

# A TOOLKIT FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATING CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

BOOKLET

## Introduction



Save the Children works in more than 120 countries.  
We save children's lives. We fight for their rights.  
We help them fulfil their potential.

This guide was written by Gerison Lansdown and Claire O'Kane

## Acknowledgements

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Cover photo: Members of Child Brigade, an organisation of street and working children in Bangladesh. (Photo: Ken Hermann)

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**A Syrian refugee holds a kite she made bearing a personal message wishing for peace in her country.**

# PREFACE

In recent years, non-government organisations (NGOs) working to promote children's rights, as well as governments and donors, have emphasised the need to develop better indicators against which to monitor and measure children's participation in terms of three key aspects: structure, process and outcomes. Numerous models have been explored, and discussions have taken place across many different agencies and in different regions of the world, to identify indicators that are not only meaningful but based on data that can be collected and analysed with relative ease.

This monitoring and evaluation (M&E) toolkit builds on those discussions and their outputs, taking as its starting point a document called *Criteria for the Evaluation of Children's Participation in Programming*, which was produced in collaboration with partners of the Bernard van Leer Foundation in Brazil and published in 2004.<sup>1</sup> That document set out a conceptual framework for monitoring and evaluating how children participate in projects and programmes. It was further developed for UNICEF's Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in 2008, incorporating perspectives from the region as well as adding a dimension on measuring children's participation in their wider society.<sup>2</sup> It was subsequently amended to more fully reflect the interpretation of children's participation given by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its General Comment on Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).<sup>3</sup> It also incorporated feedback from participants at a conference in Canada on accountability, monitoring and evaluation held in 2009, and from a consultative review across Save the Children UK, also in 2009.<sup>4</sup>

This final version of the toolkit has been produced following an 18-month pilot, funded by the Oak Foundation. It involved ten projects from nine countries in different regions of the world, in partnership with Save the Children, UNICEF, Plan, World Vision and The Concerned for Working Children. The participating organisations were:

- Save the Children, Nepal
- The Concerned for Working Children, India
- Neighbourhood Community Network, India
- World Vision, Ghana
- World Vision, Zambia
- EveryChild, Malawi
- Plan, Guatemala
- Plan, Ecuador
- Centre for Education in Health and Environment (CESESMA), Nicaragua
- African Movement of Working Children and Youth, Nigeria

Representatives of these organisations met in Nairobi in 2011 to familiarise themselves with the draft M&E toolkit and to receive guidance on the methodology for piloting it. The aim was to work collaboratively with children and young people to test the tools and other materials to assess their relevance, accessibility, practicality, and usefulness in contributing towards a greater understanding of what children's participation involves, and how to engage children in meaningful participation, as well as its outcomes and value. Over the next 18 months, those who took part in the Nairobi meeting piloted the toolkit; they produced six-monthly progress reports and participated in regular

webinars to share experiences. They met again in Accra, Ghana, in May 2013, together with some of the children and young people they work with, to review and share findings. The richness of those experiences cannot be adequately reflected here, but overall, the feedback made clear that the materials were greatly valued by the participants and their respective organisations.

Those participating in the pilot used the toolkit to undertake a rigorous scrutiny of the participation work they were involved in, with other adults and with children and young people. They found that using the toolkit helped in a number of ways. For example:

- it enhanced people's understanding of children's participation (for children and adults alike)
- it led to improvements in the quality of participation, making it more inclusive and using it to strengthen child protection
- it helped children and adults clarify their goals and measure progress in attaining them
- it provided visible feedback for children on the nature and outcomes of their involvement
- it produced accessible results that were relatively easy to interpret
- the visual nature of many of the tools and subsequent representation of information gathered enthuses children and maintains their interest.

The piloting of the toolkit also produced many creative and constructive suggestions about how the materials could be improved. These included: sharing other locally developed tools for gathering data; simplifying some of the concepts and language used; adapting activities for younger children and children with disabilities; emphasising the importance of sensitisation with adults; and highlighting the need to invest sufficient time in the process of monitoring and evaluation.

One of the most powerful messages arising from the pilot was the imperative for organisations working with children and young people to engage in more effective monitoring and evaluation of their participation work. All those involved in the pilot emphasised the significant benefits they had experienced through using the toolkit, from helping them to better understand why they were doing this kind of work, to strengthening and improving its scope and quality, and analysing – and indeed, celebrating – its outcomes more effectively. In particular, all the participants emphasised the fundamental importance of gaining organisational commitment to monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of children's participation activities.

This toolkit is the culmination of all the processes described above. It reflects the learning and accumulated experiences of all the organisations participating in the 18-month pilot, including the direct contributions of the children and young people who were involved. We hope it will inspire other organisations everywhere to recognise that it is relatively easy to effectively monitor and evaluate children's participation, and that it brings important and mutually reinforcing benefits, which more than justify the investment needed to undertake it.

# I WHAT IS THE M&E TOOLKIT?

The toolkit is intended for use by practitioners and children working in participatory programmes, as well as by governments, NGOs, civil society and children's organisations seeking to assess and strengthen children's participation in their wider society. It provides:

- 25 indicators to help you map the extent to which children's participation is institutionalised at different levels of society
- tools to help you monitor and evaluate the scope, quality and outcomes of children's participation in any given service, programme, initiative or project
- a 10-step guide to help you undertake a participatory monitoring and evaluation process, with children and other stakeholders.

The toolkit can be used for a number of purposes:

- to analyse progress in implementing children's participation in your context or country and to determine priorities for building a culture of respect for children and young people's right to express their views and be taken seriously
- to help determine the nature and potential of participation at the outset of a project or programme
- to establish goals for participation and help monitor the extent to which those goals are realised
- to monitor and evaluate the scope and quality of participation, and any changes it has effected, at the end of a project or programme.

The toolkit provides a conceptual framework for measuring children's participation, together with guidance on how to undertake monitoring and evaluation and practical tools that can help you gather the information you need. It can be used by organisations working directly with children, by child- and youth-led organisations, and by governments that are committed to fulfilling their obligations to respect children's right to participate.

The toolkit comprises six booklets:

**Booklet 1** explains the background to the toolkit and provides an overview of children's participation. It includes a brief guide to monitoring and evaluation, with definitions of key terms and some useful resources.

**Booklet 2** provides a framework for measuring the extent to which a respectful and participatory environment for children has been created in a given situation or country, and has practical tools to help you do this. It introduces three categories of indicators: a) protecting the right to participate; b) promoting awareness of the right to participate; and c) creating spaces for participation.

**Booklet 3** provides a conceptual framework for measuring the scope, quality and outcomes of children's participation in any given context. It introduces a series of benchmarks and matrices that can help you conduct more effective monitoring and evaluation of children's participation.



**Booklet 4** provides a 10-step guide to help you undertake a participatory monitoring and evaluation process, with children and other key stakeholders. It offers guidance on how to identify your objectives and indicators against which to measure progress, and guidance on how to ensure systematic data collection, documentation and analysis of the monitoring and evaluation findings.

**Booklet 5** provides a range of tools that you can use with different stakeholders, especially children and young people, to gather and analyse the information you need to monitor and evaluate the scope, quality and outcomes of children's participation. Many of the tools have been specifically adapted to gather information that relates to the matrices in **Booklet 3**.

**Booklet 6** has been produced by young people who have been involved in the piloting of the toolkit. It provides guidance for adults, children and young people on what they should bear in mind when monitoring and evaluating work on children's participation.



Children participating in a focus group as part of an M&E project baseline process in Waslala, Nicaragua.



## 2 PARTICIPATION: SETTING THE CONTEXT

### DEFINING CHILDHOOD

The definition of a child or a young person varies widely across different countries and cultures. In some countries, the term 'child' is used to describe someone up until around 12 years of age, after which the term 'youth', 'young person' or 'adolescent' is used to describe them. In some cultures, 'young person' is used to describe people up to the age of 25 years, while in others it extends to 30 and beyond.

However, for the purposes of this toolkit, the terms 'children' and 'children and young people' are used interchangeably to apply to anyone up to the age of 18 years, using the definition of a child stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### WHAT PARTICIPATION MEANS

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognises that children are not merely passive recipients, entitled to adult protective care. Rather, they are subjects of rights who are entitled to be involved, in accordance with their evolving capacities, in decisions that affect them, and are entitled to exercise growing responsibility for decisions they are competent to make for themselves. Article 12 of the UNCRC is a unique provision in a human rights treaty, addressing the legal and social status of children under the age of 18 years who lack the full autonomy of adults but nevertheless are subjects of rights. It states that every child who is capable of forming views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting him or her, and that their views must be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Furthermore, children are entitled to be heard in any judicial or administrative proceedings that affect them, either directly or through a representative. This is a fundamental right, and the Committee on the Rights of the Child has identified it as an underlying principle which must inform the implementation of all other rights.<sup>5</sup>

Together with Articles 5 and 13–17 of the UNCRC, Article 12 introduces a philosophy of respect for children and young people as active participants in their own lives. Article 5 clarifies that when providing direction and guidance in the exercise by children of their rights, parents and other guardians must have regard for the evolving capacities of children. In other words, they need to recognise that children acquire skills and competencies as they grow up and they are able to take an increasing level of responsibility for decisions that affect them as these capacities develop. Articles 13–17 address the child's right to freedom of expression, religion, conscience, association, assembly, privacy, and information. Overall, this cluster of civil rights has been broadly conceptualised under the term 'participation'. The Convention itself does not use the term 'participation', but the term has been adopted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as by many other organisations around the world that are working on children's rights, as shorthand to describe the realisation of these rights.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has stressed that the right to participate applies without discrimination to all children capable of forming views, irrespective of age, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, family income, or other factors. It applies to all areas of their lives, from the family, school, local communities and public services to wider government policy.<sup>6</sup> The Committee also emphasises the fundamental importance of providing children with the information (in accessible formats), time and space they need to be able to participate safely and effectively.

In summary, the Committee places an obligation on governments to fulfil, protect and respect the right of girls and boys to express their views, as individuals and as a constituency, in all matters of concern to them, and to have their views taken seriously. However, this obligation poses profound challenges to the status of children in most regions of the world, where they have not traditionally been deemed to have the experience, knowledge or understanding necessary to be directly involved in contributing to – let alone taking responsibility for – major decisions affecting their lives.

Since the UNCRC was adopted in 1989, thousands of initiatives have evolved in all regions of the world to create space for children and young people to begin to influence the laws, policies, services and decisions that affect their lives. They have been engaged in advocacy, social and economic analysis, campaigning, research, peer education, community development, political dialogue, programme and project design and development, and democratic participation in schools. Globally, this experience has highlighted a number of issues. On the positive side, this broad array of experience has demonstrated that:

- children and young people have unique perspectives and expertise that can shed light on the challenges they face and on the best strategies for resolving them
- children, when provided with the opportunity, necessary information and support, can and do make a significant contribution to decisions affecting their lives
- children want greater control over the issues that affect them, at the individual and collective levels
- adults commonly underestimate children's capacities and are positively impressed when they see children actively contributing to discussions
- children's participation can enhance the quality of legislation, policy-making and service provision relevant to their lives, with consequent positive outcomes for the realisation of their rights
- children and adults consistently report that participation improves children's skills, confidence and self-esteem.

However, experience with children's participation around the world to date has also revealed that:

- the right to participation remains patchy, with many countries showing little sustained commitment to creating the legislative, policy and cultural changes necessary for participation to become a reality for all children
- too little evidence has been gathered on the sustained impact of participation, and on which approaches are sustainable and effective in different settings
- there is a need for improved indicators and tools with which to measure the work that is being undertaken.



**A club in a primary school in Vietnam where children discuss topics such as children's rights and how to prepare for possible disasters.**

Overall, the full realisation of children's participation rights continues to be impeded by many long-standing practices, cultures and attitudes, as well as by political and economic barriers.<sup>7</sup> And while many children find it difficult to get their voices heard, some groups of children face additional hurdles, including younger children, girls, children with disabilities, working children or those out of school, children from indigenous or minority communities, and poorer children. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has also expressed real concern that even where there are opportunities for children to be heard, the quality of their participation can often be poor. Governments and organisations working to promote children's right to participate need to develop a better understanding of what Article 12 involves, how to implement it in relation to children of all ages, the approaches needed to achieve meaningful and ethical participation, and how to measure what is being done in terms of participation work, and what it is achieving.

## WHY PARTICIPATION IS IMPORTANT

Participation is a fundamental right of children and young people. It is also a means through which their other rights can be realised. It is important for a number of reasons:

- The active engagement of girls and boys provides information on, and insights into, their lives that can inform legislation, policies, budget allocations and services, and can lead to the best possible outcomes across a range of rights, including health, education and family life.
- Empowered children can become active and effective advocates for the realisation of their own rights.

- Children acquire skills, knowledge, competencies and confidence through participation. It therefore enhances their development and contributes to: the aims of education outlined in Article 29; their optimum development, in accordance with Article 6; and their capacities to exercise their rights, consistent with Article 5.
- Participation leads to better protection. Children who are silenced and passive can be abused by adults with relative impunity. Providing children with information, encouraging them to articulate their concerns, and introducing safe and accessible mechanisms for challenging violence and abuse are key strategies for providing effective protection. Children who have access to information about health and sexuality are better able to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV. Child workers who form and join associations may be able to protect themselves better against exploitation and abuse by their employers.
- Participation promotes civic engagement and active citizenship. Through participating in discussions about matters that concern them, children can acquire the capacity to contribute to building peaceful and democratic societies that respect human rights. Participation contributes to a culture of respect in which decision-making is undertaken through negotiation rather than conflict.
- Participation helps to build accountability and promote good governance. It is a means through which governments and other duty-bearers can be held to account. Recognising children's right to be heard can make an important contribution towards more transparent and open government.

## CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING PROGRESS

Children's rights organisations have devoted considerable efforts and resources to promoting children's participation in a wide range of areas, including health, education, protection, environmental campaigns, disaster risk reduction, the media, and in governance. However, to date, these investments have not led to significant and sustained change either in children's status or role in society. It seems clear that children and young people's civil rights are less well understood than their rights to survival, development and protection; but realising their civil rights also presents more significant challenges to adults in positions of power and to social attitudes that determine the level of respect for children as active agents in their own lives. This lack of change may be attributed to a number of diverse factors:

- **Lack of clarity as to what 'participation' means:** 'Participation' is used to describe a wide range of diverse activities, which are often short-term, one-off processes that provide only limited opportunities for children to realise their civil rights. Arguably, there has been too much focus on Article 12, the right to be heard, and insufficient attention to the other aspects of participation enshrined in the UNCRC – for example, the right to information, to seek redress, and the right to respect for an individual's evolving capacities in the exercise of their rights.
- **Lack of legislation to establish the right to participate:** Realising children's right to participation requires the introduction of legislation to affirm or 'institutionalise' their entitlement; it is not sufficient to rely on goodwill or commitment on the part of individual adults.



- **Cultural barriers and adult resistance:** In many cultures, children are expected to be silent in the presence of adults. They are not encouraged to express their views or ask questions at home, at school or in community gatherings, nor are they recognised as having the capacities to do so. Furthermore, the presence of children in public roles challenges the existing relations between children and adults, and requires significant social adjustment.
- **Lack of adult capacities:** Initiatives to promote participation often fail because the adults working with children lack the skills and experience required to implement such work. In some cases, adults do not really understand how to relinquish their power and control over children in favour of an approach based on partnership or collaboration.
- **Fear of negative outcomes:** In most societies, children lack power to influence their own lives. Participation can and does involve some redistribution of power, and this can lead to potential exposure to risk. Teachers, employers and politicians (among others) may not respond well initially if children challenge the way things are (for example, the way they are treated, or how resources are distributed). This can result in retaliatory action against children. Some people argue that children need to be protected from such risks and should therefore not be encouraged to participate in certain arenas.
- **Lack of tools for monitoring and measuring participation:** If children's participation rights are to be realised, it is important to develop standards and indicators against which to monitor and measure what has been achieved and why. Although there has been much debate about developing standards, tools and indicators to help monitor and measure what is being achieved through participation and how, none have yet been agreed or applied systematically.

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

There has been considerable progress in exploring and applying the concept of children's participation since the UNCRC was adopted in 1989, but it is still at a very early stage of development. There is still too much emphasis on short-term and unsustainable projects. More investment is needed to institutionalise children and young people's participation by promoting the cultural and societal changes needed to bring about a step change in their status and role. Bringing about this step change requires some key actions by governments and by those organisations working to promote children's participation:

- **Introducing the necessary legislative changes to protect and promote children's right to participate.** There is a need for legislation establishing the obligation and right to set up democratic bodies in schools, to affirm the obligations of parents to listen to their children, to introduce complaints mechanisms and appeal procedures in all relevant areas of public policy (including education, health, protection, and juvenile justice), and to guarantee independent advocacy or representation when seeking redress against rights violations or defending against prosecution. Relevant legislation covers a wide range of issues, from prohibiting harmful acts such as early marriage and female genital mutilation, to lowering the age at which citizens are entitled to vote.

- **Providing appropriate and accessible information on rights for children of all ages and abilities.** Children cannot exercise their rights unless they have access to information in a format that they can easily use and understand.
- **Investing in sensitisation and awareness-raising of adults.** Much more work needs to be undertaken with adults to sensitise and educate them about children's participation rights and their positive implications. Indeed, participation necessitates work with adults as much as with children. This involves providing specific training to build the capacity of professionals working with and for children, as well as sensitising parents, the media, and other influential groups.
- **Introducing mechanisms for systematically influencing public decisions at all levels.** This includes promoting access to information and training to support children's right to participate, developing child-friendly and collaborative public services, supporting child-led organisations and peer education, facilitating access to the media, helping to mobilise communities, and engaging in dialogue with government in all relevant aspects of policy development.
- **Improving the quality of programmes or initiatives to promote children's participation.** This includes promoting practices that are ethical, child-sensitive, relevant, inclusive, safe, well supported, and understood in the context of children's families and communities.
- **Demonstrating a commitment to monitor and evaluate progress in realising children's right to participate.** There is an urgent need to develop and agree indicators to measure work to support children's right to participate.



**Children at a reception centre in Zimbabwe for unaccompanied children who have been deported from South Africa.**

# 3 MONITORING AND EVALUATING CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

## THE CASE FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As already stated, there has so far been relatively limited investment in monitoring and evaluating the scope and quality of children's participation, and any changes it has led to. While there is considerable anecdotal evidence of its benefits, there has been relatively little sustained or independent research to explore this systematically. This partly reflects the very real practical and ethical difficulties inherent in developing effective tools with which to measure achievements.

But there is a powerful case for investing in more rigorous mechanisms for measuring children's participation. Developing accessible and shared benchmarks, standards and tools will:

- help define the legislative and policy environment needed to promote and respect children's right to participation
- clarify who are the duty bearers and their responsibilities
- enable children to gain a greater understanding of what they hope to achieve
- help assess the strengths and weaknesses of initiatives, and clarify which procedures and practices are helpful and which are redundant or obstructive
- help identify what support and resources are needed to strengthen children's participation
- provide evidence to support the case for political commitment to the realisation of children's participation rights
- encourage donors to see the benefits of investment in strategies to promote child participation.

If children's participation is to be sustained, replicated, resourced, and institutionalised into the wider communities in which children live, it is necessary to develop methods of measuring what is being done and how it is affecting children's lives. It is only by doing this, and demonstrating that monitoring and evaluating participation work can make a significant contribution to improving children's lives and realising their rights, that it will be possible to argue the case for continuing investment in strategies to promote participation and, indeed, to build and share a collective understanding of what constitutes effective participation.

## WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND EVALUATION?

**Booklet 4** provides a 10-step guide to help you prepare for and implement participatory monitoring and evaluation of children's participation work involving children, young people and other key stakeholders. Here, we briefly describe the key concepts involved and what they mean. (There is a fuller list of terms associated with monitoring and evaluation in the Appendix in **Booklet 4**.)

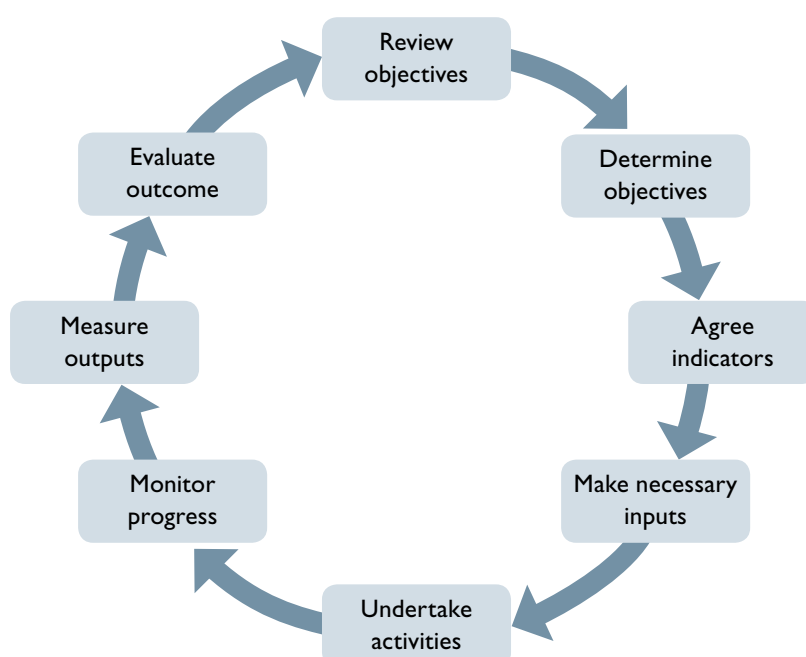
- **Monitoring** is the systematic and continuous assessment of the progress of a piece of work over time. It is an ongoing process to check that a service or programme is 'on track' towards achieving its goals and should result in ongoing improvements being made to the service or programme. There are some key questions to consider, including:
  - What is the purpose of the information?
  - What types of information will be needed?
  - How can the information be collected with the least possible effort?
  - Who will collect the information?
  - Who will analyse the information?
- **Indicators** are facts which provide an objective measurement for assessing the state or level or condition of something, usually in an area where there is a desire to see change – for example, teachers are provided with training in children's rights; schools are required to establish democratic school councils; teachers are prohibited from using corporal punishment. Ideally, indicators are agreed before the start of activities that aim to bring about change, so that their effects can be consistently and systematically measured.
- **Inputs** are the investments that are made to enable a project or programme to begin. In relation to participation, inputs might include initial training for staff and children on the UNCRC, visits to other projects to see how they are approaching participation, or developing materials to use in activities.
- **Activities** are the core elements of a project or programme that are designed specifically to achieve its objectives. They might involve research, campaigning, peer education, setting up and running an organisation, or producing a publication.
- **Outputs** are activities or investments that are made in order to realise the objectives of a programme or project. Depending on the nature of the programme or project, this might be, for example, the number of children or adults provided with training, the completion of a piece of research, or the production of campaign materials. The outputs contribute to the objectives of the programme or project, but are not in themselves evidence of whether those objectives have been achieved. For example, an output might be the creation of a children's parliament, but the act of setting up a parliament alone will not tell you whether it has achieved the objective of giving children a real opportunity to get their voices heard by decision-makers.
- **Outcomes** are the short-term or medium-term results achieved by the programme or project. You need to know whether the action(s) you took led to the desired changes you were seeking to achieve. Evaluation should be less concerned with outputs (eg, the materials produced) or indicators (eg, the proportion of children involved in an initiative) and much more concerned with outcomes – for example, whether children experienced a significant change in the extent to which they are listened to, or whether children have been successful in challenging practices that violate their rights. You could ask questions such as: How much did things change? How well did they change? Is anyone better off?



- **Impact** is similar to outcomes, but refers to the positive or negative long-term effects produced by interventions through a programme or project. It can be a direct or indirect impact, and it can be intended or unintended. For example, you might be implementing a programme to establish a children's parliament at the local community level. The outcomes could be that policy-makers discussed the issues raised during a children's meeting, and the impact would be a change in policy over an issue raised by children. The impact of the programme in the longer term might be a gradual shift in attitudes towards young people in the wider community, with greater recognition of their potential contribution within the community.
- **Evaluation** is an assessment of the programme at a specific point in time, based on the information gathered in the monitoring process. It compares the actual project outcomes or impacts against the planned objectives. It looks at what you set out to do, what you have achieved, and how you achieved it. Evaluation can take place during the lifetime of a programme or project to help assess its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, and can also be undertaken at the end, to give a final assessment of what has been achieved. It can explore both the positive and negative outcomes, intended or unintended, and should result in recommendations to improve the running and the impact of the service or programme (or others aiming to achieve similar objectives). You should consider how to monitor activities and impact right at the very start of the programme cycle, when determining your objectives. It is essential that you monitor the choice of objectives and ensure that they are the right objectives before you start providing inputs.

Throughout the programme cycle, the process of monitoring and evaluation needs to take place along the following lines. The programme should result in outcomes linked to the original objectives, referring to the indicators that were agreed at the outset. It is important to involve children and young people at every stage of the cycle.

**Figure 1: Monitoring and evaluation within the programme cycle**



## ISSUES TO ADDRESS IN MEASURING, MONITORING AND EVALUATING CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

There are a number of issues to address in measuring, monitoring and evaluating children's participation, as follows.

- **Using universal indicators:** It is important to construct universally applicable indicators in order to be able to measure and track progress across countries. However, there are as yet no commonly agreed international indicators against which to measure children's participation. The broad-ranging support provided by key international agencies in contributing to this toolkit demonstrates a commitment to working together to develop and agree such indicators. Furthermore, the Council of Europe has developed ten participation indicators that are consistent with those embodied in this toolkit. In other words, a consensus is beginning to emerge around key indicators that can be applied to measure progress in strengthening the extent to which there is respect for children's right to participation in a given country or context.
- **Understanding the context:** Any analysis or measurement of change needs to take account of and reflect the local cultural, economic, social and political context. What constitutes progress in one country may not be significant in another. For example, the creation of a children's council engaging with the local municipality may be relatively easy to achieve in Norway, but would represent a huge shift in cultural and political terms in a country with no history of democratic engagement, such as Yemen or China. The toolkit can help you track progress at different levels, including the national level.
- **Involving children in developing indicators:** It is vital that children are able to contribute to the development of international indicators. However, it has not been possible to undertake a global consultation with children during the development of this toolkit. The indicators which have been identified for mapping country progress are drawn from wide-ranging experience of many previous consultations with children. They reflect concerns and issues raised by children in many different contexts and countries. Furthermore, children have been actively involved in piloting and validating the toolkit in the nine countries involved.
- **Using quantitative and qualitative data:** Many outcomes associated with children's participation rely on qualitative rather than quantitative data. Quantitative data provide information in terms of numbers or percentages, such as the number of schools with school councils, or the percentage of children attending criminal proceedings who are represented by a lawyer. On the other hand, qualitative data provide information about children's experiences – for example, whether children feel they are listened to by doctors and nurses, or whether a club they belong to has succeeded in changing a national or local government policy. Obviously, this information can be harder to collect. However, it is far from impossible, and consistent evidence from qualitative data, pointing to comparable outcomes across programmes, provides a more meaningful and often richer source of information that can be used to improve and strengthen activities to support children's participation.

- **Focusing on sustainable outcomes:** Many of the desired outcomes of participation relate to sustainable long-term changes in children's lives that cannot be measured within a short time period. Organisations working to promote children's rights need to do more advocacy work to encourage donors to invest in these longer-term outcomes. For example, children and young people might want to be involved in a campaign to end the use of physical punishment in the family. This will inevitably be a very long process. Not only does it often take years to achieve a change in the law, but even after legislation is introduced, it can take many more years to bring about a change in attitudes and practices within communities.
- **Attributing cause of change:** It is not always possible to make direct links between the goals and activities in a given programme or project and any change that follows. For example, a local children's club may be engaged in advocacy to stop young girls entering into early marriage. However, there may also be wider campaigns around the same objective. If the government eventually changes the law, imposes greater penalties for breaches of the law, or introduces better training for the police to enable them to protect girls more effectively, it may be difficult to decide how to attribute those improvements. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that external events which are unconnected to the programme may have a significant impact (positive or negative) on whether it achieves its outcomes: for example, a change of government, increased access to information technology, or the onset of a humanitarian crisis.
- **Acknowledging negative outcomes:** The outcomes of participation may not always have a positive impact, either on children or their communities. Children's involvement in a campaign to claim their rights might, for example, expose them to harsh media criticism, social exclusion within their community, or even arrest and assault by police or security forces. It is important that any negative outcomes are recorded; they provide invaluable information and learning to help other programmes to advise children more effectively on how to keep themselves safe, how to avoid placing children at undue risk, and how to build on strategies to strengthen protection. It is also important to reflect on the balance of providing opportunities for participation against the potential risks that might be incurred. You will need to assess what is an acceptable level of risk in any given situation.



**A children's council meeting in a village in Tanzania.**

PHOTO: PIERS BENATAR/SAVE THE CHILDREN

# 4 ENSURING ETHICAL PARTICIPATION IN MONITORING AND EVALUATION

## THE BASIC REQUIREMENTS OF ETHICAL PARTICIPATION

In all participation work with children it is essential to have regard to the basic requirements of meaningful and ethical participation. These requirements have been elaborated in the Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment, No.12, 'the right of the child to be heard'.<sup>8</sup> It demands that all processes in which a child or children are heard and participate must be:

- 1 Transparent and informative** – children must be provided with full, accessible, and age-appropriate information (that is also sensitive to children's diversity) about their right to express their views freely; information should include how their views will be given due weight, how the participation will take place, and its scope, purpose and potential impact.
- 2 Voluntary** – children should never be coerced into expressing views against their wishes and they should be informed that they can cease their involvement at any stage.
- 3 Respectful** – children's views have to be treated with respect and children should be provided with opportunities to initiate ideas and activities. Adults working with children should acknowledge, respect and build on good examples of children's participation – for instance, in their contributions to the family, school, local culture, and work environment. Adults also need an understanding of the socio-economic, environmental and cultural context of children's lives. People and organisations working for and with children should also respect children's views with regard to participation in public events.
- 4 Relevant** – the issues on which children have the right to express their views must be of real relevance to their lives and enable them to draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities. In addition, children need to have opportunities to highlight and address the issues they themselves identify as relevant and important.
- 5 Child-friendly** – environments and working methods should be adapted to children's capacities. Adequate time and resources should be made available to ensure that children are adequately prepared and have the confidence and opportunity to contribute their views. You need to consider that children will need differing levels of support and forms of involvement according to their age and evolving capacities.
- 6 Inclusive** – participation must be inclusive, avoid existing patterns of discrimination, and encourage opportunities for marginalised children (girls and boys) to be involved. Children are not a homogenous group and participation needs to provide for equality of opportunity for all, without discrimination on any grounds. Programmes also need to ensure that they are culturally sensitive to the situation of children from all communities.



- 7 Supported by training** – adults need preparation, skills and support to facilitate children's participation effectively – for example, they need to develop listening skills, and to know how to work with and engage children in accordance with their evolving capacities. Children themselves can be involved as trainers and facilitators on how to promote effective participation; they require support to develop or strengthen necessary skills – for example, awareness of their rights, and training in organising meetings, raising funds, dealing with the media, public speaking and advocacy.
- 8 Safe and sensitive to risk** – in certain situations, encouraging children to express their views may put them at risk. Adults have a responsibility towards the children they are working with and must take every precaution to minimise the risk to children of violence, exploitation or any other negative consequence of their participation. Actions to mitigate such risks and provide appropriate protection include developing a clear child protection strategy, which recognises the particular risks faced by some groups of children, and the extra barriers they face in obtaining help. Children must be aware of their right to be protected from harm and must know where to go for help if needed. Investment in working with families and communities is important in order to build understanding of the value and implications of participation, and to minimise the risks to which children may otherwise be exposed.
- 9 Accountable** – a commitment to undertaking regular follow-up and evaluation of participation activities is essential. For example, in any research or consultative process, children must be informed as to how their views have been interpreted and used and, where necessary, given the opportunity to challenge and influence the analysis of the findings. Children are also entitled to receive clear feedback on how their participation has influenced any outcomes. Wherever appropriate, children should be given the opportunity to participate in follow-up processes or activities. Monitoring and evaluation of children's participation needs to be undertaken with children themselves at the centre of the process.



**Children participating in a focus group as part of an M&E project baseline process in San Ramón, Nicaragua.**

PHOTO: CESESMA



**A child in a refugee camp in Iraq with a drawing she did to highlight children's rights for Universal Children's Day.**

## A CHECKLIST FOR ETHICAL PARTICIPATION IN MONITORING AND EVALUATION

You need to think about the following checklist of actions to make sure that these basic requirements are respected in any process of monitoring and evaluation with children:<sup>9</sup>

- ✓ Start thinking about how you are going to involve children in monitoring and evaluation from the earliest stages of any project or programme.
- ✓ Ensure that you have informed consent from children and that they know they can withdraw from activities at any stage if they change their mind; also ensure that you have informed consent from children's parents and caregivers.
- ✓ Support children, especially those from the most marginalised or disadvantaged groups, to participate in feedback, monitoring, evaluation, and follow-up processes.
- ✓ Assess and mitigate risks associated with children's participation in the M&E process.
- ✓ Ensure that you do not create false expectations, that you address issues of material or symbolic rewards for participation in a transparent and fair way, and that you manage all expectations in this respect.
- ✓ Introduce confidential reporting mechanisms that are accessible to girls and boys, to ensure that all children can easily share concerns or reports about child abuse. These concerns must always be followed up sensitively and promptly by the appropriate agencies.
- ✓ Equip children with the skills and confidence to use participatory monitoring tools to support their active role in monitoring and evaluation.

- ✓ Develop child-sensitive indicators with children to enable them to identify their priority concerns and the goals they want to achieve.
- ✓ Plan M&E activities at times that suit children and do not interfere with their school work, or other important household duties or responsibilities.
- ✓ Make efforts to ensure a safe environment where children and young people feel safe to share negative experiences and criticisms about participation in programming without fear of repercussions.
- ✓ Ensure respect for the privacy and anonymity of the children and young people involved during M&E processes; however, you should respond sensitively to any disclosures of child abuse, applying the relevant child safeguarding policies.
- ✓ Disaggregate all information and findings according to gender, age, ethnicity, caste, religion, disability, HIV status, socio-economic status and other relevant factors.
- ✓ Give children rapid and clear feedback on the impact of their involvement, the outcome of any decisions, the next steps, and the value of their involvement.
- ✓ Communicate the results of M&E back to all the children involved in an accessible and child-friendly way and make sure their feedback is taken into account in future work.
- ✓ Ensure that any mistakes identified through evaluation are acknowledged and that the organisation is committed to using the lessons learned to improve its practice around children's participation in the future.
- ✓ Evaluate how adults have understood and implemented children's priorities and recommendations into their policies, strategies and programmes.
- ✓ Discuss sustainability of support with children, and provide clear feedback to them regarding the extent/limit of commitments to support children's ongoing initiatives and organisations. If ongoing support is not possible, provide children with resources and support to make contact with other agencies who can support them.

# 5 REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The piloting of this M&E toolkit, and other relevant initiatives, has highlighted some important lessons about the experiences of involving children in M&E of participation, which provide useful pointers for future work.<sup>10</sup>

- It is extremely useful to undertake a baseline assessment of the situation before undertaking a participatory initiative that you plan to monitor and evaluate. The baseline will provide you with an understanding of the current environment, against which you can then measure any changes as a result of your activities. For example, if children are planning a project to reduce corporal punishment in schools, they will need to know some basic information before they start. This includes how frequent the practice is, teachers' and parents' attitudes to it, the experiences of children themselves, and what existing legislation and policies say about the use of corporal punishment. Once the project is underway, you will be able to track changes and demonstrate how and what children have been able to achieve through their activities.
- Commitment to and application of the nine basic requirements for ethical participation are essential at all stages of the M&E process.
- Significant investments of time are needed for participation to be meaningful – it involves supporting children's engagement in all stages of the process, and working at times when children are available, such as school holidays and weekends.
- It is important to support children to identify appropriate time frames within which they hope to achieve their objectives, as it can take many years to achieve tangible changes in attitudes and practices.
- Investment in building the skills and experience of staff is essential if they are to have the confidence and competence to work collaboratively with children.
- Participatory M&E is a social process. It involves understanding and negotiating complex social dynamics and power relations. Adults generally have a lot more power than children. There are also power differences among children, as individuals and as groups. It is therefore necessary to recognise and negotiate these power relations if all children, particularly the most disadvantaged, are to be afforded a genuine opportunity to voice their views and influence outcomes.
- In many countries, children are actively discouraged from speaking out or challenging adults. If they are to be able to contribute effectively to M&E processes, they need to be supported and encouraged to criticise without fear of retribution. Adults involved in these initiatives also need to be supported to accept criticism and respond constructively.
- Participatory tools can be effectively used by children to gather and analyse information from children and adults and to transform children into young researchers and evaluators. Tools may need to be adapted for different groups of children – for example, younger children, children with disabilities, children who cannot read.



- Girls and boys of different ages and backgrounds, when provided with support and information, can demonstrate significant skills and confidence in researching, evaluating, and documenting activities.
- Children and staff have been empowered through their involvement in M&E processes.
- The quality of participation, as well as the scope of children's engagement, is often significantly enhanced as a consequence of M&E processes.
- A commitment to participatory M&E needs to be embedded into an organisation's ongoing M&E systems, mechanisms and tools. Participatory M&E offers more inclusive ways of assessing and learning that are also more responsive to the needs and aspirations of those most directly affected, ultimately making the organisation more accountable to children. Thus, organisations should encourage creative ways to support children's participation in ongoing M&E processes in all relevant thematic areas.



**A girl holds up a drawing of what happened when her home in Pakistan was flooded, leaving her and her family stranded for days.**

## 6 USEFUL RESOURCES ON PARTICIPATION AND M&E

Ackerman L, Feeny T, Hart J and Newmann J (2003) *Understanding and Evaluating Children's Participation: A review of contemporary literature*. Plan.

Action for the rights of the Child (2009) *ARC Resource Pack: A capacity building tool for child protection in and after emergencies*. Foundation Module 3: Programme Design, Foundation Module 4: Participation and Inclusion.

Boyden J and Ennew J (1997) *Children in Focus: A manual for participatory research with children*, Save the Children Sweden.

The Concerned for Working Children (CWC) (2008) *Children as Research Protagonists: Rights-based research by children*.

Dorning K and O'Shaughnessy T (2001) *Creating Space for Children's Participation: Planning with street children in Yangon, Myanmar*. Partners in Development – A World Vision Discussion paper. World Vision Australia Resource Centre.

Dynamix and Save the Children Wales (2003) *Participation – Spice it Up! Practical tools for engaging children and young people in planning and consultations*.

Estrella M and Gaventa J (1998) *Who Counts Reality? Participatory monitoring and evaluation: a literature review*. IDS Working Paper 70.

Feinstein C and O'Kane C (2008) *A Kit of Tools for participatory research and evaluation with children, young people and adults*, Save the Children Norway.

Feinstein C and O'Kane C (2008) *Ethical Guidelines for ethical, meaningful and inclusive children's participation in participation practice*, Save the Children Norway.

Feinstein C and O'Kane C (2008) *Searching Together: Formative dialogue research made easy*, Save the Children Norway.

Feinstein C and O'Kane C (2005) *The Facilitator's Guide to the Spider Tool: A self-assessment and planning tool for child led initiatives and organisations*, Save the Children.

Funky Dragon and Partnership Support Unit (2011) *Children as Researchers Resource Pack*. Wales.

Horwath J et al. (2011) *You Respond: Promoting effective project participation by young people who have experienced violence. A guide to good practice through training and development*. South-East European Research Centre, The University of Sheffield, European University Cyprus, Walsall Council, The Institute of Child Health, Greece.

Hart J, Newmann J, Ackerman L and Feeny T (2004) *Children Changing their World: Understanding and evaluating children's participation in development*. Plan.

Kirby P and Bryson S (2002) *Measuring the Magic: Evaluating and researching young people's participation in public decision-making*. The Carnegie Trust.

Lansdown G (2013) *Take Us Seriously! Engaging children with disabilities in decisions affecting their lives*, UNICEF.

Lansdown G (2011) *Every Child's Right to be Heard: A resource guide on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No.12*, Save the Children.

Lansdown G (2003) *The Evolving Capacities of the Child*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Save the Children (2004) *So You Want to Involve Children in Research? A toolkit supporting children's meaningful and ethical participation in research relating to violence against children*. Save the Children Sweden.

Save the Children (2003) *So You Want to Consult with Children? A toolkit of good practice*. International Save the Children Alliance.

Save the Children (2000) *Children and Participation: Research, monitoring and evaluation with children and young people*.

Theis J (2004) 'Evaluating children's participation', in J Theis, *Promoting Rights-Based Approaches: Experiences and ideas from Asia and the Pacific*, pages 112–131. Save the Children Sweden.

UNFPA (2004) *Programme Managers Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit. Tool No: 4 Stakeholder participation in M&E*. United Nations Population Fund.

UNFPA (2004) *Programme Managers Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit. Tool No: 5 Planning and managing an evaluation*. United Nations Population Fund.

# ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Lansdown G, (2004) 'Criteria for the evaluation of children's participation in programming', in Early Childhood Matters No 103, *Young Children's Participation: Rhetoric or growing reality?* Bernard van Leer Foundation, pages 35–39

<sup>2</sup> The development of environmental benchmarks of participation has benefited from the work of Joachim Theis (2007), in *Children as Active Citizens: A policy and programme guide – Commitments and obligations for children's civil rights and civic engagement in East Asia and the Pacific*, Bangkok

<sup>3</sup> General Comment, No. 12, The Right of the Child to be Heard, CRC/C/GC/12, July 2009

<sup>4</sup> 'Child Rights in Practice: Measuring our impact', conference organised by the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD), 26–29 October 2009, Whistler, Canada

<sup>5</sup> The Committee on the Rights of the Child is an international body comprising 18 members, elected by States. Its mandate is to monitor government progress in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

<sup>6</sup> UNCRC General Comment No. 12, The Right of the Child to be Heard, CRC/C/GC/12, 2009

<sup>7</sup> A World Fit for Children, Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly 2002, A/RES/S-27/2

<sup>8</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12, The Right of the Child to be Heard, CRC/C/GC/12, July 2009

<sup>9</sup> See 'Action for the Rights of Children' resource pack, Foundation Module 4: Participation and Inclusion, Save the Children

<sup>10</sup> Save the Children Norway's global thematic evaluation on children's participation in armed conflict, post conflict and peace-building (2006–08), written by Clare Feinstein and Claire O'Kane

# A TOOLKIT FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATING CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

BOOKLET



Introduction

This toolkit looks at how to monitor and evaluate children's participation in programmes, communities and in wider society. It is aimed at practitioners and children working in participatory programmes, as well as governments, NGOs, civil society and children's organisations seeking to assess and strengthen children's participation in society.

The toolkit comprises six booklets:

**Booklet 1: Introduction** provides an overview of children's participation, how the toolkit was created and a brief guide to monitoring and evaluation.

**Booklet 2: Measuring the creation of a participatory and respectful environment for children** provides a framework and practical tools to measure children's participation in their community and society.

**Booklet 3: How to measure the scope, quality and outcomes of children's participation** provides a conceptual framework for children's participation and introduces a series of benchmarks and tables to measure children's participation.

**Booklet 4: A 10-step guide to monitoring and evaluating children's participation** looks at involving children, young people and adults in the process. It includes guidance on identifying objectives and progress indicators, systematically collecting data, documenting activities and analysing findings.

**Booklet 5: Tools for monitoring and evaluating children's participation** provides a range of tools that you can use with children and young people, as well as other stakeholders.

**Booklet 6: Children and young people's experiences, advice and recommendations** has been produced by young people who were involved in piloting the toolkit. It consists of two separate guides: one for adults and one for children and young people.

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