



# Mainstreaming Psychosocial Care and Support **through** **Child Participation**

*For programmes working with children and families affected by HIV and AIDS, poverty and conflict*



**Psychosocial Wellbeing For All Children**

*REPSSI is a regional non-governmental organisation working with partners to promote psychosocial care and support (PSS) for children affected by HIV and AIDS, poverty and conflict in East and Southern Africa.*

### **THE REPSSI PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING SERIES**

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### **Jonathan Morgan**

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# Foreword

REPSSI is a regional non-governmental organisation working with partners to promote psychosocial care and support (PSS) for children affected by HIV and AIDS, poverty and conflict in East and Southern Africa.

REPSSI advocates that services, programmes and policies designed to support vulnerable communities need to respond holistically to the needs and rights of communities and children. It is important that psychosocial care and support (PSS) programmes are not only specialised stand-alone programmes.

Instead REPSSI advocates for the social and emotional needs of children and their caregivers to be addressed in an integrated manner. This can be done by mainstreaming psychosocial care

and support into all types of programme designed to support vulnerable communities including economic strengthening projects and programmes.

We appreciate the active participation of many partner organisations, adults, children and youth in contributing valuable ideas in the development of this guide.

*Nuni*

Noreen Masiwa Huni  
Executive Director,  
REPSSI, August, 2009

*“The REPSSI vision is that **all** children affected by HIV and AIDS, conflict and poverty benefit from stable, affectionate care and support.”*



# I Introduction



## Child participation and psychosocial support

Participation is one of the key principles of psychosocial support. Indeed it could be argued that, to some extent, they are two sides of a coin. It is through getting involved that children:

- Enhance their resilience and decrease their vulnerability
- Discover and develop their talents
- Discover and enhance their own strengths
- Are able to overcome many of their psychosocial challenges.

However, participation is not an activity or programmatic area like early childhood development, nutrition or economic strengthening. It is a way of being, seeing and doing within an organisation or community which contributes to the healthy development of the community as a whole and different groups with the community.

Child participation is an inspiring approach to addressing the needs of children and families affected by HIV and AIDS, conflict and poverty. It brings new perspectives, energy and creativity to development programmes, while contributing directly to the psychosocial wellbeing of all involved. If you are

embarking on the journey of child participation for the first time, or if you wish to continue to advance your understanding of child participation, we hope that you will find the ideas presented in this guide helpful.

## Key messages in this guide

The main points that we hope you will take away from this guide are that:

- Child participation is not an option or an add-on, but a right enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) - to ensure that all children have the opportunity to actively participate in all issues directly affecting them
- Child participation contributes significantly to the psychosocial wellbeing of children
- Child participation may increase the skills, confidence and social connectedness of the children involved
- Child participation brings unique perspectives which can enhance all types of programmes relating to the wellbeing of children and their families
- Child participation brings energy, creativity and fun to development programmes
- One may start gradually with child participation methods so that this eventually grows organically in your organisation until it is mainstreamed into all aspects of your functioning

## The story and people behind this publication

The guidelines were written by REPSSI in collaboration with TAMASHA (Youth Participatory Development Centre in Arusha Tanzania) after consultation with REPSSI partners using child participation approaches in Tanzania. Two consultative workshops were held to find out how practitioners felt that child participation could best be integrated into their programmes. The first workshop was held with 14 children from various children's centers including Dogodogo centre, YOPAC, Salvation Army, AFRICARE and PASADA. This was followed immediately by a workshop for adult representatives from countries where REPSSI operates including Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Swaziland. It was also attended by Government Officials from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare as well as UNICEF Tanzania.

The two workshops tried to explore relevant methods and approaches to child participation and tried to draw on existing child participation initiatives that enhance psychosocial wellbeing of children, while contributing to the development goals of the programme. The guidelines make use of case studies, background information and practical suggestions for mainstreaming child participation into various programmes impacting on the wellbeing of children and their families.

*These are some of the people that were actively involved in developing the guidelines:*

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These guidelines are written for individuals working in or funding programmes working with vulnerable children.

You could be a:

- Project Manager
- Trainer/counsellor
- Fieldworker
- Donor
- Child involved in a development project

The guidelines may be used as a training tool for organisations wishing to increase their focus on child participation.

*The partners involved in the pre-testing of this guide were:*

Who are these guidelines for?



## 2 Why Consider Child Participation



ACTIVITY

### Activity 1:

#### What do you think about child participation?

Child participation (CP) is a concept that is open to many interpretations. To start discussions in your organisation about child participation, it may be best to start with some self reflection questions.

**a)** Ask a group you are working with (staff members, field workers, caregivers etc) to think about/write down their answers to the following questions. Stress that their answers are completely confidential. The aim of the exercise is not to probe into their personal views but to give them time to think about child participation before some group discussion. They are free to use their answers as they think fit during the group discussions.

#### Questions for reflection

1. Can you remember an example of when you were given a chance to participate in a serious issue when you were a child? How did you feel about it and how did it influence your life?
2. Can you remember an example of when you wanted or tried to participate in a serious issue when you were a child? How did you feel about it and how did it influence your life?
3. What do you think about children's participation in general? How important and relevant is it to you?
4. How do children participate in your organisation and its programmes? What is the best example you have of children participating? Of children leading a programme?
5. What are your greatest concerns when you think about children's participation? What do you think you need to do, and your organisation needs to do in order to be able to address these concerns?

6. How do you think children, community members, or other child-serving organisations would rate your agency's commitment to and practice of children's participation? Why?

- b)** Ask participants to sit in groups of 6 to 8. Each group should choose a leader. The leader then asks volunteers to explain to the others examples of when they participated or were denied the chance to participate. From the explanations, participants should develop a mini-drama which brings out the main issues which came out of the examples.
- c)** Groups present their mini-dramas for discussion. Write down the main points that arise out of the dramas and discussion.
- d)** Ask participants to sit in their groups again and develop a flip chart which shows the advantages and disadvantages of child participation. Tell groups they should be very frank in their discussion as there are very legitimate fears about participation.

continued on page 6



ACTIVITY

### Activity 1: *continued*

*Why child participation?*

*Why not child participation?*


**e)** Groups present their charts to the whole group for further discussion. Take time to hear and acknowledge people's negative feelings. Allow some discussion about how these concerns need to be taken seriously in order to mainstream child participation effectively.

You may be able to use the following sections to acknowledge people's concerns about child participation and to deepen the group's understanding of child participation.

## Resistance to child participation

There may be strong resistance to child participation, which is usually comes from genuine concern for the wellbeing of children. Firstly, there may be genuine concerns for the safety of children, adding to their responsibilities and time. Secondly, many societies are not very participatory overall and it is difficult to push child participation in a situation where not even the adults are able to participate in meaningful and ethical ways. Some of their arguments can be summed up as follows :

- Children are too young and inexperienced to participate. They do not know enough
- It is contrary to 'our culture' that children participate in this way. They should listen to and learn from their elders
- Children's participation in other activities interferes with their schooling and preparation for succeeding in adult life
- Child participation may take too much time. It may interfere with the goals of a project or programme
- Children's safety may be at risk if they are participating in events away from their family or immediate community context.

All these objections have some element of truth. However, it is often forgotten that most (if not all) cultures place a lot of value on the wellbeing and active development of children. Even in very traditional cultures, there are spaces for children to participate in one way or another. In many traditional

societies there were social structures in place for meaningful participation of children and adolescents in community life.

This modern resistance to children's participation may need to be explored more. On the one hand, it could be the reaction of societies to extreme adversity and marginalisation. It could be a reaction against external interference in their lives. It may also be linked to a natural reaction to acculturation, where many traditional societies feel under threat and many elders feel that their children and youth are losing traditional values. However, if handled respectfully, child participation may be a way of supporting communities to strengthen values that are meaningful to both adults and children in an increasingly modern world.

## Value of children's participation

Child participation is an exciting and worthwhile process, which almost always yields rich outcomes for all involved. Here are some ideas about why we should promote child participation in our own and other organisations.

### *1. Participation is key to the development capacities of children*

Children's capacities are developed most effectively through interaction. Children grow in competence and confidence through the experience gained in participation, including playing active roles in their society. Through participation:

- They develop their life skills such as decision making, assertiveness and negotiating skills



CASE  
STUDY

### *Respect Campaign*

In rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, many elders felt that the stress of modern life, violence and poverty was eroding respect in their community. In traditional Zulu culture, respect (hlonipha) is a greatly esteemed value. It applies to both the way that children and youth behave towards adults, as well as how adults behave towards children and youth. It also applies to the way children, youth and adults behave towards one another. Some traditional leaders started a campaign which they called "Hlonipha". They took this message to schools and opened discussions about respect. To their surprise, children responded even more enthusiastically than expected, saying that they also felt that there was a lack of respect in their lives. The children eventually designed their own poster, held a march in the community of Umbumbulu, and designed their own messages around respect, saying that they too needed to be treated with more respect (see [www.survivors.org.za](http://www.survivors.org.za)).

- They learn democratic principles in practice and prepare themselves to play a full role in their communities and nation as adults

So participation leads to greater levels of competence and psychosocial development which in turn enhances the quality of their participation. So it is not a question of waiting for the children's capacity to evolve. Through participating, their capacity evolves, which means that they are able to participate even more. In this way, participation and the capacity of children support each other.

*Participation* ← → *Capacity*

## 2. Participation enhances protection

All child-serving and child-led organisations have to pay great attention to ensuring that children are properly protected even when they are participating fully. However, in general, participation actually enhances their protection.

- Participation contributes towards capacity development: Children develop the personal skills that enable them to protect themselves
- Participation increases solidarity: Participation empowers the vulnerable to act together for their own cause. They protect one another. Their being, talking and working together creates a safe space for them.
- Joint participation creates more meaningful relationships
- Isolation may contribute towards greater abuse: Research in South Africa has shown that isolation increases the possibility of sexual harassment and abuse of children.
- Participation may improve the presentation of reality from the viewpoint of the vulnerable. This may be true of examples such as abuse where we may learn from children about where they feel least safe, with whom they feel safer etc. This is true in community as a whole where the participation allows the presentation of multiple viewpoints. From the point of view of children, it allows the space for them to identify issues which adults do not see.
- When young people are given the chance to participate, they often become protectors of their younger siblings or other children.



### CASE STUDY

#### Children's effectiveness

In a project on sexual exploitation in Eastern Europe, 60 adolescents participated as researchers – gathering data and developing training and advocacy materials and strategies.

There was initial resistance from some of the partner organisations who felt the adolescents lacked the competence and expertise to take responsibility for research in such a sensitive and complex field. It was suggested that, in order to test their concerns, a pilot should be held using first the adult professional researcher, and then the adolescents themselves. The outcome was that the adolescents elicited more comprehensive responses, in large part because the children in the survey felt more at ease with their own generation when responding to issues of sexual exploitation and abuse (Lansdown, 2005, page 28).

## 3. Participation enables children to make a significant contribution to their families, communities and society as a whole

It is true that some adults may be resistant at first to child participation, because they don't believe that children have the capacity, or they fear that it will interfere with their education or other parts of their lives. However, once the programme is initiated, the resistance most often turns to support.



Children may contribute in many ways:

- Their way of looking at things both reveals things that maybe adults did not see – for example where the present systems are not working for them
- Their perspective increases understanding
- They are very active when given the chance and can complete many activities, from surveys to peer education, to economic projects.

In this way, participation improves services for children and the children's involvement improves services for everyone. This can be seen even in broader development such as the programme in the case example below:



CASE  
STUDY

#### *Improving services*

In a development initiative in Barra Mansa, Brazil (Landsdowne, 2005), 18 boys and 18 girls are elected by their fellow children to serve on the children's council. The council meets regularly, and sets priorities based on the input from the children they represent. They manage an annual budget allocated to them by the Municipal Council of USD 125,000 in addressing these priorities and overseeing the implementation of the projects.

Apart from running their own activities (sports and recreation, artistic activities, study activities, livelihood activities etc), children can get involved in many different ways even in other activities of the organisation, especially the older children. For example:

- a) They are very good researchers, especially in child-to-child research, both in qualitative and quantitative methods. This is particularly important because research has shown that children give different answers, even to quantitative questions, depending on who is asking the question. When TAMASHA carried out a research into multiple vulnerabilities of adolescent girls in Dar es Salaam, it trained young researchers who were particularly strong in eliciting information from their fellow young women. Children are also the first to know about activities which adults would rather not acknowledge such as abuse or neglect of their fellow children.
- b) They are very good advocates, particularly through the use of drama and other artistic activities. In the out of school programme in Tanzania which has now become the model for youth work, young people carried out research into their own communities and fed back to their communities through theatre for development (e.g. provoking discussion on the issues raised).
- c) They are very good at mobilising their fellow children to participate.
- d) They are very good implementers of activities once they have been convinced of their importance, including

livelihood activities, support to vulnerable children or families etc.

In this way children become social actors for their own good and for the good of their society.

#### *4. Children's right to participate*

The participation of children, as of all other human beings, is recognised in many countries around the world as a basic right. Like anyone else, children have the right to be heard, valued and taken seriously and if this happens it is beneficial both to them and their societies. Because this is often forgotten, children now have their own document, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which explains their rights: For example:

- Article 12 of the CRC, says that children who are capable of forming their own views have the right to express those views freely, in all matters affecting them. Their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity
- Article 5 says that children should participate 'according to their evolving capacities'
- Article 13 says that children have the right to obtain appropriate information and share that information with others as well as express their own views;
- Article 15 says that children also have the right to meet others and to join or set up associations i.e. the right to freedom of association;

### 5. *Child participation increases impact and reach*

The early stages of establishing child participation activities and processes may seem quite time consuming. But organisations involved in child participation have often commented that eventually it decreases one's workload and becomes a pleasure to move to a more supportive role as one encourages the energy of children and youth to support one another and make meaningful changes to their lives. In this way child participation may reach many children and may even improve the conditions for all children in a country.

### 6. *Child participation is fun*

The above points focus on the value that children may contribute through participation, and on their right to participate. But once your organisation has taken the step to introduce child participation, you will also most likely find that the work becomes more enjoyable as the children bring an energy, excitement and creativity that is often missing when they are more passive recipients of services.

## Participation and protection

While it is clear that participation contributes to the psychosocial wellbeing of the children, this can only be achieved in a supportive and protective environment. Care must be taken to ensure that children's participation does not expose them to more danger.

In recognition of the relative lack of power and status of children and adolescents, protection is a key right, even as their evolving capacities enable them to protect themselves. However, the Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees such protections to all children and the more vulnerable they are, the greater the need to emphasise protection rights to complement development and participation.



### *Children running programmes*

A Save UK initiative in Kampala involved 200 children in tackling child abuse in the community (Lansdown, 2005 unpublished paper). Children were asked to identify protection needs. On the basis of these findings, they designed a range of activities and took responsibility for their implementation. The children established a project steering committee of 18 children for the overall planning of activities to address protection needs, a management committee for handling the implementation of project activities, a child protection committee for investigating, hearing and handling cases of abuse and neglect and an advocacy committee responsible for community sensitisation of child rights and child abuse. Members of these committees were all elected by other children in the community.

Here are some important ways of ensuring that children are protected during participatory activities:

- Caregivers of all children involved should be consulted beforehand about the nature of participation, and should be kept fully aware of all activities and movements of the children. This is called informed consent.
- Screening of child-care workers who are responsible for the care of children is becoming an increasingly important aspect of any work with children. In many countries now there are state records of any child abuse offenders.
- Try to organise the children to be together in groups at all times, preferably with other children of a similar age.

Children should not be isolated individually in child participation activities.

- Consider the physical or environmental aspects of child protection, for example making sure that transport is safe, having children escorted if they are going to a meeting in town, using meeting rooms or outside areas that are visible at all times to others (rather than using closed rooms).
- Consider the psychosocial aspects of protection – for example, avoid stigmatising or labeling children who have been affected by certain types of circumstances like illness, abuse, or the loss of parents. It is more effective to include all children in addressing these issues together, rather

than singling out those who are most severely affected by certain challenges.

- Have regular reflection processes where children and adults involved in the programme are able to give honest feedback in a safe way.
- Encourage children to look out for one another. You may be able to discuss norms such as always informing someone if you are going somewhere.



## CASE STUDY

### *International youth exchange programme*

Socially active adolescents from Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe were brought together to consult them about how they have been able to help other young people in their communities who have lost their parents. During the course of their time together, the youth were given an afternoon off. By evening, two of the young people had not returned to the workshop venue. When the young people had not come for supper, the organisers were extremely worried and sent out a search party. Much later that night the two young people casually walked back into the workshop venue and wondered what all the fuss was about. They explained that after losing their parents and becoming the heads of their households, they were not used to being accountable to others for their movements. They had not even thought that others would be worrying about them. They apologised for the concern that they had caused. This was an important learning point for all involved in the project. It was agreed to open the discussion to the whole group to agree on what systems of protection they could suggest to avoid similar situations in the future.



## Child protection and resilience

It is necessary to review the conventional protection model in which children and adolescents are constructed as passive and vulnerable, needing the protection of concerned adults to save them from harmful life experience. For example, despite the most appalling situations which millions of adolescents have to face, many of them have consistently shown the strength to cope and overcome, as is shown by the examples of Humuliza (see page 22) and the response of children to the recent Asian tsunami.

This is why protection has to be balanced by age-appropriate child participation. It has been consistently found that children felt that they had a greater capacity to deal with a given situation than adults gave them credit for. In addition, protective approaches that make children dependent on adult support leave children without resources when those adult protections are withdrawn.

Even in the most extreme situations, and always bearing in mind the safeguards that need to be put in place, it is essential that children are given the chance to develop by participating in their own protection. It is not possible to promote their participation without ensuring them protection but, equally, there is little protection that can be provided to them if no alternative opportunities for their participation are created.

Indeed participation is often the best form of protection.

- The practice of participation develops personal skills that enable adolescents to protect themselves in dangerous situations:
- Participation empowers the vulnerable to act together in their own cause
- Isolation leads to greater abuse – inclusion and participation develop connectedness and reduce isolation
- Participation makes it possible for the point of view of the vulnerable to be heard and the reality to be exposed (eg on issues of abuse). This can be in the media, local councils and committees, through theatre for development etc.
- When adolescents and young people are given the chance to participate, they become the protectors of their younger siblings (as shown by the Rafiki Mdogo programme in Humuliza)
- Youth organisations provide safe spaces
- Being actively involved in shaping one's own destiny may be an important way of avoiding the sense of helplessness which often accompanies adverse situations and has negative psychosocial consequences for children and adults. Children and adolescents are more likely to experience psychosocial stress as bystanders rather than as participants. This can be seen in refugee camps where children are often left with nothing to do.

It is often the neglect of such opportunities which leads them to be more vulnerable. As stated by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (Bainvel, 2006) in relation to young people in situations of war and conflict:

*The costs of not focusing on adolescents are enormous: massive rights violations committed against adolescents, with long term consequences for them and their communities as they attempt to endure and recover from an armed conflict. Perhaps, worst of all, adolescents' strengths and potential as constructive contributors to their societies go largely unrecognized and unsupported by the international community, while those who seek to do them harm, such as by recruiting them into military service or involving them in criminal activities, recognise and utilise their capabilities very well.*

The key is to enable participation while ensuring as protective and supportive an environment as possible. Once again the involvement of older children and young people as guardians in the Rafiki Mdogo programme is a good example. In Lebanon, guidelines were developed by the adolescents in conjunction with adults which enabled them to participate in the rehabilitation of Lebanon while minimising the risk of their involvement.





ACTIVITY

## Activity 2:

### Child protection

#### Part One

Ask participants in groups to consider the following questions.

- a) What are the key elements of a protective environment for children of different ages?
- b) What are the protection measures in place to ensure that children are not exposed to physical and psychosocial harm?
- c) Are all the measures purely for protection of the children or are some of them for 'self protection' (i.e. to protect the organisation in case anything goes wrong)?
- d) How can child participation be structured so that it enhances the protection of children working with our organisation?

#### Part Two

Ask children in the organisation/programme the same questions.

#### Part Three

Bring the adults and the children together to work out a joint programme which maximises their participation within a protective environment.

## The psychosocial outcomes of involving and including children

The more people actively participate in decisions and activities that are important to them, the greater their self-confidence and self-esteem will be. The same applies for children. This is not always easy for adults to accept, as many cultures believe that children are too young to participate in this way and do not have rights in decision-making. Children "should be seen and not heard." It takes time to convince communities to believe that involving and including children in programmes will benefit not just the individual child, but also the whole community.

The improved psychosocial wellbeing of children as a result of greater involvement and participation is being explored in many development programmes across the world. For example, an evaluation of children's participation programmes in India, Kenya and Ecuador (Ackerman et al, 2003) found that children's participation had an impact at different levels.

## The psychosocial outcomes of children's participation in development programmes in Kenya, India and Ecuador

Levels of impact	Psychosocial outcomes
<i>Personal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased self-confidence</li> <li>• Increased knowledge and awareness</li> <li>• Enhanced personal and social development</li> <li>• Expanded social networks</li> </ul>
<i>Family</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved family relations</li> <li>• There may also sometimes be negative PSS impacts like decreased time and energy devoted to family responsibility, and conflict of interests between child-led initiatives with that of the parent or guardian</li> </ul>
<i>Community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased community awareness and concern for children's issues</li> <li>• Improved status of children within the community</li> <li>• Enhanced community development</li> </ul>
<i>Institutional</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved school attendance, better school performance</li> <li>• Enhanced processes and institutions of governance due to improved attendance and participation of learners</li> </ul>



## The relationship between participation, protection and psychosocial support

In its presentation to the Study on Violence Against Children, Save the Children (2003) itemised the importance of children's participation in the study. In this way they produced a very good summary of the relationship between participation, protection and psychosocial development. This is an extract from the study.

### **It will provide new perspectives on how children experience violence.**

*Children's participation in the study will enable them to give a voice to the violence they have experienced, their own efforts to challenge it and the impact of adult efforts to help them. It will ensure that the views and concerns of those most directly affected are heard.*

### **It will help to challenge one of the key barriers that children face in countering violence against them.**

*Living under the reality or threat of violence has significant consequences for a child's everyday life. But most boys and girls are not used to talking about violence they experience from adults and peers. Girls, disabled children and other groups facing discrimination may find it even more difficult to break out of their silence. Younger children may find it difficult even to recognise violence as they may be socialised not to question the behaviour of adults towards them and others. Some types of violence may be taboo to discuss or carry heavy stigmas.*

*Children's involvement in the study will help explore these issues and make participation a key tool in the struggle to eradicate violence against children.*

### **It will ensure that the measures we design to counter violence against children are more appropriate, relevant and sustainable – and therefore more likely to succeed.**

*Children's participation in the study will help provide a better understanding of the extent and characteristics of violence affecting them and will aid the development of programmes that more effectively respond to children's needs and which they can trust.*

### **It can help to heal the past.**

*Boys and girls affected by violence have indicated that they welcome participation in the research and interventions designed to meet their needs. For many of them, the process of involvement, which must be undertaken in a supportive and understanding environment, can help children to explore past experiences and regain confidence for the future. At its best, participation can be an important tool to counter victimisation, passivity and silence.*

### **It can enhance child protection.**

*Participation provides children with the possibility to protect themselves and challenge abuses of their rights, either directly or through informing a responsible adult. Children are often most vulnerable in situations where they have the least*

*opportunity to voice their views. Having the opportunity to participate helps children to share their experiences and gain more control of their lives, lessens the risk of exploitation and lessens the fear that can prevail in living a situation where trauma is silenced and strict rules of behaviour are observed. Experience shows that when children have had easy and safe access to adults prepared to take their views seriously, hidden or ignored instances of violence have surfaced. Children who have access to information about complaints procedures or reporting mechanisms are more likely to seek help to protect themselves.*

### **It enhances self-confidence and self esteem.**

*Children benefit from participation by acquiring and expanding their skills, by meeting other children and understanding that others share the same or similar experiences – that they are not alone. Participation gives children a sense of purpose and competence in their own lives and a belief that they can make a positive impact on their own lives and influence and change the lives of others – their peers, family and community. Children who have been able to participate in school panels, village committees or youth clubs have used these opportunities to proactively seek ways to voice, prevent and stop violence against themselves, their peer group and the wider community.*

## What children say about participation

Fortunately, there are many examples of how children, even in situations of extreme vulnerability or emergency, participate very effectively. Their participation is a key part of their psychosocial support. Here are some of the voices of the children themselves, from the partners of Humuliza in Tanzania ([www.humuliza.org](http://www.humuliza.org)). The children say that their participation in the activities of Humuliza gives them better self esteem and hope.

### JULIETA

*"We play together. If I have some cassava or guava, I bring these foods to them and we enjoy being together. If I or my friends are sick at school, we bring them at home. We do homework together ... Also we work together, for example to go to cut grass for our homes... Other people, even children, treat you like dogs because we have no parents. Here, with other Rafiki Mdogos we can be together, to console each other and to forget that we have lost our parents."*

### FILIMENA

*"We construct houses together for members whose houses have collapsed. We have already constructed three houses for this reason. If we would be alone, we couldn't do such things. We organise such work in our meetings, where we decide who we shall support and when we will do the work."*



ACTIVITY

### Activity 3:

#### *So what do you feel?*

After going through the arguments for and against children's participation, it is worthwhile to ask staff/community members to revisit their personal responses to the issue. Here are some questions that could be asked:

- a.** What is the underlying reason for any concerns that I may have about child participation?
- b.** What are important basic considerations that need to be in place for me to consider including children as more active participants in my programme?
- c.** What value may it add to my programme to involve children as more active participants of my programme?

Participants should answer these questions individually first before discussing in groups their responses and feelings about child participation.

Introduce the idea of a competition as to who can come up with the best material which advocates for child participation. This can be a role play, or poster, or brochure. Give everyone time to prepare their material and announce an incentive for the winners.

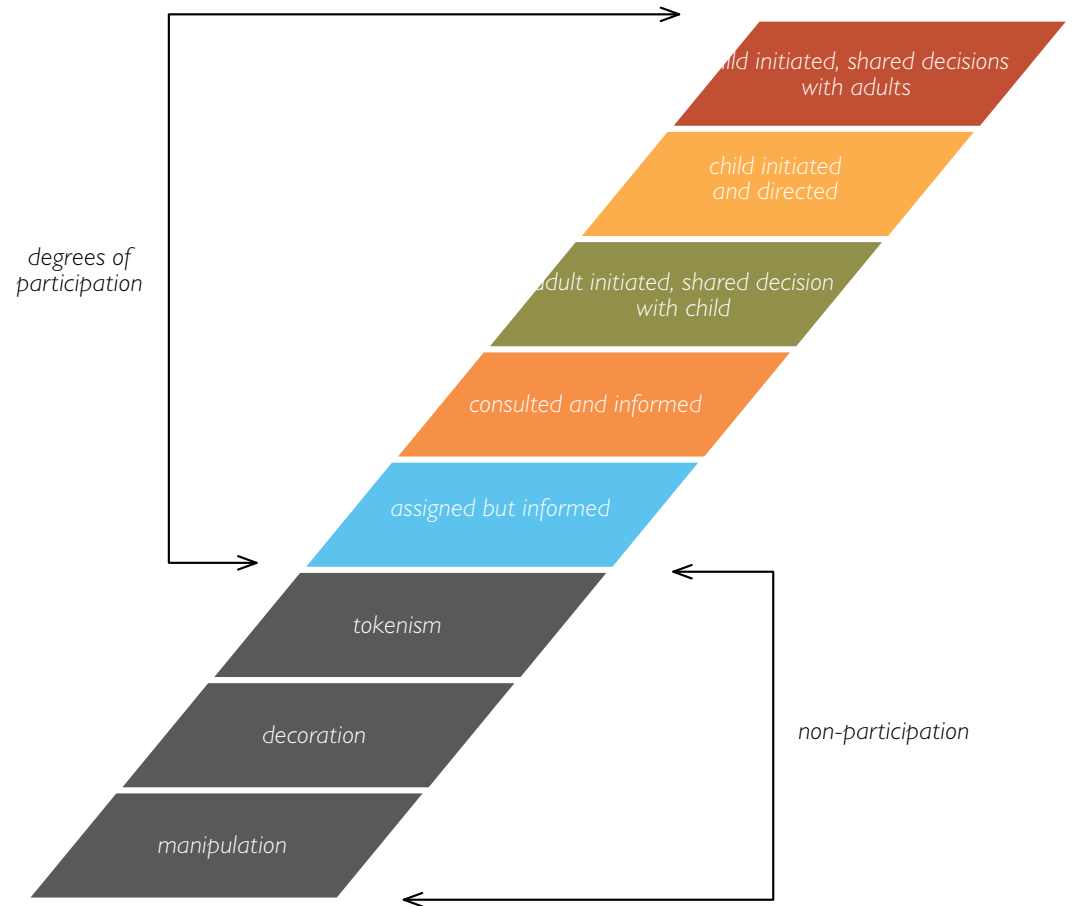
### 3 Understanding child participation

#### Levels of child participation

Probably the most famous explanation of child participation is expressed in Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation (Hart, 1977). Hart shows that there is no 'golden standard' or perfect marker for child participation. Instead, there are different levels of child participation which may take time to reach. He calls these degrees of participation.

.....  
"When you show me respect it grows my dignity."  
.....

CHILD PARTICIPANT, AGED 12  
.....



"Ladder of Participation" Hart (1997)

## What is not full participation

In many languages there is no word for participation, in the sense that children participate of their own free will. Rather we 'participate' them in our own programmes. For example, in Kiswahili, people 'wanashirikishwa'. They don't 'shiriki'. Someone else controls the participation. The bottom three rungs of the ladder show what full participation is *not* about, even though many adults think that they have given children space to participate.

### *Manipulation*

Manipulation means that children are involved in doing certain things but in a way entirely controlled by adults. For example, children might make a speech to a visitor, or sing a song, or do a drama. But all the ideas and words have been prepared by adults and the children are just mouthpieces for what the adults want to say.

Some peer education programmes are a bit like this. The children are selected by adults and given a few hours or few days training in what to say and told to go and tell the same things to their fellow children. They have little input into what should be said or even how it should be said.

### *Decoration*

We see this on big occasions like the Day of the African Child or World AIDS Day. Children are invited to come and sing, dance, or perform a drama. They can be good songs or

dances but are not taken seriously. Adults enjoy them, and then get down to the 'serious business'.

### *Tokenism*

Tokenism is when one or two children participate mainly just to show that children did participate. Once again, they are usually selected by the adults. They may have been given no time to prepare themselves and are often informed at the last minute. They may not have had time to consult with their fellow children about what it is they want to say. They are often not even given the handouts etc of the meeting/workshop. It is therefore impossible for them to participate effectively in the meeting where they are outnumbered by the adults. Even if they are asked to speak, they are often unprepared.

This is to say that adults who use these methods always have bad intentions. Many adults often work very hard to ensure that children at least come to these meetings, and the messages they have in the songs or drama are very strong. But they are not allowing 'true' child participation - the children are either not fully involved in the preparation of the activity or in the activity itself.

## What child participation is

In order to have child participation, they must be involved themselves in preparation, decision making about what should be done and the activity itself. There are increasing degrees of involvement:

### *Assigned but informed*

In this situation, the adults are still in control of the situation and the children are fully aware of what it is they are expected to do and why. Much of peer education also falls into this category. Here they understand what the messages are and why they are supposed to give these messages to others.

### *Consulted and informed*

In this case, children are also asked for their views about the issue. However, the decision-making is left to the adults. It is up to them whether they take the children's ideas on board or not. That is why, in many consultations, children say they are tired of being consulted because they do not see that what they have said or suggested being taken seriously.

### *Adult initiated, shared decisions with children*

Many programmes start this way. The adults have an idea or a project which they share with children. But as things develop, the children start to participate in the decision-making. It may not have been their idea in the first place but they can make it theirs.

### *Child-initiated and directed and child-initiated, shared decisions with adults*

This level shows that children have initiated the idea, are active directors of the process and make shared decisions with adults. Here Hart emphasises the importance of a collaborative child-adult partnership.

It should be emphasised that while *it is* a ladder, apart from the first three levels, Hart is only showing degrees of child participation. Not all activities have to reflect the highest rungs of the ladder. Activities at lower rungs can still mean child participation.

## Factors affecting the nature of child participation

The nature of child participation depends on several factors:

- The age of the children: the Convention on the Rights of the Child says that children are children up to the age of 18. In accordance with their 'evolving capacities' older children are much more capable of initiating and developing activities. By contrast, pre-school (or kindergarten) children cannot be expected to do the same.
- The existing knowledge and experience of the children: for example, if it is an issue that they know very little about, they will initially be more dependent on adults.
- The environment for children's participation: if there is a lot of opposition to children's participation, it may be necessary to start at a lower rung on the ladder and increase the children's participation as the acceptance of the value of their participation increases.



However, these three factors should not be used as excuses for refusing to move out of our comfort zones on child participation, or our own need to remain in control! Projects or programmes can start at a lower level on the ladder and move up the rungs. Child participation is something that takes time to develop and we can keep growing our abilities in this approach. For example an out-of-school programme in Tanzania was initiated by UNICEF after consultation with the young people on what they thought should be the key elements of the programme. However, once it started, the young people took over the programme and most of the subsequent activities were initiated by them, in consultation with adults in their community, local government and UNICEF.

Secondly children may be able to contribute different ideas to different topics. They may not have certain information about some topics. Yet we should not underestimate how much children do know, especially about issues directly affecting their lives. They may be able to contribute from a unique perspective. For example, at the beginning of an HIV and AIDS prevention programme, they might not know how the HIV is transmitted but they do know the best way to transmit that knowledge to their peers, which is why their involvement in decision making is key.

Related to this is the need to recognise the evolving capacities of children, particularly adolescents. For example in the RIATT Conference mentioned below, the children developed their own speeches and presentations together, which were very

powerful. Yet many of the adults refused to believe that they could prepare such presentations on their own - they must have been 'manipulated'. Many others expressed amazement that children could make such speeches. The children were very hurt by this and asked why people should be so suspicious or

amazed. Most of them were at secondary school so they asked why the adults were sending them to school if they did not believe that children could think and speak effectively. The fact that adults thought they had been manipulated showed how adults may underestimate the capacities of children.



### *Getting it Right for Children*

A good example of a half-way point in terms of full child participation is the RIATT conference, Getting it Right for Children for Children Affected by AIDS (CABA) held in Dar es Salaam, 2008. For the first time, it was decided that children should participate. Realising their limited experience of facilitating such even participation, the Child Participation Task Team of RIATT contracted TAMASHA (Youth Participatory Development Centre in Arusha) to run the child participation process). They set up a careful process of child consultation in the 8 countries which agreed to carry out the process whereby children were selected from different child-serving organisations, in particular those working with vulnerable children (thereby ensuring greater inclusion). After a preliminary national consultation where the children identified their main issues and what they wanted to find out from their fellow children, they were given 2-3 weeks to consult their fellow children in their home areas before coming together again to share experiences and develop their national report. They then elected 2 representatives to attend the regional conference.

The elected representatives met in Dar es Salaam 3 days before the conference in their own special session to share experiences between countries and prepare their presentations to the conference. They spoke at both the opening and closing ceremonies as well as at two plenary sessions. The fact that they had consulted with their fellow children made a clear difference to their presentations as they were not just speaking for themselves but for all those with whom they had consulted. The consultations with their fellow children had in fact changed many of their original ideas.

*From: Regional Interagency Task Team for Eastern and Southern Africa including REPPSI, Save the Children, Plan, World Vision and UNICEF*



## Structural participation

One reason for the disbelief of adults with regard to child participation is the fact that they often see children participating in large scale events only such as The Day of the African Child or World AIDS Day. Participation in such events may be a very good experience for the children, but such one-off events do not necessarily contribute to the continuing nurturing and fostering of the child's psychosocial wellbeing through ongoing participation in their day to day life.

Thus:

*"As important as special projects and events can be, participation in them will be less effective and less sustainable if there is no scope for meaningful participation in day to day living. An over focus on more visible and shorter term forms of participation can run the risk of neglecting the main aspects of adolescent life"* (Rajani, UNICEF)

The other problem is when children's participation is seen as a project, something separate, special, an add-on, rather than part of all aspects of the organisation.<sup>1</sup> Thus, children's participation needs to be organic, built into the structures of child serving organisations and other places where children are present, in their communities and schools. This is particularly important for the psychosocial development of the children as will be seen later.

## Consultative and participative approaches

Many of us tend to think of children as "deficient" adults. Yet anyone who has opened the door to children's participation soon discovers that they understand and can act far more than we originally thought.

However, as with adults, it is not possible to involve all children at all levels of programme activity and decision-making. The nature of participation varies depending on the level at which one involves children and the activity itself.

Children may be included in programme activities by involving them in consultative processes, in participative initiatives or in promoting self-advocacy. Each of these has the following characteristics listed in the box below (from Landsdowne, 2001):

Consultative processes	Participative Initiatives	Promoting self-advocacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult-initiated</li> <li>• Adult-led and managed</li> <li>• Children have no control over the outcomes</li> <li>• Children may be provided with opportunities for organising together, acquiring skills and confidence and contributing towards influencing outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiated by adults</li> <li>• Involve collaboration with children</li> <li>• Involve the creation of structures through which children can challenge or influence outcomes</li> <li>• Usually involve children taking self-directed action once the project is underway</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The issues of concern are identified by children themselves</li> <li>• The role of adults is to facilitate, not lead</li> <li>• Children control the process</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup>: In child led organisations, obviously such participation is already structured

Thus, consultative processes are often the first stage in promoting child participation. The nature and structure of the programme remains adult-led, but children are given a chance to feed their own ideas into the programme. However, if the programme remains only at the stage of consultation, children can very easily become frustrated because they have no guarantee that their ideas and suggestions will be taken seriously. This is why most programmes move towards increasingly participatory initiatives, in particular among older children. While the programme may have started as adult-initiated, more and more space is allowed for children to take over the reins and make their own decisions. Once this happens, programmes often move towards self-advocacy as children start identifying issues and activities themselves and set them up with support from adults.

The following case example of Humuliza is a very good example of the final stage, where instead of facilitating consultation or participation, the organisations actually become child-led:



## CASE STUDY

### *Children Participating in Design, Implementation and Decision-making*

The Humuliza Project in Tanzania was set up to enable teachers and caregivers to support children who had lost their parents and to develop the orphaned children's own capacity to cope with the loss of their caretakers. Once teachers and trainers had completed their training, the question of what could be done to provide ongoing support for the children was asked.

Some 17 children who had lost their parents and were participating in the project were brought together in a workshop to help answer this question. At the workshop the children spent time identifying their existing strengths i.e. what they had learnt and could do well because they were orphaned children. They also talked about where support from others would be helpful. They identified areas in which they could support each other, which ranged from practical support such as helping each other with agricultural activities to emotional support such as consoling each other. The children also discussed the possible functions of an orphan's organisation.

Subsequent to this, VSI or the "Vijana Simama Imara – VSI" (Youth standing upright firmly), an organisation for orphaned youth was formed. At the end of the workshop, five groups, each with an action plan, had been formed in order to start the VSI orphan organisation. VSI grew from 39 members in 2000 to 1 300 members by 2004. VSI is run by the young people themselves through elected committees. Humuliza provides training and monitoring.

Initially VSI catered for children aged 13 to 18. This expanded to include the younger brothers and sisters and led to the creation of the Rafiki Mdogo (Little friends) in 2002. These younger children meet once a week for games and activities at a meeting run by older VSI members.

The structure of the VSI is influenced by the concept of "protagonism" – an idea most widely applied in children's projects in Latin America and India. Essentially protagonism means that children are seen as social actors who have a right to participate in

*continued on page 23*



*(continued)*

whatever matters to them. Protagonism essentially moves beyond the typical forms of participation that we see in many children's programmes. Within the frame of protagonism participation can be placed at the highest point of Hart's Ladder of Participation (Hart, 1997). The activities are child-initiated and child-directed; children make the decisions supported by adults.

Prior to the project VSI members described three main, interrelated areas of stress including grief and depression; social isolation; and worry about coping and their future.

Four themes emerged in their descriptions of how joining the VSI had helped them in overcoming these stresses:

"The group activities (meetings, training sessions, playing and singing together, etc.) provided not only a sense of acceptance but also confidence, a common identity and a sense of purpose which relieved much of the grief and stress.

The wide range of friendships and the strong social co-operation they found in the organisation provided a sense of self-respect and social acceptance, and could also be seen as feeding into identity and purpose.

Similarly, the practical and income generating skills they learned not only reduced worries about coping and the future but could also be seen as feeding into a sense of competence, confidence and purpose.

Finally, the resources that became available, through the organisation and its income earning activities, (meeting school costs, buying new clothes, repairing a house, etc.) provided a sense of security and dignity which, again could also be seen as feeding into competence, confidence and social acceptance."



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#### FURTHER READING

*For more information about Humuliza and VSI and how to start your own child-led organization, REPSSI has recently produced a manual called "Mobilising Children and Youth into their own Child- and Youth-led Organisations" written by Kurt Madoerin. This manual may be downloaded free of charge from [www.repssi.org.za](http://www.repssi.org.za)*

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## Integrating participation of children and psychosocial support

Encouraging active participation of children is one of the key principles of psychosocial support. The participation of children in issues affecting their lives builds confidence and contributes significantly to their social integration. The matters that children and adolescents address together may also be directly relevant to their wellbeing.

In the same way, approaches to child participation can draw actively on the principles of psychosocial support to ensure that these approaches contribute towards the child's emotional and social wellbeing. The following section has therefore been added as a reminder about different aspects of a child's wellbeing that may be integrated into child participation approaches.

### *What is psychosocial wellbeing?*

Psychosocial wellbeing is about the connections between individuals in a community. It is about the connections between the individual and others, its community and society ("social"). It is also about how each person, adult or child, feels and thinks about him or herself and about life ("psycho"). It is often linked to the African concept of "ubuntu" – "I am because we are, and we are because I am".

Such wellbeing includes many different aspects of our lives, such as physical and material aspects, psychological, social,

cultural and spiritual aspects. The focus of psychosocial wellbeing is not just on the individual, but on households, families and communities.

### *Psychosocial support principles to keep in mind*

Participation is one of the five programme principles supported by REPSI. When organising child participation initiatives, it is worth bearing in mind the other four principles to ensure that the children's participation builds their sense of self and connections with one another and the community.

- **Attitudes:** One of the main ways of building a child's sense of self and connections with others is by respectful ways of interaction. Building a sense of dignity is important in developing a sense of wellbeing. During child participation activities, it is helpful to encourage respectful ways of working together amongst children and adolescents, and to ensure that when the children engage with adults they are treated with respect. In this way all child participation activities should build the dignity of the child.
- **Social support:** This principle is about drawing on existing cultural, social and spiritual ways of doing things. It means fostering connections and building a sense of self and community. Even if child participation action is centred around changing the way something is done in a community, children may be encouraged to find respectful and culturally appropriate ways of addressing these

issues. They may be encouraged to develop an attitude of learning from and drawing on their own cultural ways of doing things. In this way they build on their relationships with their social support systems, rather than becoming alienated.

- **Family support:** This principle suggests drawing on and enhancing existing family relationships and ties, instead of bringing in external help. For children it could mean enhancing one caring relationship with an adult who is able to provide consistent care in the child's life. It aims to promote within the child and the family a sense of control (vs helplessness) during difficult times. During child



participation initiatives, try to involve the family and build on the relationships with caring adults, siblings, neighbours, cousins and other children who are already in the child's life.

- **Emotional support:** This involves promoting stability and routine in the child or caregivers life, especially during difficult times. When helping to organise child participation activities, try to contribute towards the stability and routine in their lives – for example have the child participation activities at the same time and place each day. Providing emotional support can also involve promoting the use of safe spaces for reflection on past experiences, as a way of learning from and growing from these experiences. During child participation initiatives, sensitive issues such as painful past experiences may emerge. Try to foster a safe environment where children are supported to talk about these issues if they are ready and willing. Another way to provide emotional support is to focus on positive achievements to build a sense of self. Once again, norms of encouragement and positive feedback may be integrated into all child participation actions, especially amongst one another, which is very powerful for children. Lastly try to give children enough time to play and participate in sport, as this contributes to a child's social, emotional and cognitive development. Encourage them to help one another to find time to play and participate in sport.



ACTIVITY

#### Activity 4:

#### *Where are you in terms of child participation?*

After going through some of the theory about different ways of encouraging children to participate, it may be helpful to reflect on where your organisation or project is situated along the continuum of child participation. Here are some questions that could be asked:

- a. What process do I use to engage young people in reflecting on my organisation's value to young people and the community?
- b. What activities do I choose to involve children and youth in, and what process do I use to ensure their full involvement?
- c. What decisions do I choose to involve young people in making, and what process do I use to ensure their full involvement?
- d. Do I continually consult young people, and do I really listen to their answers?
- e. Do I provide opportunities for youth to take on leadership roles? What actions have I taken recently to build leadership skills among young people in partner communities?
- f. On the basis of my answers to the above questions, what do I need to rethink in order to promote child participation in my organisation/community/school?

Participants may discuss these questions in groups with others involved in similar projects. These are then presented to the whole group for discussion and agreement. Section 7 provides a more detailed framework for assessing your organisation's mainstreaming of child participation.

## 4 Introducing Child Participation Into Your Organisation

### How to get started

By now we should be assured that mainstreaming child participation is a process, not a once-off activity. As shown in the models of increasing child participation, one can never be a fully realized expert in the subject! Instead there are gradual steps that may be taken to increase your child participation focus. Here are some ideas on how to get started with child participation, or how to continue mainstreaming child participation in your organisation.

#### *Focus your strengths*

It may be best to start by focusing on your strengths. You may think about the following questions:

- What you are already doing to consult children or families in your work?
- Where are children most actively participating in your programmes?
- Where is there already energy being generated together with children?

Try to identify these points of leverage and start with growing the child participation focus in these areas of existing strength.



### *Start with a specific project*

Another way of starting on the journey to mainstreaming child participation is to try out some of these methods with one specific project event or activity. This will help to increase one's confidence and belief in this approach. You may be able to identify a project or activity within your organisation that lends itself to an increasing focus on child participation.

### *Start with talking and listening*

Like all processes in development, talking and listening is always the best place to start. This is so for promoting children's participation. It is worth spending time talking to the adults, in the programme, in the community, and in the children's families about how they believe children can participate. Then one may talk to children, and finally bring the two together to exchange views. They may not agree on everything to begin with, but if one trusts the process of collaboration usually people will find a creative way of moving forward together.

You may also decide to talk to fieldworkers and project staff working on your programme. They will have insights into the value of strengthening child participation in their programme.



ACTIVITY

### *Activity 5: Finding your starting point*

Here are some simple questions to help your organisation to find a starting point (or point of leverage) for growing your focus on child participation:

- Where are children already involved in our organisation?
- Where would we appreciate more involvement from children?
- Is there an existing project that we can work on to strengthen child participation?

### Gaining organisational commitment

Before making the decision to promote child participation in a programme or organisation, it is very important to ensure that people in the organisation actually support child participation. If staff and supporting communities have not had the chance to think through why and how the children should participate, they will only pay lip service to that participation and it will end up on the bottom three rungs of Hart's ladder. Therefore you may wish to facilitate workshops for staff and community (in which they participate as well, rather than just being consulted) to work out their own modalities for child participation.

- Where and how will they participate?
- How will their participation affect the running of the organisation (how will they be involved in the decision making process)?
- What further training is required to ensure that all key personnel are capable and comfortable with the participation of the children?

Some of the issues that will have to be confronted in the workshops include:

- How do I react if children disagree with my ideas or come up with different priorities?
- How do I feel if a child challenges me? Or if the children's group disagrees with my ideas?

- How does the organisation create the time to give to participation?
- How do we create an environment that is child-friendly and promotes active participation of children and youth?

## Consulting parents and caregivers of children

It is also important to gain the commitment of the parents or caregivers of children involved in child participation.

Many parents share similar concerns as covered in Step 1 in the section on Resistance to Child Participation. Here are some ideas on how to engage parents in child participation processes:

- Spend time building trusting relationships with parents. Try not to only contact them when you need something urgent from them (like asking them to sign an indemnity form!).
- Comment on the strengths of the child and compliment the parents on how they must have contributed to these strengths that you have observed in their child. Take care not to sound patronizing and be genuine in what you say.
- Explain why their child was selected and what the project is about.
- Give full details about the activities the child will be involved in.
- Listen to their ideas and priorities.
- Take seriously their concerns and ask about their

suggestions in how best to address these concerns.

- Invite parents to visit the project and witness special events and achievements.
- Give feedback to the parent on a regular basis. Again use this as an opportunity to comment on what you observed the child doing well. Bring photographs and other interesting materials to show the parents what the child achieved.

Building a good relationship with parents or caregivers of the children involved in your programme is an important aspect

of psychosocial wellbeing. You may be able to draw strength and creative ideas from parents and you may be able to add value to the parents' own relationships with their children.

In more traditional rural communities or in government-led institutions such as schools, it will also be important to consult leadership and relevant authorities about the child participation initiatives that are planned. Once again this can be a valuable time of consultation, where one not only gains support from such authorities, but gets a sense of the priorities and ideas from such structures.





## Explore different ways of involving children

Once there is good organisational commitment and a foundation of a good relationship with parents, caregivers or community structures, your organisation may already have been given many good ideas about how to work well with children to increase their participation in your programme.

Here are some ideas about how your organisation may increase child participation activities and processes:

- Start child and youth consultation meetings to learn about their ideas and topics that would be relevant to their lives
- Encourage child and youth-led outreach where children identify and invite vulnerable children to join existing project activities
- Facilitate children's and youth group workshops on specific topics where children and youth are active in determining the direction of the discussions on topics that are relevant to their lives
- Encourage children to co-facilitate such group sessions
- Start kids clubs where children and youth take a lead role in facilitating sessions on topics identified by their group
- Encourage child and youth-led research
- Facilitate child and youth-led organisations
- Support child and youth led community campaigns
- Support child and youth led advocacy campaigns where presentations are made to government departments and key decision makers

- Facilitate child and youth-led media campaigns to raise awareness about issues that are important to children

Again, depending on the extent to which children have already been participating, it will be necessary to carry out some capacity development activity with children to enable them to think through what participation means in their particular context and how to promote it.

Section 5 gives further practical ideas on how to mainstream child participation in your organisation. These ideas will need to be adjusted according to your programme specialization.



## Adapt these ideas to your programme specialisation

The ways in which children can participate in the programme depends on the nature of that programme. For example, child participation activities and processes will be different if you are working in an organisation that specialises in agricultural projects, versus HIV and AIDS prevention work, versus income generating activities. Think carefully about your type of programme and how child participation may be applied to your own area of specialisation. In the REPSSI Mainstreaming Psychosocial Care and Support into Economic Strengthening Programme (REPSSI, 2009), there is a good example of how participatory activities have been thought through in relation to a development programme.

Economic strengthening Activity	Ways of involving children	Activities for children in the economic strengthening programme
<i>Cash transfer</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultative</li> <li>• Consultative</li> <li>• Self advocacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consulting children about the way in which the money is spent</li> <li>• Being transparent about the household budget and where the money goes to</li> <li>• Allocate a small portion of the money to older children to pursue some livelihood project of their own</li> </ul>
<i>Vocational training for older children</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultative</li> <li>• Participative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soliciting children's opinions on vocational skills they think are needed in the community</li> <li>• Involve children in the training and mentoring of children entering the programme</li> </ul>
<i>Group based savings</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participative</li> <li>• Consultative/participative</li> <li>• Participative/ self-advocacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin group savings schemes with older children to encourage a culture of saving</li> <li>• Encourage children to offer ideas of how and where money saved can be used to improve their educational outcomes</li> <li>• Start a dream club where children put a small amount of money towards the first step of their dreams.</li> </ul>
<i>Income generating activities (IGAs)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-advocacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage youth to start their own IGAs and give them responsibility of running and managing their own small business (see Case study)</li> </ul>



ACTIVITY

### Activity 6:

### *Applying these principles to your programme*

In order to apply some of the ideas about child participation to your programme specialisation, you may find the following process helpful:

- Think carefully about the types of children that are involved in your programme, and those which could possibly be involved in future
- Draw a table similar to the one on this page, but with only 2 columns for:
  - o Your existing projects
  - o Activities to promote more involvement of children





ACTIVITY

## Activity 7: *Develop a workplan*

The development of child participation may therefore start gradually as an organisation and facilitators grow in confidence. Especially where an organisation wants to promote child participation for the first time, a gradual process is often the best. It is better to start small and be effective, than to attempt large-scale participation that may be overwhelming. Both adults and children need time to adjust to greater participation.

### 1. List any goals to maintain or improve child participation in your institution

Decide on a few concrete ways to continue and advance promising goals and activities. How many goals can we realistically achieve? This depends on the level of commitment from your institution. If you have just received funding devoted to child participation, you may be able to create many new activities and improve on existing programming. Otherwise, you may identify fewer goals or a long-term goal.

2. Evaluate each goal by answering the eight subsequent questions<sup>2</sup>. Some goals will be more realistic than others, so the group will have to establish priorities. The eight questions which follow, applied to each goal, can help your institution create a sensible work plan for child involvement.

### **How will this goal benefit the institution/project/activity?**

This question should help clarify why each goal is important and how meaningful participation for children can be practical. Institutions should not assign children to token positions or positions that demand skills and expertise that go beyond their training.

**What are the challenges?** A wide variety of obstacles may need to be addressed.

Sometimes staff attitudes (extremes in favour of, or opposed to, child involvement), time, or financial constraints can arise. Money and time will be needed to recruit and manage staff, pay salaries, conduct training, monitor progress – everything involved with hiring any new employee, plus the extra attention needed to child-adult partnership issues

**What are the steps to achieve the goal?** This question helps you outline how your institution will attain the expected result. Detailing these steps can help identify the activities required for each goal, which helps comparisons between possible goals.

**What resources are currently available?** By assessing the existing capabilities of your institution, the framework for success can be identified. Often this process begins with senior management making a commitment to provide funding to support child involvement. Once this is accomplished, staff time can be allocated to manage the process.

**What gaps need to be filled?** Recognise the places where further commitment is needed.

**What is the timeline?** Plan when each step needs to occur in order to attain the goal.

**What is the monitoring and evaluation plan?** You need a strategy to review both processes and results associated with involving child. This is critical for future decisions relating to child involvement.

2: Adapted slightly from Youth Participation Guide: Assessment, Planning, and Implementation© 2005 by Family Health International

*continued on page 32*



ACTIVITY

Activity 7: *continued*

**Who in the institution could or will take responsibility to achieve this goal?**

Perhaps there is a logical point or person for maintaining an existing activity, but such a person may not be easy to identify for a new activity. You should, therefore, think carefully about where the goal fits into the institutional structure.

**3.** Decide which goals to implement of all the goals discussed. As a group, you may not be able to make the official decision, but you can at least prepare a case for proposing these activities to senior management. The facilitators will be responsible for taking these ideas to senior management, as well as to those who participated in the assessment and planning process, when delivering the final report (and presentation, if needed).

**4.** Revisit the work plan periodically Once or twice a year, evaluate how well your institution is implementing the work plan.

Goal <sup>3</sup>	Activity
<b>1.</b> How will this goal benefit the institution/project/activity?	
<b>2.</b> What are the challenges?	
<b>3.</b> What are the steps to achieve the goal?	
<b>4.</b> What resources are currently available?	
<b>5.</b> What gaps need to be filled?	
<b>6.</b> What is the timeline?	
<b>7.</b> What is the monitoring and evaluation plan?	
<b>8.</b> Who in the institution could/will take responsibility to achieve this goal?	

3: Institutional Assessment and Planning Tool Youth Participation Guide Youth Participation Guide Institutional Assessment and Planning Tool 29

## Building your child participation capacity

Once the staff in your organisation have shown an interest in child participation, it is important to keep building their capacity in this regard. It is also important to keep building the capacity of children who are involved in child participation, so that their skills and confidence may increase.

The capacity of the staff and children involved in child participation may be further developed through:

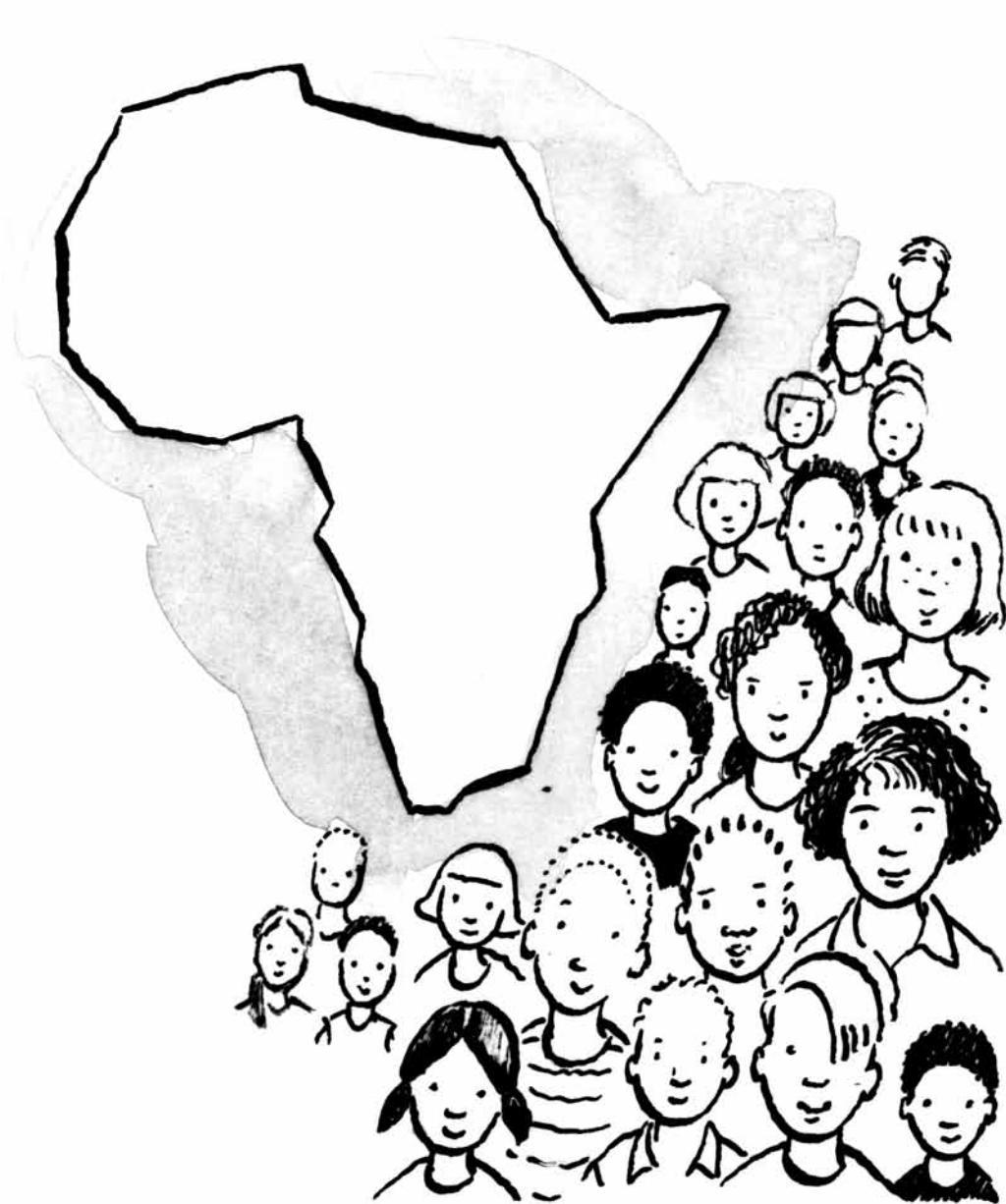
- Getting more literature and books about child participation
- Encouraging people to attend workshops and further training on child participation methods
- Accessing supervision or mentorship
- Networking and exchange with others involved in child participation
- Writing about their own experiences of child participation
- Self-reflection and research about their work

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### ASK REPSSI!

*For more information about the training, resources and networks in your area, contact your REPSSI sub-regional manager. You can find out this information from [www.repssi.org](http://www.repssi.org).*

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## 5 Structural Considerations



If you wish to move further along the journey of child participation, here are some other issues to think about. Try to apply these to your organisation as you read through this section.

### Who participates

The obvious answer is 'all children'. However, unless certain safeguards are put in place, it will usually be the oldest, better off, male children who participate the most actively. Youth centres are a good example. Research carried out by the Population Council into youth centres and peer education programmes (Erulkar et al), found that it was the older boys who benefitted the most by far. Thus in Ethiopia, research into who participated showed that more than one quarter of older boys had attended a youth centre and nearly one third had had contact with a peer educator whereas less than 4% of the younger girls had attended such a centre and only 12% had had contact with a peer educator.

	All ados	All boys	All girls	Boys 10-14	Boys 15-19	Girls 10-14	Girls 15-19
Youth centre	11.9	20.3	7.2	10.5	27.2	3.9	9.0
Peer education	19.6	26.5	15.1	18.3	32.3	12.7	16.5

Percentage of Ethiopian children who have attended a youth centre or had contact with a peer educator (Erukhar *et al*)

One of the most vulnerable group of girls in that area, young female domestic workers, were hardly reached at all. Only 1% had attended a youth centre and 6% had been contacted by a peer educator.

The pattern was similar in researches in other council researches. In Ghana, the average age of attendees at youth centres was 18. In Zimbabwe it was 21 and almost none of the participants was below the age of 15. In Kenya, 86% of the participants were over 20, the average age was 24 and 26% of the participants were above the upper age limit of 24.

By contrast, as noted in the guideline on Economic Strengthening activities, many programmes for vulnerable children tend to focus on younger children, often overlooking the needs and concerns of older children (10-18 years). Older children are most often at the forefront of supporting families that are vulnerable, and become caregivers at an early age. Children on the Brink (2004), estimates that about 55 percent of all orphans are aged 12 to 17, which makes sense in that the older they are, the more likely their parent(s) are to have

died. The guideline notes that older children can be involved in economic strengthening programmes and are the key target group for greater participation. They can also be increasingly involved in all activities concerning them, in accordance with their evolving capacities.

Therefore, in ensuring that children participate in programmes, there is a need to pay attention to three variables - gender, age and vulnerability. Here are some questions to stimulate further thinking about these aspects of child participation:

### Gender

- Are girls participating equally with boys?
- Can girls speak their mind fully if boys are present (or boys if girls are present?) Is there a need to have gender specific activities sometimes?
- Are girls taking leadership positions equally with boys?
- Are there any constraints which prevent girls from participating equally with boys?

### Age

- How do we make sure that children of different ages participate? Do we have different age groups? Does each age group choose its own leaders who then belong to an overall leadership group or council?
- Will younger children participate in a different way from older children? What kind of activities should there be for them?

### Vulnerability

Most REPPSI partners and programmes are focused on the needs of vulnerable children. However it is still worth asking:

- What mechanisms are in place to ensure that the most vulnerable children also participate equally with their peers?
- How do we ensure that vulnerable children also become actors and leaders in the programme, rather than targets of outreach programmes?
- Do we have mechanisms in place for children with disabilities to be able to participate fully?

### *Child participation after the tsunami in Asia*

After the tsunami in Asia, children played a key role in the clean up and restoration of the community (World Vision International). In a workshop after the event, the following observations were made:

Factors enabling participation in this example:

- Freedom to think and act for themselves as well as acceptance, respect and support from adults
- Feeling safe and self-confident
- Not being ordered what to do and proving to adults that young people can take action.
- Clear goals, dreams, and visions. Need well defined roles and clear guidelines
- Strong support and help from adults and peers;
- Coordination and constant communication;
- Leadership among young people
- Adequate resources, skills and knowledge (therefore on the spot capacity development)

Barriers to participation in this example:

- Views that children and young people were inferior;
- Neglect or ignorance of child rights;
- Lack of trust or support for young people;
- Different interpretations of child and youth participation;
- Failure or refusal to acknowledge young people's opinions.
- Fears of child labour, abuse and trafficking
- Lack of government support and child-friendly spaces.

- The absence of children and youth groups as well as a lack of forums for young leaders to air their views.
- Lack of information on how to participate.
- Attitudes among young people themselves. Some were fixated on grand schemes when small-scale contributions were more realistic and, ultimately, more effective.
- Many young people lacked the confidence to play a more active role, while others were simply not interested in contributing .



### *Participation of children with disabilities*

In the same document, examples were given of participation of children with disabilities.

According to World Vision Vietnam specialist Dr Michael Hegenauer, who helped establish this project:

*"It is not developing 'special services'; it is simply having the community and our development programs include children with disabilities in the activities that are already being delivered health care, education, culture, leisure, play, child participation, etc.). Part of key learning here is that it's not that children with disabilities can't participate – it's that we don't let them participate... we don't even think about letting them participate."*

Development agencies need to intentionally develop project designs, objectives, activities, indicators and benchmarks that engage this target group, such that:

- Families are supported in practical ways.
- Children with disabilities are increasingly included in the concept of community. The community becomes richer as it involves its disabled children. Attitudes and practices that are harmful to some of its most vulnerable members can be challenged and changed with tangible results.
- The participation of disabled children is encouraged, has an avenue and their views are heard as issues affecting them become recognised. Communities, local government



and volunteer CBR workers together have started to organise social occasions (with project funds), such as parties, to which all children are welcome – whereas before there were none for children who did not go to school (not only children with disabilities, but street children, and children without residence registration or a birth certificate).

- Changes in attitude and action have followed planned awareness-raising efforts where both the problem and the potential have been presented. This is important, as awareness-raising does not always move beyond the problem. If the potential for change is not presented when the attention of families or the broader community has been brought to an issue of social importance, there is a risk of apathy.
- Working with people in positions of power helps to gain support on child protection from local authorities. This observation has been noted in a study by UNICEF in 1994 which found that urban projects that worked closely with people in power (such as the mayor's office) were more effective in protecting children than projects that did not.

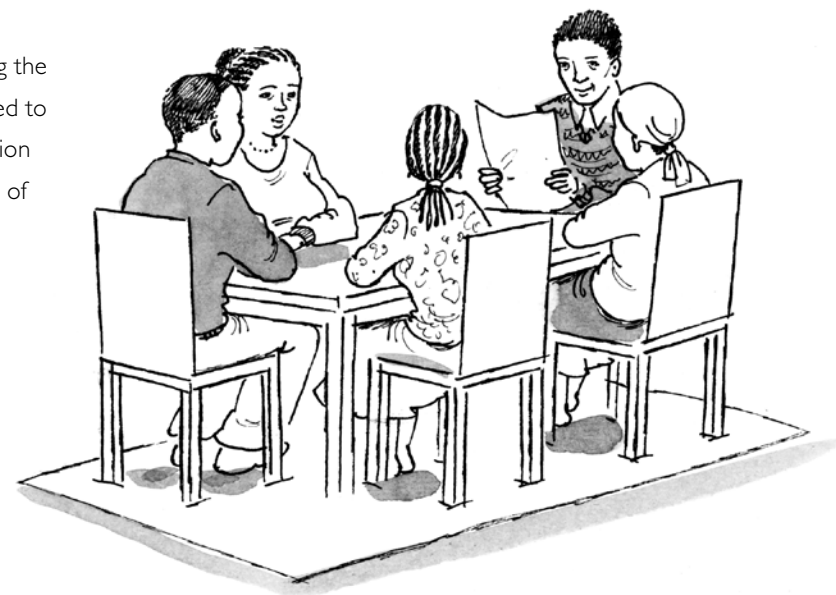
Support for the intentional inclusion of children with disabilities in broader community development projects and activities is an ongoing challenge. These children are often forgotten; they are very much hidden, and may be unable to leave their homes by themselves. Unless NGOs, volunteers and local governments actively enquire about the incidence and treatment of disability

in-community, there is a risk that they will be excluded from development. It is helpful for all organisations to review their attention to these “invisible children”.

### Maintaining participation

It is very important to think through how child participation may be maintained in your organisation, because issues like participation are often victims of what might be called the “Vanishing Trick”. Participation may be clearly present in the early stages, but often gradually disappears as the process continues. Thus the issue of participation might be strongly present in the original research/study and even the planning, but as the programme moves towards implementation, the actual participation of the children gets less and less. Or child participation may become more and more theoretical until, in the end, it is the adults controlling the processes as usual. Similarly, children might be allowed to participate more in specific events but the participation could disappear with regard to the ongoing activities of the organisation or institution.

One way to ensure ongoing child participation is to have regular planning and review processes where this topic is explicitly discussed. Another aspect of maintaining child participation is to become more aware of the language and attitudes within the organization. Our development language frequently gives us away. We see people we work with as ‘targets’ rather than as partners. In other words they are external to us, ‘the other’ which has to be reached by those of us who are ‘in the know’. This cannot lead to meaningful participation until we view the children as our partners. And once we do, they prove that they are very worthy to be our partners.



## Child participation and advocacy

REPSI also advocates that psychosocial support services should not be specialised services that reach only a few children. Instead, we should be finding ways of improving the psychosocial wellbeing of all children. This is shown in the pyramid diagram below:

### 5. Specialised Mental Health Services:

Psychiatric, clinical psychological and other specialised services for the few children with more severe responses

### 4. Focused Support:

Additional non-specialised support for children who are not coping and who are showing signs of distress

### 3. Family and Community Support:

Everyday care and support provided by caregivers, friends and community members

### 2. Provision of Basic Services:

Shelter, food, health and education, into which PSS needs to be mainstreamed, to reach many children and support ways of coping

### 1. Advocacy:

Influencing policy and changes to the social conditions that affect the wellbeing of millions of children

## Multi-layered, integrated Psychosocial Support

There are many different forms of psychosocial support (PSS). These may be offered at different levels to support children, families and communities. The model below may be used to consider the various levels at which psychosocial support can be structured.

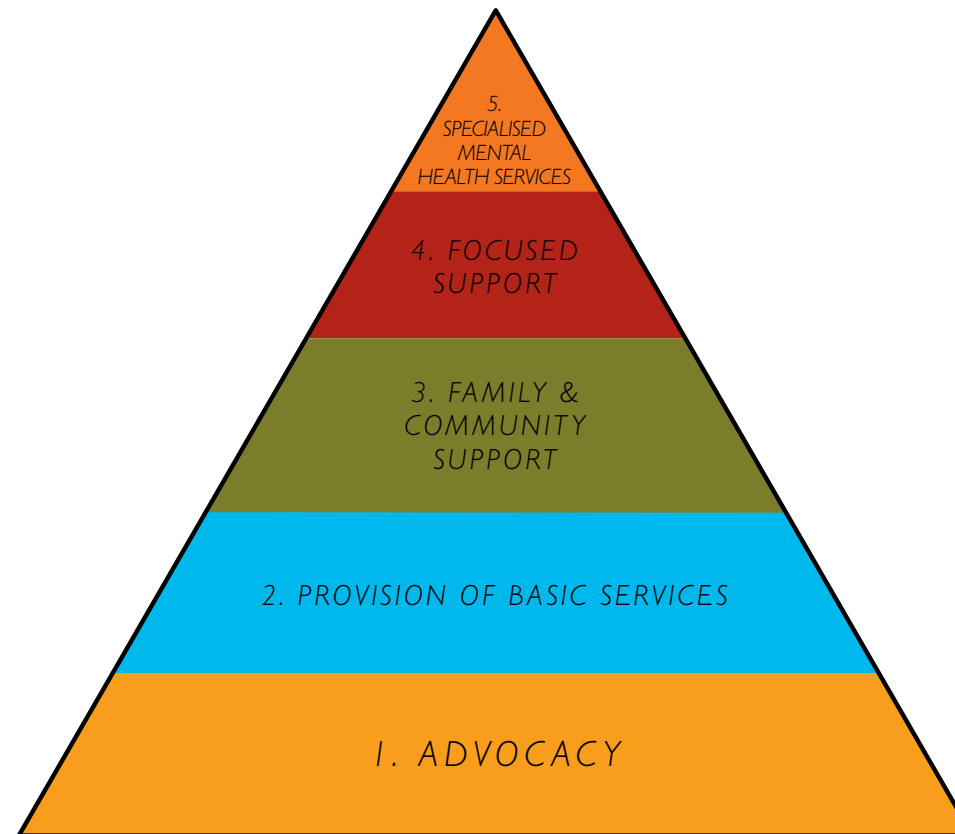
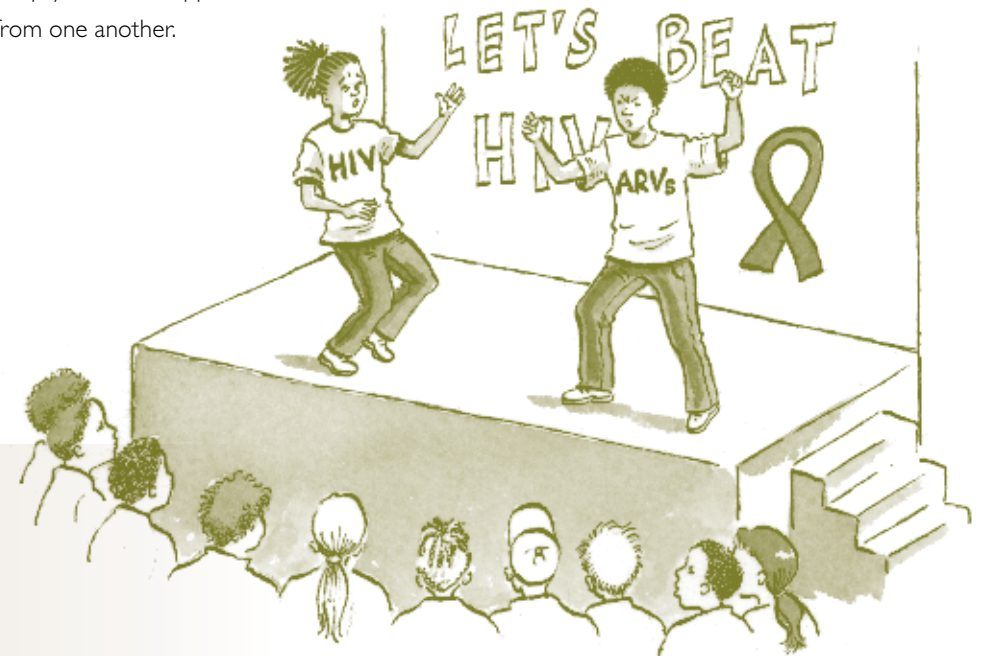


Diagram 2: Multi-layered, Integrated Psychosocial Support

REPSI is encouraging more organisations like yours to focus on what can be done at levels 1 and 2 to mainstream psychosocial support. This is about thinking strategically about how to reach many children with basic psychosocial support. Child participation may be a powerful way of doing advocacy and ensuring basic services for the wellbeing of all children. If children are given a chance to prepare themselves and consult with their fellow children, their voice can have a tremendous impact as shown in the RIATT conference in Dar es Salaam and the Global Partners Forum in Dublin in September/ October 2008. However, this also needs to be supported with follow up activities.

Advocacy initiatives may be enhanced by working together with other organisations in a network. This may be an opportunity to share ideas about both psychosocial support and child participation and to learn from one another.



**CASE STUDY**

*Advocacy and networking initiative*

UNICEF and other partners are strongly supporting the concept of 'child friendly schools' which includes child participation. There are NGOs, such as HakiElimu in Tanzania which are promoting the same. Most schools already have some rudimentary participation such as school councils and a prefect system which provides space for child leadership. Many also have some form of peer education programmes related to HIV and AIDS. Therefore most schools already have some child participation approaches which may be strengthened. UNICEF has found that even teachers who were resistant at first to the ideas of increasing child participation, said that the benefits of having children actively involved in developing the school and supporting one another were soon evident. Improving child participation and psychosocial support in schools is an excellent way to reach many children within a structured and consistent environment.

Another example of being strategic to support more children, through the use of child participation methods, is shown in the case study below. While it was set up for young people, it can be applied also to a children's programme. It should also be recognised that young people (aged 19 to 24) are key allies, supporters and mentors in the development of children's programmes.

The impact of this youth-led programme in Tanzania has been far-reaching:

- Young people have responded positively to the change to participate as artists, shown a great deal of talent and analytical skills.
- Peer educators including the girls, changed visibly during the training, showing heightened self-awareness and self-esteem.
- The recognition of young people by their communities as vanguards of the HIV/AIDS campaign has contributed to self-confidence and a change in behaviour based on that.
- The participatory action research has provided the communities with the information they needed for action to reduce risk with the young people taking the lead.
- Some artists and peer educators have become national facilitators. Artists provide the analytical and assessment role, something usually done by adults, who are more expensive and mostly too distant socially, culturally and economically, from young people to be able to relate to them on intimate personal development issues.



## CASE STUDY

### *Out of school youth programme in Tanzania*

In 1999/2000, UNICEF, in conjunction with local government, supported the development of an out of school programme, based on community research and feedback by young artists, the establishment of community based youth centres and training of members of these centres. The original goal of the programme was to empower young people to protect themselves from HIV but the young people soon transformed it into a more holistic youth development programme. The programme quickly expanded to 19 districts and became the model for youth development in the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Youth Development (MLEYD). Particular features of the programme included:

- A district wide approach from the outset. When the programme starts in a district, every ward is encouraged to develop its own youth centre and young people are trained from all the wards. This is in recognition of the need to reach as many young people as possible from the outset.
- Participatory Action Research carried out by the young people themselves and feedback to their communities

through theatre for development. This created tremendous debate in communities as they could not ignore the issues being raised by their own children, produced momentum for change and greatly empowered the young artists taking part as their contribution was highly recognised by their communities

- In depth training (one month) of the peer educators, based on a life skills approach, which meant that they were really able to act as educators in their communities

Kisarawe District Development Network is an example of a District Development Network, which after two years of existence was registered as a Non-Governmental Organization. It has membership from the 15 wards of the District. It has an Executive of members elected by the various Youth Ward centres. The following age groups characterise its membership: 10-14, 15-18, 19-24, and 25-35. These age groups determine the activities in Network. There is a constitution and leadership changes every three years. The District of Kisarawe has offered it space for its own District office.

- Ward-based youth groups have established district youth networking groups. They coordinate and work with local international civil society organizations.
- In some districts, the leaders of the youth centres have been incorporated into the community governance structures and ward development committees.

The outcomes of the various interventions had impact at personal, family, community, institutional and national levels.

The research showed that:

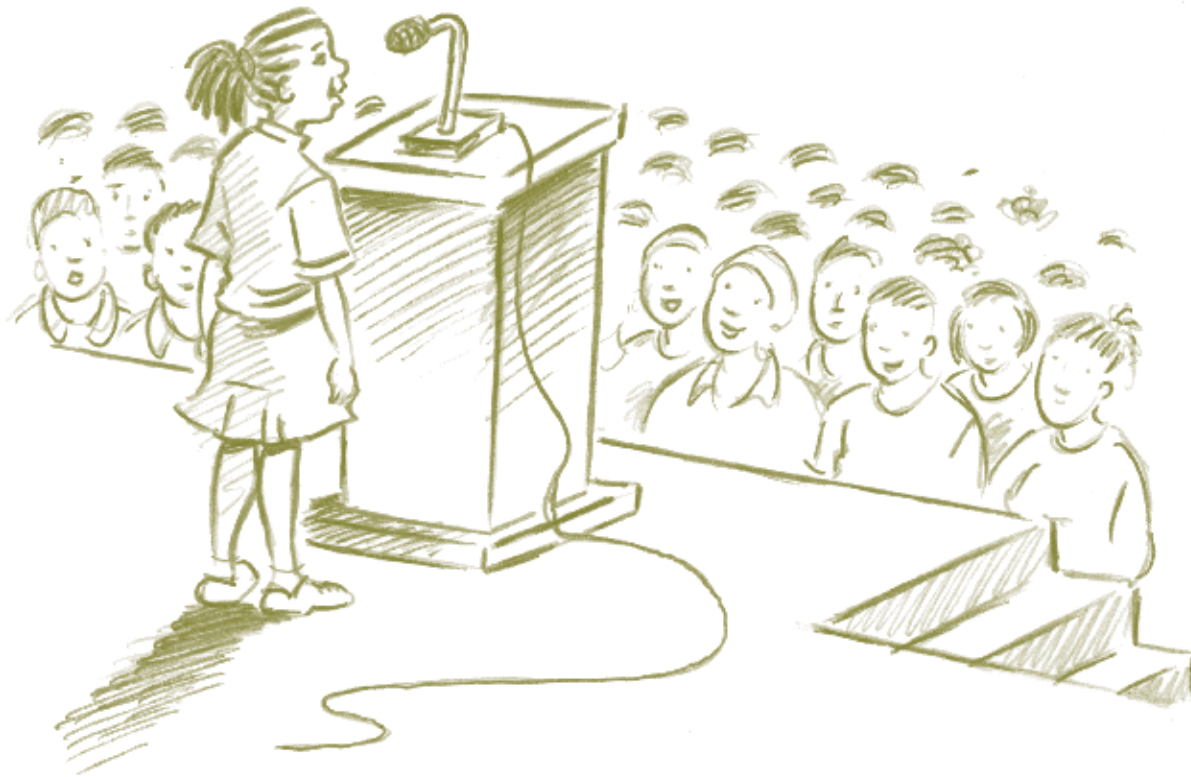
- More development agencies and other donors now trust young people with funds. This is a recent development, as it was not happening before.
- More and more District Councils do consult and listen to views of children and young people on development issues.
- Children and young people from the networks have

participated fully in and made very insightful input into the national Development and Growth Strategy (MKUKUTA); the review of the Child and Youth Development Policies and the revised Children Act. In the words of one government official "The views of children to the Children Development Policy left us all (the management of the ministry) amazed with what we got from them. Children are intelligent, have good ideas and can contribute effectively on issues concerning them."

- In the fight against HIV and AIDS, more and more young people are being recognised as the vanguards in the campaign that has in turn contributed to self-confidence.



## 6 Making Child Participation Practical



### Tools in child participation

There is a growing body of tools on child participation. Many of these are available on the internet. Others may be ordered as manuals and toolkits. One of the most effective ways of mainstreaming child participation in your organization is also to find out which local organisations in your area have some experience and materials in this regard. Then you are able to share resources and support one another in the journey of child participation mainstreaming.

This section highlights a few generic tools on child participation which may be useful to support your work.

### *Child Participation Toolkits*

Dynamix Ltd has a useful toolkit called “Participation – Spice it up! Practical tools for engaging children and young people in planning and consultation.” This was developed with Save the Children UK, London. It may be purchased on their website [www.dynamix.ltd.uk](http://www.dynamix.ltd.uk).

Save the Children UK ([www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)) has an active online library with freely available download materials such as:

- So you want to consult with children? A toolkit of good practice
- So you want to involve children in research?
- All Together Now: Community participation for children and young people

### *Kids Clubs*

Another current and useful resource from REPSSI is a training guide for Kids Club Leaders, called “Facilitating Care and Support Through Kids Clubs”. This is a practical workshop programme for Kids Club leaders to help them establish their own youth-led clubs. The guide may be downloaded free of charge from [www.repssi.org](http://www.repssi.org).

Soul City produce regular multi-media “edutainment” materials for Soul Buddyz Clubs, which may be run in schools. The materials are creative and simply produced so that children and youth can take a lead role in facilitating sessions

on interesting topics around health and wellbeing. The topics themselves are selected in consultation with children and youth from South Africa. The sessions are designed for specific age groups. You can download these materials free of charge from [www.soulcity.org.za](http://www.soulcity.org.za).

### *Starting Child- and Youth-led Organisations*

Humuliza and REPSSI have just produced a valuable resource on how to start your own child-led organization. Called “Mobilising Children and Youth into their own Child- and Youth-led Organisations”, the manual was written by Dr Kurt Madoerin who has many years of experience in child participation. This manual may be downloaded free of charge from [www.repssi.org.za](http://www.repssi.org.za).

### *Child participation facilitation skills*

It is helpful for an organisation wishing to mainstream child participation to invest in people who are well suited to this type of work. These may be people who naturally connect well with children, who are energetic and enthusiastic. They are also people who are sensitive to group dynamics and are able to support children to be constructive and caring towards one another.

Facilitating child participation is also a skill that may be developed over time. Save the Children UK gives the following useful tips for facilitating child participation activities:

- Honour each child and young person

- Trust the resources of the children and young people’s group
- Tap into children and young people’s energy
- Monitor the energy level and go with where there is energy from the children and young people
- Be attentive at all times
- Be adaptable
- If you don’t know, say so
- When in doubt, ask the children and youth for their ideas
- Be yourself
- Keep intervention to a minimum
- Don’t be attached to your own interventions
- Take everything that happens as relevant
- Be creative
- Have a sense of humour

One of the most important things in encouraging child participation is to create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. In “Are we making a difference?” Madoerin and Clacherty advocate that if children are quiet in response to questions, they may not feel relaxed or safe enough to speak (REPSSI, 2009). They advocate spending some time playing games or asking questions about the child’s life before continuing with the other questions. Here are some exercises that may be enjoyable ways of encouraging children to contribute and participate actively.

## Child participation exercises

There is a wealth of ideas generated from organisations throughout Africa and the world on involving children in creative ways. These are a few selected ideas of exercises that tend to work well with children and youth. They may be adapted to the topic which one is addressing with children at the time.

### *Rituals*

Most children enjoy a sense of order and ritual. This usually means saying or doing special things at certain set times. For example there could be certain things that the children say together or a song or dance or prayer that they do at the start and end of each meeting or time together. Try to let the children come up with these ideas and implement them at time they meet.

### *Stories*

Most children love to hear stories, especially about other children or animals. To encourage discussion about a particular topic, one can tell a story about a child or an animal that was in a particular situation. The children may then discuss in groups how that situation may be handled by the child, the animal or others in the story. This distances the topic slightly from themselves, while accessing their opinions on the subject.

### *Drawings and art work*

Creative art work like drawings, clay modeling and making a collage together can be very helpful ways for children and youth to engage with a particular topic. Drawings may be of a map of the child's community, the child's house or family, school, the child's body or self, to mention but a few ideas.

### *Music*

Most young people enjoy songs, music and dancing. Allow plenty of time for this important form of creative expression. Young people may also write their own words to their favourite songs. Particular types of songs may also be chosen to express certain moods of the group. The songs that they select or create can contribute meaningfully in terms of their participation in a particular subject or process.



### *Drama and role plays*

Most children enjoy designing short drama productions or role plays. Acting out certain situations or feelings can help children to express what is happening in their lives or what they wish to communicate. Try to structure these dramatic representations carefully so that the children come up with positive messages about the topics they are addressing.

### *Media presentations*

Children and youth usually enjoy coming up with presentations in a format that they are used to from their home life. For example, you could ask the participants to come up with a radio show, television presentation or a newspaper article.

### *Game shows and competitions*

Creating special game shows or competitions may be a fun way of tackling certain topics. For example, children may be aware of a particular game show on television, or a particular game that is played in the community – this can be adapted to suit the topic at hand. Care should be taken though to avoid negative competition or ridicule. The facilitators (adults and children) may also try to structure games and competitions so that children with different abilities may select and do well at different tasks. Children should not find participation in any games or competitions embarrassing.



### *Physical exercises*

Try to structure topics so that they involve physical exercise such as running, standing together with certain similar people, jumping and catching. Try to take care to allow children to feel competent in what they are doing and don't choose difficult exercises that make any children feel embarrassed. If possible, allow children to get messy or play with water if the weather allows.



### *Physical contact*

Although many of our traditional cultures discourage certain types of physical contact between people as we grow older, young children have a strong need for some form of physical contact. This may be especially important for children who have been neglected or abused. It is important for them to understand safe contact and to experience caring human contact. Depending on what is appropriate in your context, encourage safe physical contact like shaking hands, hugging, linking arms, games where children carry one another on their backs or climb over one another etc. The children themselves may be able to say how they would like to greet one another and could even come up with a special handshake or hugging ritual. If you are working with a group of children from a different cultural or ethnic group to your own, be careful not to introduce culturally inappropriate forms of physical contact – for example hugging may be considered inappropriate in some contexts.

### *Membership and signs of belonging*

Things like clothes, caps and badges are usually very valuable to young people, especially when they show belonging to a club or social group. Help children and youth to design a logo, and select a name for themselves. They may be able to make small badges that they pin onto their shirts, or if your budget allows, let them have special T-shirts, caps or bags printed with their logo and name. Such physical signs of belonging may be helpful when engaging in child participation activities since they

make the children easily identifiable. They are also powerful for activities like advocacy where one wants to create an image of a united movement of children and youth.

### *Letters*

Writing letters to one another, or to a person in authority can be a creative way of helping children to express their appreciations and concerns.

### *Home visits*

Encourage children to visit one another's homes for special occasions like birthdays or condolences. Have open discussions about concerns that children might have, like those who do not have the resources to give visitors refreshments, so that this does not cause embarrassment.

### *Friends' visit days*

Special days or shows may be arranged where children invite family and friends to hear about what they have been working on together in their group. Care should be taken not to exclude children who do not have parents, hence the term "friends". The day may be called "Friends of ...", using the name of the group. Where possible, encourage the visitors to give positive feedback so that the experience builds the children's self-esteem.

### *Objects and symbols*

Children and young people often respond well to expressing themselves in relation to another object or animal. For example, Humuliza, in Tanzania, uses an exercise where children bring an actual stone to the group to represent how they are feeling and what has been happening in their lives. So for example if someone brings in a big heavy stone, he or she may explain that there have been heavy things happening in the past week. Humuliza also have a set of drawings of a dinosaur creature (called "Dino") which shows different expressions. This allows children to talk about themselves and come up with ideas through another creature, which is less threatening. The Dino cards are freely available from [www.repssi.org](http://www.repssi.org). Note that some cultures find it offensive to be compared to an animal, so take care to explain that you are not saying that person is an animal. Sinani, in South Africa, use the image of us each carrying a basket on our backs where we bring certain things to the group and where we would like to add certain things to our basket.

### *Scaling exercises*

If you want to ask children a question that involves something like a scale from 1 to 5, you can use a physical scale, like a line drawn in the sand. For example, it may be explained to the children that the one end of the scale is for those who feel very happy about something and the other end of the line is for people who feel very unhappy about it. The areas in-between are for people who feel a little bit happy or unhappy.

### *Rotating leadership*

Consider encouraging 6-monthly or annual leadership position changes for children's groups or organisations. This enables different people to practice their leadership skills. It also prevents certain people from dominating or becoming too powerful in a group. Ask different members to run different parts of a meeting. This can also be the main role of a leader – to share and allocate responsibilities amongst members. When choosing leaders try to encourage principles of democracy, but also encourage quieter members of the group to have a turn at leadership roles.

### *Group discussions*

Children may find it easier to discuss topics in a small group. Help the groups to find ways of listening to everyone in the group and to record their discussions. Reporting back to the bigger group on behalf of a small group can be an empowering exercise if children are well supported.

### *Games and energizers*

Of course, when working with children and youth, it is also helpful and fun to include as many 'energizers' and games as possible. You may ask different children to take turn to come up with and lead such energizers.

Wherever possible, allow children to design and select the activities for their programme, giving as much control to them as possible. The adult facilitators may be more active in the early stages of the process, but hopefully children will soon be able to express their own ideas and follow their priorities.

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### *CHILD PARTICIPATION IN ACTION*

*Kurt Madoerin and Glynis Clacherty have written a useful manual called "Are we making a difference?" This is a guide for facilitating participatory evaluations with children, and it contains many useful exercises that may be used in a range of settings. You can download this manual from [www.repssi.org](http://www.repssi.org).*

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## Child participation questions

Child participation is more about an attitude than specific techniques, but here is a simple set of questions that other people have found useful in encouraging child participation. They are questions that may be asked directly to children. Some of these ideas come from theories on Solution Focused Approaches<sup>4</sup>. If children are old enough to read, some of the questions may be written on cards and asked by group leaders to the rest of the group.

### General questions

- What do you think would be the best way to do this?
- How have you done this successfully in the past?
- Can you think of a time when you did this well before? What did you do?
- How would it look if you that was no longer a problem for you?
- What would you be doing if you had already overcome that problem?
- Who that we know may be able to help us with this issue?
- Who do we trust to be able to talk to about this issue?
- Where can we get more information about this?
- What am I good at that I could bring to this project?
- In response to a story: What do you think the person in this story should do?

### Questions about participation

- What type of child or young person do we wish to have in our project?
- How can we choose members so that we hear from all the different types of children?
- Which children or young people do we notice are missing from our project?
- How can we invite others to join our project?

### Questions about how to behave towards each other

- How do you think we can make sure that everyone who joins this group feels welcome?
- How do we make sure that everyone has an equal chance to say what they think in this group?
- How do we build each other up, rather than breaking each other down when we speak to one another?
- If you were a very shy creature, like a very small mouse, how could other mice help you to be braver? (this question can be adapted to other creatures and group dynamics – like an angry lion that has hurt his foot)

### Questions about caring for one another

- If you were someone who had a bad week at home, what would you like others to do for you?
- If you knew someone who was struggling with something, how could you help that person to feel better?
- If we notice that someone is missing from our group meetings, what should we do?
- How do friends show each other that they are friends?

### Questions about priorities

- What do you think is the most important thing that we should be working on together?
- What would need to happen here for you to say that it was worthwhile for you to be part of this project?

### Reflection questions

- What I liked most about today was ...
- I felt most excited when we were ...
- I felt most disconnected (cut off from what was happening) when we were ...
- What I wish we could do more of is ...
- What I noticed someone else doing well today was ...
- What I like about you is ...

4: Berg, I. and Steiner, T. (2003) Children's Solution Work. New York: W.W. Norton and Company

# 7 Measuring Your Success

It is good to remind yourself of your progress in growing your focus on child participation as an organisation. Measuring the value and impact of child participation can be tricky, as it is difficult to separate the impact of child participation from other contributing factors. However, here are some suggested indicators to help you measure child participation and its impact in your organisation.



## Child participation assessment tool

Focus	Question	Answer
<i>Starting off</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have you had discussions about involving children in your institution - with all staff, board members, supervisors, and children?</li> </ul>	
<i>Planning and review processes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there an action plan which includes children's participation? Were the children involved in preparing the action plan?</li> <li>Are children included in planning, decision-making, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation? Do children choose their own representatives?</li> <li>What measures are taken to ensure maximum representation (by age, sex, education level, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, urban/rural etc)</li> <li>Do children initiate and plan their own activities?</li> <li>Do children have an activity to monitor and feed back on their participation at regular intervals (e.g. quarterly)?</li> </ul>	
<i>Capacity development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What programmes are in place to develop the capacity of adults to work with children? How many have been trained?</li> <li>Do children receive training to lead discussions, participate in decision-making meetings, and represent your institution externally? How many have been trained?</li> <li>Are there opportunities (time and funding) for children to network with partner institutions?</li> </ul>	
<i>Activities of the organisation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many children do you have serving on decision-making groups (ratio of children to adults)?</li> <li>How many children do you have represented in planning and implementing projects</li> </ul>	

## Organisational review processes with children

Here are some ideas of the types of questions that you could use with children themselves to review the organisation's growing commitment to child participation. You could use these questions regularly in the form of group discussions with children.

- How do you feel about the way you participate in the organisation? Do you feel you have a voice? How? To what extent is your voice listened to by adults and your fellow children?
- How have you been involved in different activities? Were you involved in the planning? How?
- Do you feel your leaders represent your ideas properly? Do they ask you for your opinion before they go to meetings?
- How do you feel about your participation in general? What are the strengths and weaknesses? How can it be improved?
- I feel most supported by this organisation when ...
- I feel most left out when ....

As the children grow in confidence and skill they could facilitate and discuss these questions themselves without adult supervision.

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### CHILD PARTICIPATION REVIEW PROCESSES

REPSI have written a useful manual called "Are we making a difference?"

This is a guide for facilitating participatory evaluations with children. You can download this manual from [www.repsi.org](http://www.repsi.org).

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## 8 *Conclusion*

It is the hope of REPSSI that organisations inspired to embark on a journey of involving children in more aspects of their functioning will find this a richly rewarding one. In the midst of difficult circumstances, the active participation of children in fulfilling their potential as human beings gives us clear direction, energy and hope for the future wellbeing of all children.

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