program to observe children's activities, and even involving them in the activities, can help to convince them that the activities are worthwhile and beneficial for their children. Organizations can also share the results of research undertaken by children with the community leaders.

Document and share the advantages and benefits of listening to children. Showing how child participation works and how it helps children and their communities can change some of the community members' views about the value of listening to children.

²⁷ From Stephenson (2004) and Regional Working Group on Child Labor (2003).

Case Study

Girls' Participation in Creating Safe Spaces, Nepal²⁸

In 1999 Save the Children UK researched the problems of girls in Ramghat Village Development Committee (VDC) in Surkhet, Nepal. The girls discussed the low value they experienced as females and the difficulties they faced: heavy workloads, restricted mobility, early marriage and fears for their personal safety. During the discussions, a core group of 18 girls (members of nine different child clubs, each from a different ward) decided to work together to effect positive change.

Save the Children began supporting the girls to undertake a project to show their capacity and potential to create safe spaces for girls. Both school going and non-school going girls were involved in the project. The group met regularly to carry out information gathering and analysis of unsafe and safe spaces and activities for girls in their localities.

The following were found to be unsafe: travelling to school, collecting wood or water, going to markets, festivals, or relatives' houses on foot or by bus. At these times boys, neighbours, police or teachers could threaten them.

This analysis, their new knowledge and understanding of gender, and the increased self-esteem they gained through participating in the project led the girls to negotiate for change. They met with community members and authorities to raise awareness and call for action to bring about the changed behaviour, attitudes and service delivery required to transform unsafe spaces to safe ones, to improve girls' mobility, and provide access to public services and opportunities. The girls have continued to protest against any incident of harassment or abuse of girls.

The girls' group has developed strong linkages with village and district level child club networks, the district child welfare committee, the local police, teachers, and women's groups, as well as the local decision-making body - the VDC. All of these actors now recognise the group as a crucial agent for improving the lives of girls in the community. The girls' initiative has resulted in positive behaviour and attitude changes among teachers, boys, parents and community members towards girls. Furthermore, the girls have become more confident, articulate and able to negotiate for necessary changes in their families and communities.

²⁸ Bhandari and Karkara (2005), 53.

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

The _____ and _____ of a community can be a _____ that stops people listening to children. This can be cultural or ethnic, a perceived fear of the dangers of listening to children or the lack of recognition of the value of listening to children and how it contributes to their development. Although these issues are _____ to change, _____ can help to change _____, _____ and _____ of communities regarding listening to children. There are some strategies to adopt. A few practical steps can be taken to influence communities to listen to children. We can begin by addressing _____ and encouraging adults to identify and talk about the views they have of children. We can provide avenues for parents and _____ to talk about their commonly held beliefs and values about children. We should also promote opportunities for _____ to listen to _____, such as inviting adults to witness children's presentations. We can also share the _____ and _____ of listening to children, as a way of raising awareness about the benefits of child participation to children and to the community as a whole.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are common attitudes of your community towards children's participation? What values, traditions or beliefs are these attitudes based on?
2. How do these attitudes affect adults' behaviour with children at home, in the community, and in the church? Give example of adults interacting with children that shows how this view influences the way they behave towards children.
3. What parts of the community, or which traditions and practices do you think would pose the greatest barriers to accepting children's participation?
4. What small steps can you take to gradually help your community accept children's participation more?
5. What opportunities are there in your work or your church to invite adults to observe children's activities to help them see what child participation could mean for them?

Part 3: What are some examples of child participation?

Introduction

We have already looked at various examples of listening to children and children's participation in church, organizational, family and community settings. This final section focuses on some more specific forums for children's participation that could be used to inspire new efforts in your context: children working with other children through a 'child-to-child' approach and children collaborating with other children in child-led groups and associations to address matters of concern for the members. It also puts a spotlight on the role of adults and children in advocacy.

Lesson 13: How do children participate in leading and supporting other children?

Summary

- Child to child approach
- Guidelines for implementing the child to child approach

Children and young people can be very effective in working with other children, for example as peer supporters. It is often easier for children to express their views and to be comfortable in using their own language when they are with other children who share a similar situation.

Child-to-child

The so-called ‘child-to-child’ approach was originally developed in 1979 as a way to improve health practices among children.²⁹ The approach is now widely used in many countries not only in health but in other aspects of work with children. The child-to-child approach involves a child working with other children. This may be as facilitator (or ‘leader’) to help another child to discuss issues of concern and to assist them in dealing with difficulties; it can also as researcher, conducting research with another child or children; as peer educator, educating other children on specific topics such as children’s rights; or as peer counsellor, providing counselling or other assistance to another child who does not have information or confidence to get help from a local centre or organization.

Some examples of issues that have been addressed successfully using a child-to-child approach include child rights education, improving community hygiene, awareness of land mines in conflict zones, education about drugs and HIV/AIDS and integrating disabled children.³⁰

What is the role of adults?

Here are some ways for adults to support participation of children in child-to-child activities:³¹

- **Equip** children with skills in listening, communication and facilitation, and the use of appropriate methods.
- **Monitor** children’s work with other children particularly during early stages of the work, so that program staff can provide additional support when needed. This will also help staff gain insight into the quality of interactions between the implementing children and other children. Targeted children should participate in this monitoring, as well as in other aspects of the program.
- **Selection** of children as peer support should be carefully done in a way that is transparent and democratic, and includes other children. If children are not allowed to select which of them are trained to become facilitators or ‘leaders’, child-to-child becomes leadership imposed by adults.

²⁹ See <http://www.child-to-child.org> for more information.

³⁰ <http://www.child-to-child.org/wherewework/index.html> gives these and many more examples of different projects that use the child-to-child approach.

³¹ Regional Working Group on Child Labor (2003)

- **Inform** parents of children involved in child-to-child activities about the roles and responsibilities of their children. Other relevant adults in the community also need to be informed. For example, peer educators working with other street children risk being arrested if the police are not informed.
- Put in place **safeguards** to children in the child-to-child activities. Programme managers are responsible for protecting both the children implementing a child-to-child activity and the children they reach. The implementing children should be fully informed about protection issues relating to their work with other children. On the other hand, monitoring of their work should include making sure they do not abuse the other children.
- Ensure that engaging children in child-to-child activities is in their **best interest**. There is a risk of children getting exploited by having them do a role in a child-to-child project. Their involvement should be for their own benefit as well as the benefit of the children they reach out to; it should never be treated as a cheap and easy alternative to employing paid adults.
- Ensure that children's involvement is **voluntary**. Children should be able to decide their own workload and to say 'no' when appropriate. Managers should make sure the children's responsibilities are appropriate to their abilities and their other commitments such as work, study and family. Also ensure that children have access to emotional support systems as child-to-child facilitators can also be subjected to stress in fulfilling their roles.

Case Study

Children aged 5-10 years working with younger siblings during an emergency³²

This example concerns the participation of 5- to 10-year-old children, their involvement in the play and development of younger siblings and their work with parents and grandparents in an Afghan refugee camp in Pakistan. The example is taken from a conflict setting but could easily be applied to camps and other situations of disaster recovery and rehabilitation.

Step 1: Understanding the issue

The community worker in the refugee camp noticed how very young children in the camp were not being stimulated at all. In a weekly group session with children (aged 5-10), she discussed through a story the importance of talking to and playing with babies for the child's development.

Step 2: Finding out more

The older children went back to their younger siblings in their families and observed what makes them smile. They learned that young children like clapping, singing, poems and stories. They also noticed that there were not many toys or books in the camp for the very young children.

Step 3: Discussing findings and planning action

The children discussed what they had observed and planned what action they could take to support the babies and toddlers in the camp. They decided to make toys for the younger children and collect materials that do not cost anything or may even have been thrown away, such as seeds, grass, bottle tops, cotton reels, string, rags and paper as well as old newspapers and magazines.

Step 4: Taking action

The children collected the material with the help of family members and had a special toy-making event for all the children in the camp. With the help of the community workers, they made mobiles of shiny things and rattles for babies, shaped sorters, pictures and books for the very young children, pull-along toys and puppets for toddlers. They then gave these to babies and toddlers in the camp.

Step 5: Evaluating action

The children discussed among themselves about changes they had seen in the camp and how much the toys were being enjoyed and shared or exchanged. They also noticed how some toys were not very safe for babies as they put everything into their mouths.

Step 6: Doing it better

The children continued these activities, using all opportunities, individually and as a group. They also encouraged parents to use the toys to play with the children and asked grandparents to share with them and the younger children traditional games and stories.

³² Unicef East Asia Pacific Region (2007).

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Children can be very _____ when they work with other children. It is often easier for children to talk with other _____ who share a _____. The _____ to _____ approach involves a child working with other _____. A child could act as _____, _____, _____ or _____ with or for another child. If we want to encourage children to participate in one-on-one situations, we need to support them and make sure they are kept safe.

Discussion Questions:

1. What makes children good at supporting other children?
2. In what sort of situations do you think that a child-to-child approach would be most effective? Are there situations where it might not be appropriate or even risky for children?
3. Can you think of an example from your experience or that you have observed when a child acted as peer educator or supporter for other children? Was it effective?
4. Identify the possible advantages and disadvantages of the child-to-child approach in the context where you work.
5. Think of an activity, project or program in your organization, church or community where children could get involved in leading, supporting or educating others.

Lesson 14: How do children participate in child-led groups?

Summary

- Different forms of child-led group activities
- How can adults support these?

The UN-CRC affirms the right of children to form their own groups or associations (Article 15). Indeed, the voice of children becomes more audible when they work collectively. Children's groups can play an important role in developing social awareness and responsibility of children; they also build interpersonal and organizational skills and enhance the strength of children in influencing decisions affecting them.

Child participation in groups can take all kinds of different forms such as:³³

Children's clubs are a way of enabling children and the organization working with them to explore approaches to participation. Children's clubs provide a safe place for children to learn, play, and carry out activities that benefit their communities. The interests of the children should direct the club's activities. Clubs fit well within a community development approach.

Children's movements and networks provide children with the opportunity to organize, plan and carry out actions to meet their needs and concerns. **Children's councils** try to influence decision-making at the community level.

MANTHOC (Movement of Working Children of Christian Workers) consists of about 2,000 working children in over 130 communities across Peru. The organization is divided into groups of 10–30 children. These groups work with adults, who help them to develop plans and activities that meet their specific needs. These include:

*Education: alternative forms of school to fit with their work schedules
Vocational training and promoting the development of small businesses
A focus on health education*

Community cafeterias to help improve the nutrition of poor children in the community

The groups send representatives to meetings at departmental and national levels once a year. The process enables the children to present proposals for policy change at national and international levels that would benefit working children.³⁴

³³ Stephenson et al, (2004).

³⁴ Stephenson et al, (2004). See also <http://www.manthocperu.org> (Spanish) and <http://www.shinealight.org/MANTHOC.html> (English)

Children's parliaments provide opportunities for children's voices to be heard at state or national level.

The Philippines' National Anti-Poverty Commission Children Basic Sector (NAPC-CBS) is mandated by law to ensure that the opinions of marginalized groups of children are presented in the public policy arena. A children's council was constituted to offer a regular, institutionalized mechanism for children to influence government policies and decisions on issues affecting children.

For over six years, the children's council raised concerns of poor children in the country. As a result of these efforts, pupils have greater access to school books and violence against children in school has been given greater attention. NAPC-CBS is also monitoring government commitments to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals using a monitoring tool developed by the children.³⁵

What is the role of adults?

Most children-led associations are, to some extent, dependent on adults. This leads to a risk that adults take too much control over what children should do. As much as possible, children should be given opportunities to run their own associations, with less adult interference.

Much can be learned about ways to support children-led associations. Here are some recommendations:

- Provide children with ongoing **capacity building** and **mentoring** to ensure that they are adequately informed and prepared to engage in tasks they deem important to achieve their group objectives.³⁶
- Raise **awareness** with parents, community members, local officials and other stakeholders about child rights, capacities of children, the value of listening to children and child participation. These people are instrumental in providing support to the children and enabling their environment to participate.
- Help children **assess** their groups in order to determine how they are currently doing according to indicators and then to identify future direction.³⁷
- Do not forget the importance of **advocacy** aimed at policy and other mechanisms that will encourage and support children to form their groups or associations

³⁵ Regional Inter Agency Working Group on Child Participation, (2008).

³⁶ National Coalition for Children's Participation, (2002).

³⁷ Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation, (2008). A spider tool developed by Save the Children can be useful tool in this process both as an assessment and a planning tool. For the tool and instructions on how to use it, see appendix A.

Case Study

Children who are elected leaders and ambassadors for their project in the Early Encounter project in Cochabamba, Bolivia have for several years now been involved in the “buen trato” (good treatment) campaign that is currently making its rounds in Latin America.

The campaign focuses on preventing child abuse by holding annual child abuse awareness campaigns. In the case of Bolivia and elsewhere, the children themselves, led by the ambassadors have organized and are key actors in carrying out the campaign. In many cases, children who have been abused themselves are raising awareness in public about the need to treat children with dignity.

In preparing for the implementation of the campaign, children are trained in techniques for establishing a “buen trato” campaign in their area. The original training session is facilitated by an adult leader with assistance from other children and youth who in previous years have completed the training. Upon finishing the training program, the ambassadors and other child leaders in turn train the children that they help to represent. In many cases these might be other children that live in a residential centre for abandoned children or a day outreach for street workers.

The child ambassadors and leaders are free to add their own creative touch to the training program which they call “replicas.” In many cases the children will add games or other activities to the schedule. These additional activities are developed by the children in pre-training event meetings.

After all the children are trained (nearly 900 children in total), plans are made to launch the campaign in a public square. Children are consulted during the planning phase and in many cases help to direct the campaign. Adult leaders help with facilitating the event, but it is the children that are the active participants in symbolically vaccinating adults against child abuse. Children divide themselves up into groups and in the company of their guardians, stop people on the street to talk about the importance of treating children with respect and dignity. Adults who are symbolically vaccinated fill out a card and are given a piece of candy in recognition of their commitment to care for children.

The advantage to having children lead both the training and implementation of the campaign is that they not only take ownership in the campaign, but they are ideally in the best place to teach adults about child abuse. Child participation in activities such as the “buen trato” campaign, when guided by sensitive adult leaders can foster healthy environments where children can grow and mature in a way that is consistent with our biblical mandate to care for children in difficult situations.

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Children's right to form and participate in groups is guaranteed in the _____. Children's voices becomes stronger when they work _____. Child participation in groups can take many forms. It can be a _____ which provides a safe place for children to learn, play, and carry out activities that benefit their communities. It can also be a children's _____ or _____ which is organised to meet the needs and concerns of the members. A _____ works to influence decision-making at the _____ level, while children's parliaments give children an opportunity to be heard at _____ level. Although adults are still important, child-led associations should be run with _____ adult _____. This does not mean that adults will be totally disengaged but should provide certain support as determined by the children themselves.

Discussion Questions:

1. What different kinds of child participation in groups have you encountered in connection with your work, church or community? Please give examples.
2. What is the value of child participation in groups? What are the challenges?
3. What sort of relationship can child-led groups have with adults? Give some advantages and disadvantages of each.
4. How are child leaders identified and developed in your community, church or organization? How could you contribute to developing leadership skills in children and young people?
5. Is there a child-led group or association that you could support or encourage? What practical things could you do to get alongside them and help them to meet their objectives? If you cannot think of an existing group, can you see any opportunities for children to benefit from working in a child-led group? What could you do to help them get started?

Lesson 15: How can children participate in advocacy?

Summary

- What are issues for child participation in advocacy?
- What roles can adults play in advocacy for and with children?
- How can children be involved in advocating for their rights?

In Workbook 1 we saw that advocacy can be an effective way of raising awareness of children’s rights and making sure that people and institutions in a position of power respect the rights of children.

When we are considering advocacy on the rights of and issues facing children, we need to pay particular attention to ensuring that we do not take away the voice of children in the process. Advocacy is all about speaking. We often think about an advocate speaking *on behalf of* someone who cannot speak for themselves. In fact there are lots of different roles that adults can play in advocacy work targeted at helping children. Notice how many of the roles actually involve helping children to speak and to be heard in their own right.

Adults’ roles in advocacy

Here is a list of some of the possible roles of an adult advocating for and with children³⁸:

Advocate roles	Involves
Represent	Speaking for children
Accompany	Speaking together with children
Empower	Enabling children to speak for themselves
Mediate	Facilitating communication between child(ren) and other people (e.g. parents, teachers, police, government officials)
Model	Demonstrating a way of doing things to children or to policy makers / parents / community members
Negotiate	Bargaining for something to benefit children
Network	Building coalitions between groups of children and / or adults

³⁸ Based on Gordon (2002), 32.

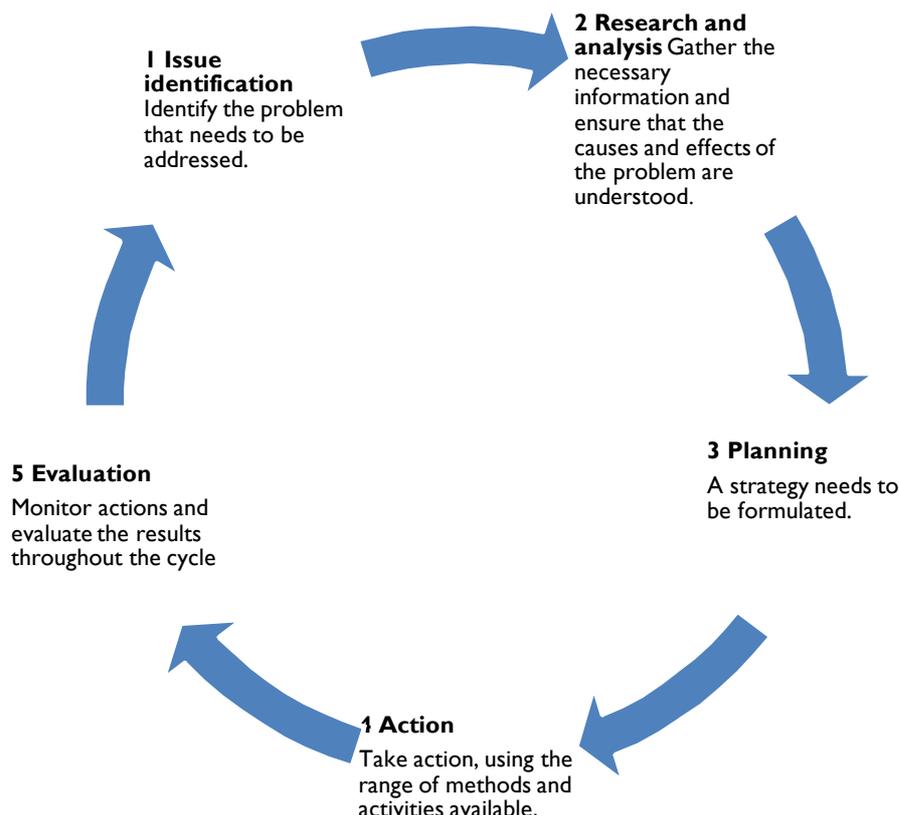
Children's roles in advocacy

It is also important to realize that advocacy is not just something that adults do for children. Children can also be involved as advocates for their own rights and the rights of their peers. They can also be involved together with adults in advocating on issues that affect the whole community, not just issues facing children.

Some important things to bear in mind:

- **Educate** children so that they are aware of their rights, of the way power is used and abused in their context, and how they can stand up for their rights
- **Listen** to children's ideas and perspectives about the issues they face and how they want to communicate about them
- **Support** children in finding effective ways to get their voice heard

In practice this means that whenever you are planning to do advocacy work, you must consider how children can be involved as active participants in the whole of the process. To help think this through, it is useful to look at the 'advocacy cycle'.



Like the project cycle we looked at in lesson 10, the advocacy cycle is a helpful way of looking at the different steps involved in doing effective advocacy. By involving children at every step of the cycle, you can make sure that advocacy programmes really do include children and give them a voice, rather than taking it away.

Case Study

Children's involvement in advocacy for child protection

As part of a child advocacy strategy involving churches and NGOs who are part of the Children at Risk Action Network, 400 children in Kampala came together for a day of music, dance and drama in August 2009. The aim was to give the children themselves the opportunity to express themselves on the theme “*I feel safe when...*” The children got together in 26 organisations to write competition pieces to present to a panel of judges including one Member of Parliament.

On the day of the competition, the children's message was very clear. A group of children from Mukisa Foundation for Children with Special Needs said, “When you love me you help me to feel safe.” Other children said, “You hit me, you hurt me, you told me I was nothing, until I believed it was true. But now I am taking back my life, claiming it as my own.” The winning entry presented a dance and drama that pictured a scene around the village camp fire where the elders of the village wanted to discipline the children with sticks, but the children appealed for discipline with firm, loving words, and the children won the day!

This creative approach turned out to be an effective way for children's voices to be heard. The MP who joined the children for the day said to the children, “*Being disabled or different doesn't make you unable and I salute you children for all your efforts to communicate. Action speaks louder than words. I don't see what matters more to MPs than hearing what the children say, the members of our future generation. If I don't speak on your behalf than on whose behalf am I speaking? A message has come from you, the children; you are asking leaders to act now. I have heard children say that their values have been suppressed; they feel that their voice is not heard. Nobody is supposed to feel unsafe on this universe; the children have made this a cry. Children of this country, your existence is very valuable. I want to assure you, as legislators, we have not turned a blind eye to you. Children should be a blessing, not a burden.*”

The chief judge concluded by declaring, “*Parents, please do not keep them in their rooms, let them come out and show us what they can do!*”

This positive step is just one part of an ongoing programme of training and activities whose aim is to uphold the rights of children in Kampala and to improve their situation.

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

_____ is an effective way of raising awareness of children's rights and making sure that they are respected. When we are considering advocacy on issues facing children, we need to ensure that we do not _____ the _____ of children. The role of adults is also to help children _____ and to be _____ in their own right. Advocacy is not just something that adults do for children. Children can also advocate for _____ rights and the rights of their _____ and _____. To engage children in advocacy requires us to _____ children to be aware of their rights; to _____ to children's ideas and perspectives about the issues they face; and to _____ children in finding effective ways to be heard. It also means that children should be involved at every stage of the advocacy _____.

Discussion questions:

1. How do you understand advocacy? What role do you think children should play?
2. Can you think of an example in the Bible where children or young people advocated for the rights of their community? What about examples from your church, organization or community?
3. Brainstorm as many ideas as you can of ways that children could be involved in advocating for their rights and those of their peers and community. Which would be most appropriate in your setting?
4. What are the benefits of involving children in advocacy? Are there any disadvantages or risks to consider?
5. What opportunities do you have to prepare or involve children and young people in advocacy? What practical steps could you take?

Solutions to summary texts

Lesson 1

Children are made in the **image of God**. This means every child has **value** and **dignity** and is therefore entitled to the same **rights** that are given to any human being. In the Bible, we see examples of how God has chosen children to **fulfil roles** in his **mission** at certain points of history. One of the famous stories is that of **David** who at a young age was given the role of defending the people of Israel and was later to become a king.

In the New Testament, we find Jesus bringing children into **the centre of his ministry**, even when his disciples were trying to prevent them from coming to Him. We see this story in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus said “...**let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.**”

There are other stories in the Bible that emphasizes the importance of children being listened to. The Bible has always taught us that children are **capable individuals** who may take on significant **role** within their **family, organisation** or **community**.

Lesson 2

We can cite least four main reasons why we should listen to children: **ethical, legal, child protection** and **benefit**. Listening to children is **ethical** because children are also human beings who have their own **views, feelings** and **experiences**. It is legal because there is an international mandate through the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** that enshrines the right of children to be listened to. We should listen to children also because it enables us to better **protect children** from abuse or harm such as when we enable them to talk about their concerns. Finally, listening to children is **beneficial** not only for the child but also to their families and communities. Child participation has many advantages. It contributes to increasing children's **confidence, self-esteem, skills** and **responsibilities**. It also helps create good **policies** and **programmes** for children.

Lesson 3

There can be a number of negative implications when do not listen to children. In the context of the family, failure of parents to listen to their children could mean hampering **the child's development** and could lead to **disruptive behaviour**. In the community, if children's views are not listened to, they are more **vulnerable to exploitation**. In the area of policy making, laws that are **unchallenged** can become **harmful** rather than **beneficial** to children. Any **programmes** designed to improve children's situation can also be **irrelevant, unattractive** or **harmful** if their interest are not taken into account. In situations of child abuse, failure of adults to listen to children affected can mean acquiescence and could lead to **perpetration of abuse**.

Lesson 4

Listening is a skill that we need to practice. Adults who work with children need **attitudes, attributes** and **behaviours** that will enable them to **listen to** children and motivate children **to talk**. We listen in many different ways. It is possible to be a **passive** or an **active** listener. An active listener uses **open** questions and other techniques to check you have **understood properly**. Understanding how we listen may also help us become more sensitive to listening to a child. It is said that the best way to listen is to be **empathetic listener**, in which we fully immerse ourselves in the perspective of the speaker. Children are very **sensitive** and can tell if someone is really listening. Good listening is especially important with children who have experienced **traumatic circumstances**.

Lesson 5

It is in the **family** that the child first learns to share his or her views and experience the value of being listened to. Thus, empowering parents to become better listeners to their children is crucial. We need to recognize that **parents** are confronted with many challenges that often influence how much they listen to their children. Some of these are to do with lack of **time**, conflicting **priorities** and **inter-generational** gap that exists between them and their children. It is therefore important for organisations, churches or groups who want to help promote listening to children to **equip** and **support** parents.

Lesson 6

Child participation is more than just **listening** to children. The aim is for children to participate in all kinds of different **contexts** in ways that are **meaningful** and **constructive**. Child participation can take place in different arenas and forms. It can be through **informal** interaction or formal **consultation** and **decision-making**, starting from within their own **family**, to **national** and **international** settings. Some child participation mainly uses children as **tokens** or **manipulates** them for the **adults'** agenda. To be genuine, child participation should be guided by the following principles: **respect, opportunity, responsibility**, and **support**. Without these, child participation can be **slowed-down** or become **imbalanced**.

Lesson 7

Children have different **ages, values, beliefs, ethnicity, capacity** and so on but all of them have the same right to be treated with **equal respect** and given the opportunity to **participate**. Children can also belong to what we call 'marginalised' groups or those who are often ignored and discriminated against. These include **girls**, children with **disabilities**, and children from **minority ethnic** groups. Marginalized children like all other children are entitled to the same amount of respect. Without it, their **self-esteem** and **sense of self worth** is undermined and their **opportunities for growth** are diminished. It can also lead to increased marginalization because the situation will remain unchallenged. In order to encourage effective participation among vulnerable children, adults need be extra **diligent** in understanding their **background** and be able to use a **variety of methods** to enable them to participate. Projects should encourage **different roles** for children, according to their **aptitudes, interests** and **abilities**.

Lesson 8

It is important to understand what child participation does and does not involve, because there are many **misunderstandings**. For example, child participation does involve **learning** from children but it does not mean **devaluing** adults' **experience** and **expertise**. Child participation does not mean handing all **power** over to children, but rather **sharing power** with them. A practical tool that we can use to understand how our organization fares in promoting children participation is called **Pathways to Participation**. This tool looks at the **openings, opportunities** and **obligations** that are in place in an organization to make it more suitable for child participation. It can be used by **individuals** and **organizations** working with children as an **initial step** to building an **action plan** to enhance child participation.

Lesson 9

Promoting child participation in an organization will need some time for **learning** and **change**. It is important that staff and the organization begin to see children more **as partners** rather than mere **beneficiaries** of their programmes. Organisations that are determined to facilitate child participation can make small changes that will make them better at **listening** to children, like **being willing** to listen, creating regular **space** and **time** for children to communicate and putting children's ideas **into practice**. Creative **mechanisms** can also help children to communicate openly.

An organization may need to **change its work habits**, which involves including rather than excluding children in organizational process that affect them; **build** staff and organizational **capacity** to work with children, provide **space** for **children** to be themselves, and ensure that there are **safeguards** for children to be protected.

Lesson 10

Children are **experts** in their own way, especially in matters anything that will particularly impact their lives. In development work, it is now accepted that children can participate at all the different stages of **the project cycle**. The project cycles stages begins with **identification of needs** (or situation analysis), which then informs the **design** of the project. Children can definitely participate in **implementation** and **monitoring** in which they can take on different roles. Finally, children can also participate in **evaluating** the impact of projects on their lives and can be involved as researchers or data collectors. In all of the stages, **support** and guidance from **adults** as well as appropriate **tools** are key to realize children's participation.

Lesson 11

Jesus challenges the role children should play within the church. They should be seen as **active members** of the church community. Children should both **receive** from and **give** to the **ministry** of the whole church. For example they should receive teaching, discipleship and prayer. They should be able to **participate** in ministry. Children should be protected from **harmful traditions** in the church and **families** should be prepared for child-rearing. There are also many steps churches can take to become more **child-friendly**. **Christian leaders** also have a **catalytic** role in transforming society's view of listening to children.

Lesson 12

The **culture** and **traditions** of a community can be a **barrier** that stops people listening to children. This can be cultural or ethnic, a perceived fear of the dangers of listening to children or the lack of recognition of the value of listening to children and how it contributes to their development. Although these issues are **hard** to change, **small steps** can help to change **perspectives, attitudes** and **behaviour** of communities regarding listening to children. There are some strategies to adopt. A few practical steps can be taken to influence communities to listen to children. We can begin by addressing **negative attitudes** and encouraging adults to identify and talk about the views they have of children. We can provide **avenues** for **parents** and **community members** to talk about their commonly held beliefs and values about children. We should also promote opportunities for **the community** to listen to **children**, such as inviting adults to witness children's presentations. We can also share the **advantages**

and **benefits** of listening to children, as a way of raising awareness about the benefits of child participation to children and to the community as a whole.

Lesson 13

Children can be very **effective** when they work with other children. It is often easier for children to talk with other **children** who share a **similar situation**. The **child to child** approach involves a child working with other **children**. A child could act as **facilitator, researcher, educator** or **counselor** with or for another child. If we want to encourage children to participate in one-on-one situations, we need to support them and make sure they are kept safe.

Lesson 14

Children's right to form and participate in groups is guaranteed in the **UN-CRC**. Children's voices becomes stronger when they work **collectively**. Child participation in groups can take many forms. It can be a **children's club** which provides a safe place for children to learn, play, and carry out activities that benefit their communities. It can also be a children's **movement** or **network** which is organised to meet the needs and concerns of the members. A **children's council** works to influence decision-making at the **community** level, while children's parliaments give children an opportunity to be heard at **state or national** level. Although adults are still important, child-led associations should be run with **less adult interference**. This does not mean that adults will be totally disengaged but should provide certain support as determined by the children themselves.

Lesson 15

Advocacy is an effective way of raising awareness of children's rights and making sure that they are respected. When we are considering advocacy on issues facing children, we need to ensure that we do not **take away** the **voice** of children. The role of adults is also to help children **speak** and to be **heard** in their own right. Advocacy is not just something that adults do for children. Children can also advocate for **their own** rights and the rights of their **peers** and **community**. To engage children in advocacy requires us to **educate** children to be aware of their rights; to **listen** to children's ideas and perspectives about the issues they face; and to **support** children in finding effective ways to be heard. It also means that children should be involved at every stage of the advocacy **cycle**.

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Resources

See the separate Appendix to this workbook:

A Using the spider-web tool to assess child-led groups

B Child participation standards

C How to produce child-friendly documents

For more resources on child participation standards:

See www.iawgcp.com