

What is meant by child participation?

Child participation means looking at the way programs are developed from the perspective of children, consulting with them, involving them and not making the assumption that adults always know best. In other words, children are engaged as active participants in the process, not seen as passive beneficiaries.

ChildFund believes that children's participation can and should operate at multiple levels – from home to government and from the local to the international level. Child participation involves:

- Paying attention to children's views, opinions and needs
- Creating more time for interaction with children, dealing with their problems and building trust
- Listening to children and actively soliciting their views
- Following up on children's ideas, information and suggestions
- Involving children in planning, implementation, problem identification, decision-making, monitoring and evaluation
- Taking children seriously at all times
- Involving children in discussions with parents, community leaders and others about issues affecting children so they feel free to discuss issues with them in the future when ChildFund staff are not around
- Reflecting critically on our work to identify constraints that hinder children's participation



Child participation is not just counting the number of children who attend a meeting. It is important to look at the way in which children are involved. Are they influencing or setting the agenda? Do they have real power in meetings? Do they speak openly with confidence – both the girls and the boys? Are they overpowered or excessively controlled by parents, adults or someone superior?

Why is children's participation important?



Research carried out by ChildFund Alliance in 2003 found that children experience poverty in some ways differently to adults. When development initiatives are carried out to address poverty, the focus is usually on adult priorities while children's needs (as identified by the children themselves) may not be considered. Development interventions that don't take children's views into account may fail to address children's experience of poverty.

Children have great insight, skills, knowledge, experience and energy that can be utilised. By providing real opportunities for children and youth to participate meaningfully in our development work, we will harness greater capacity to reduce poverty.

Participation is a way for children to learn and develop. By providing opportunities for children to participate in their own development, we are helping to build the skills of tomorrow's leaders. Fundamentally, children's participation is understood as a right that they, as with other members of the community, are entitled to exercise

What are some of the common barriers to children's participation?

The most common barrier to children's participation is reluctance by adults to value the ideas and opinions of children. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child acknowledges that children should be involved in the decisions that affect them, but in many cultures children are expected to remain silent while adults make all the decisions.



Other barriers include a lack of skills and confidence among children. In some countries children who are in the official structures of schools, churches, youth clubs and community organisations can be denied the opportunity to exercise their appointed roles, making their role tokenistic.

The degree of participation is influenced by the age level, ability and maturity of the child. It is important that any information that is provided to or sought from the child is given in a manner that is appropriate to the child's level of understanding. Adults have the responsibility to create a conducive environment for children to participate. Children also have responsibility to make their participation a reality.

What are some examples of children's participation in ChildFund's development work?

- In Bright Futures areas children and youth are fully involved in the Area Strategic Planning process. This ensures that children's voices are given legitimacy and their needs taken up in the strategic plans. Bright Futures encourages the development of child and youth organisations that are empowered to design and manage their own development initiatives.
- Child Clubs in Vietnam are providing children with their own space which they manage themselves. Children have the opportunity to develop their management skills, as well as skills in peer-to-peer education and advocacy.
- Building Child and Youth Agency projects in the Philippines focus on building the skills and confidence of children and youth as well as advocating for child participation with adult stakeholders so that children and youth are able to lead their own development. The projects involve helping children and youth to identify their concerns and to work with the local Government to get solutions placed firmly on the official Government agenda.
- The Papua New Guinea youth program is building up youth and children's clubs and assisting the formation of sporting teams. The child and youth associations, which are managed by children and youth, are supported and strengthened that they are better able to advocate for children's rights.
- In Cambodia, children's participation is prioritised in program activities including the establishment and management of Child Clubs, commune planning involving children to identify their needs and priorities and improved access to education.



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