

Child and Youth Participation Policy

Version 4.0

Introduction

There are more children and youth¹ in the world today than at any other point in history. A majority of these children and youth live in Global South countries. Many experience deprivation, exclusion, and vulnerability, and are unable to enjoy their rights. While there has been significant improvement in child rights realisation, following the COVID-19 pandemic it is estimated that an additional 100 million children are estimated to fall into poverty².

Utilising Lundy's Model of Participation (see Annex 2), ChildFund Australia is committed to ensuring children and youth are provided safe and inclusive space to express their views, are equipped to express these views in a manner of their own choosing, these views are communicated to those with the responsibility to listen, and these views are taken seriously and acted on, where appropriate³. Ultimately, ChildFund Australia is committed to ensuring that children and young people are active participants in creating change in their own communities, in our programming, and across the breadth of our organisation's work.

ChildFund Australia understands Child and Youth Participation to be core to our vision of children reaching their full potential and having a childhood. Our mission is to enable vulnerable children and young people, in all their diversity, to assert and realise their rights. Our Theory of Change specifically recognises the rights of children and young people in relation to education, health, participation, and protection, as well as their right to participate in crafting solutions.

ChildFund Australia understands that child and youth participation is a process where children and young people exercise agency over issues that affect them, either directly or indirectly. Participation includes children and youth expressing their views, having influence in decision-making including developing and implementing their own initiatives in a safe and meaningful. ChildFund prioritises children and youth in key policies and strategies. In ChildFund Australia's context, child and youth Participation is supported through standalone programs and projects and also incorporated in internal governance and decision-making processes in the ChildFund Australia Sydney Office and Country Offices. ChildFund Australia also recognises intersecting barriers to participation and supports child and youth inclusion in Gender and Disability Inclusion policies.

Frameworks

ChildFund Australia is guided by the following standards:

- Article 12, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) assures to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all

¹ Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence. As a category, youth is more fluid than other fixed age-groups and defined differently across different contexts. The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 as youth without prejudice to other definitions by Members States.

² UNICEF (2021). *Preventing a Lost Decade: Urgent Action to Reverse the Devastating Impact of COVID-19 on children and young people*.

³ Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2015). *The Lundy Voice Model of Participation as shown in Ireland's National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020*.

matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the children.

- Article 13, UNCRC specifies that a child shall have the right to freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.
- The UNCRC General Comment No.12 (2009) provides further clarity on the right of the child to be heard.
- The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, recognises the role of young people play in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security and identifies participation as a key pillar.

Key Principles

Participation: Children and young people have the right to have their views heard and given due weight, engage in civic action, influence their own local communities, and participate in public decision-making and accountability processes. Young people are also central to the SDG2030 agenda and should be included, wherever possible, in all stages of ChildFund Australia’s programming and represented in our governance structures.

Inclusion: Children and young people in all their full diversity have the potential to be key agents in driving progress if given systematic and organized support and opportunity and if existing barriers to leadership and participation are addressed.

Accountability: ChildFund Australia recognizes children and young people as rights holders and we aim to be transparent, accountable and responsive to the those who participate in our programs.

Policy Statement

ChildFund Australia seeks to ensure that children and youth in all their diversity have meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives, both directly and indirectly. We are committed to contesting power structures that exclude children and youth from shaping their own lives and futures, including those structures that exist in our own governance processes, programs and projects.

ChildFund Australia recognise the importance of child-centred approaches that allow for the participation of children and youth to be active in their own development. Child and Youth Participation further supports principles of building local capacity, supporting sustainable change, working in partnership, and adopting a rights-based and evidence-informed approach. This includes prioritising the voice and visibility of local partners, especially youth-led organisations and networks, in our regular development programming and emergency response. We are deeply committed to the localisation process, understanding that this means devolving decision-making authority, and sharing resources, opportunities and visibility with local partners including young people.

Policy Commitments

ChildFund Australia will support the participation of children and youth in five key ways:

1. Allocating resources to build capacity of staff and partners, including innovations to ensure child and youth participation in all aspects of ChildFund Australia’s work.
2. Developing programs and projects designed to increase the participation and ownership of children and youth throughout the full project life cycle.

3. Creating opportunities for youth-led and peer projects and capacitating young people to contribute, including youth representation in ChildFund Australia Board and/or Advisory Committee representation.
4. Identifying barriers to children's/youth's meaningful participation and responding to the exclusion of children/youth due to vulnerabilities (e.g., gender, disability, indigeneity, other forms of social exclusion, etc.).
5. Through policy and programmatic advocacy activities to amplify the voices and diverse perspectives of children and young people.

ChildFund Australia will:

- Adhere to ChildFund Australia's Policies and Procedures on Child Safeguarding and PSEAH.
- Adhere to ChildFund Australia's *Practice Standards for the Ethical Participation of Children and Youth* (Annex 1).
- Support the participation of children and youth throughout all stages in the project cycle by:
 - Conducting and regularly updating a child and youth situational analysis to inform Country Strategy Papers, programs and projects.
 - Including the participation of children and youth in the design, monitoring and evaluation of all projects.
 - Undertaking project level risk assessments to ensure that ChildFund Australia projects provide an enabling and safe context for child and youth participation.
 - Identifying and strengthening youth-led partners, networks and associations.
 - Increasing the number of activities that are implemented in collaboration with or led by children and young people.
 - Ensuring children are consulted on the design, implementation and monitoring of feedback and complaints mechanisms.

Annex 1: ChildFund Australia's Practice Standards for Ethical Participation

In all participation work with children and youth, it is essential to have regard to the basic requirements of meaningful and ethical participation. These requirements have been adapted from Save the Children's Practice Standards and the Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment, No.12 'the right of the child to be heard'.⁴ While these standards specifically apply to children, ChildFund Australia adopts the same standards for participation activities with children and youth. These standards require that all participation be:

1. **Transparent and informative** – children and youth must be provided with full, accessible, and age-appropriate information (that is also sensitive to diversity) about their right to express their views freely; information should include how their views will be given due weight, how the participation will take place, and its scope, purpose and potential impact.
2. **Voluntary** – children and youth should never be coerced into expressing views against their wishes and they should be informed that they can cease their involvement at any stage.
3. **Respectful** – children and youth's views have to be treated with respect and they should be provided with opportunities to initiate ideas and activities. Adults should acknowledge, respect and build on good examples of child and youth participation. Adults also need an understanding of the socio-economic, environmental and cultural context of children and youth's lives.
4. **Relevant** – the issues on which children and youth have the right to express their views must be of real relevance to their lives and enable them to draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities. In addition, children and youth need to have opportunities to highlight and address the issues they themselves identify as relevant and important.
5. **Child and youth-friendly** – environments and working methods should be adapted to children and youths' evolving capacities. Adequate time and resources should be available to ensure that children are adequately prepared and have the confidence and opportunity to contribute their views. Children need differing levels of support and forms of involvement according to their age and evolving capacities.
6. **Inclusive** – participation must be inclusive, avoid existing patterns of discrimination, and encourage opportunities for marginalised girls and boys and young women and men. Programs also need to ensure that they are culturally sensitive to the situation of children and youth from all communities. All genders must have equitable opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, programs and projects we support.
7. **Safe and sensitive to risk** – children should be safeguarded and protected from harm. In certain situations, encouraging marginalised girls, boys, young women, and men to express their views may put them at risk. Adults have a responsibility towards the children and youth they are working with and must take every precaution to minimise the risk to children and youth of violence, exploitation or any other negative consequence of their participation. Children must be aware of their right to be protected from harm and must know where to go for help if needed. Investment in working with families and communities is important in order to build understanding of the value and implications of participation, and to minimise the risks to which children may otherwise be exposed.

⁴ *Practice Standards in Children's Participation: A User Friendly Summary*, USAID and Save the Children and Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12, The Right of the Child to be Heard, CRC/C/GC/12, July 2009.

For more information on these practice standards, see Gerison Lansdown, Every Child's Right to be Heard: A Resource on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12. https://www.unicef.org/french/adolescence/files/Every_Childs_Right_to_be_Heard.pdf

Annex 2: The Lundy Voice Model Checklist for Participation

The Lundy Voice Model is grounded in the UNCRC and focused on a rights-based approach to involving children in decision-making. It identifies four elements for conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC. These four elements and accompanying checklist questions are outlined below and can be used to inform ChildFund Australia efforts to foster meaningful child and youth participation practices.

- **Space:** Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to express their view
 - Have children’s views been actively sought?
 - Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?
 - Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?
- **Voice:** Children must be facilitated to express their view
 - Have children been given the information they need to form a view?
 - Do children know that they do not have to take part?
 - Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?
- **Audience:** The view must be listened to
 - Is there a process for communicating children’s views?
 - Do children know who their views are being communicated to?
 - Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?
- **Influence:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate
 - Were the children’s views considered by those with the power to effect change?

For more information on the Lundy model, see Ireland’s National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020, p22.

https://eurochild.org/uploads/2021/01/National_Strategy_-_Child_Participation.pdf

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