PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND CIVIL SOCIETY





unite for children

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INTRODUCTION: CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Child and youth participation is about all children and young people having the opportunity to express their views and influence decision-making. Children's participation is an informed and willing process of involvement of all children, including the most marginalised and those of different ages and abilities, in any matter concerning them either directly or indirectly. Children's participation is a way of working and an essential child rights principle that cuts across all programs and takes place in all arenas - from homes to governments, from local to international levels. The NACC assessment found that in some countries child and youth participation in NACC activities had occurred through a range of participation opportunities and activities. Only one country had a child representative member on the NACC, and youth organisations were represented on NACCs and in Sub-committees in some countries.

Child participation is a cornerstone of every child's individual overall development (see Introduction to the CRC in Booklet 1). A child who lives in a family that listens to them, takes into account their ideas and opinions, and helps them to make decisions and take responsibility is more likely to participate in decisions affecting their community as they grow and develop. Equally, communities who value and listen to their children, encouraging them to take an active role in community life, will benefit from harmonious social development and the active citizenship of their children and young people.

Children are born with civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, but they need an enabling environment to access these rights in accordance with their emerging and developing capacities.

"While it is the State which takes on obligations under the Convention, its task of implementation – of making reality of the human rights of children – needs to engage all sectors of society and, of course, children themselves."

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment #5

More than one third of the world's children live in East Asia, South Asia and the Pacific. While Western cultures stress individual rights, Asian societies place greater emphasis on responsibilities of the individual towards family, community and society. Similarly, this is traditionally the case in the Pacific. By definition, civil rights are protections and privileges given to citizens and citizenship means a collection of rights and obligations that define the members of a community. In short, civil rights inherently refer to individuals. However, in societies where individuals exist as part of and having responsibilities toward the whole, ensuring civil rights for one third of the world's children continues to be a challenge. Civil rights and citizenship are closely linked to countryspecific political, social and cultural contexts.

The definition of 'youth' in the Pacific overlaps that of a child, with Youth Policies covering ages 15–30 in most countries. Cultural definitions of youth also add another layer of definitions to the mix of citizenship and impacts upon an individual's access to participation in decision-making at all levels of society. A vibrant society which embraces its children and young people's development and participation can only benefit from the inclusion of their ideas, knowledge and skills and from the challenges these bring.

The vast majority of public decisions affecting children are made without considering their views or involving them. Much of the work of government and civil society is carried out without explicit recognition of children and young people. When children do participate, it is often tokenistic and not sustained, such as when children appear at conferences or public consultations.¹

Public decisions that are informed by the views and concerns of young people lead to better policies and better services. Researching children's views produces more detailed information of the concerns of a wide variety of children than inviting a few children to high-level conferences.²

Child and Youth Participation:

- leads to better decisions about outcomes;
- is an integral part of any democratic society;
- strengthens children's and young people's understanding of human rights and democracy;
- strengthens intergenerational dialogue and mutual understanding;
- promotes social integration and cohesion in society;
- encourages more children and young people to participate by example.

Challenges

Inequality

Children and youth are often seen as having a lower social status than adults, and girls have less opportunity than boys. Other factors such as coming from a poor family, living in an isolated community or having a disability may also create inequality. Participation efforts must strive to address these inequalities.

Lack of mutual respect and trust

Generational differences, negative and preconceived ideas, poor cooperation and understanding may produce a lack of communication.

Poor education and training

Children and young people who are not taught skills for critical thinking, problem-solving through participatory education processes. Some cultural upbringings can also prevent children from questioning authority.

Weak infrastructure

Lack of access to institutional systems and structures within government, the media, the community and private and civil society organisations.

Lack of representation

Ensuring that children who will be most affected by the decisions being made is not easy, as often these are the most marginalised children. It is critical that child representation is not tokenistic or and that opportunities are only given to children of families who have access to decision makers.

The cost

It costs more to have children participate than it does adults, but the overall benefits outweigh the efforts and cost of facilitating participation. There are also many cost-effective methods of engaging children.

The lack of skilled facilitators

Facilitating child participation is a specific skill that is distinctly different from 'teaching' or 'leading', though these are both aspects of facilitating. Time is also needed for adequate skills building and follow-up.



Steps for Child and Youth Participation



STEP 1	Identify groups of representative children (these could be independent children's organisations, sport or cultural clubs or associations, church groups, NGO children's groups, or a children's parliament representative or a school representative).
STEP 2	Decide on the mechanisms for child and youth participation (see page 9 for examples).
STEP 3	Consult Sub-committee partners to determine the most appropriate agencies and organisations to undertake the child participation activities.
STEP 4	Coordinate nominated agencies in the development of child participation programs, ensuring that ALL programs follow set child participation program standards.
STEP 5	Prepare strategic plan with timeline and budget.
STEP 6	Prepare advocacy strategy for child participation plan.
STEP 7	Promote NACC child participation strategy through media for general public.
STEP 9	Launch NACC child participation strategy at a high profile function.
STEP 10	Actively monitor and evaluate program implementation closely focusing on ensuring access for all children, their safety and protection.

NOTE: Any approach to child participation would need to be based on National Standards for Child Participation, including a Code of Conduct, which could be developed, endorsed and implemented by the NACC, and would need to take account of the challenges of participation.

Principles for Child and Youth Participation



- 1. An ethical approach: Transparency, honesty and accountability. Adults involved in consultations with children follow ethical and participatory practice and put children's best interests first.
- 2. Child participation is relevant and voluntary: The child's participation must be relevant to their level of development and interest and their involvement must be voluntary
- **3.** A child-friendly environment: Children experience a safe, welcoming, inclusive and encouraging environment that enables participation.
- 4. Equality of opportunity: Participatory work should include groups of children who typically suffer discrimination or who are often excluded from activities, such as girls, working children, children with disabilities and rural children.
- 5. Safety and protection of children: All people working with children have a duty of care and this is particularly relevant to child participation. Involvement in a consultation must not expose any young delegate to threats or actual harm to well-being. A child's safety and health is considered in every possible way, with safeguards put in place. Organizational Child Protection Policies and Code of Conduct for all staff and volunteers must be in place.
- 6. Commitment and competency of adults: Adults working with children are committed to the aim of consulting with children and are trained and supported to carry out participatory practices.
- 7. Ensuring follow-up and evaluation: Providing children with feedback and hearing from children about their experience of being involved demonstrates respect for the child's views and values their contributions.



www.crin.org/docs/Participation.pdf

This resource provide further details on how to apply the principles of participation to consultation activities with children.

National Child Protection Policies and Codes of Conduct

Many organizations working with and for children create Child Protection Policies and mandatory Codes of Conduct that all involved adults must sign and abide by. Such Codes set out principles for how adults will and will not treat and interact with children in various contexts, and assure respect for children's rights and safety. The NACC has a primary responsibility to lead the development of a National Government Child Protection Policy which includes a Code of Conduct, and engage all partner organizations working with children to become signatories to the Policy.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child grants children freedom of expression, association and assembly. Children are entitled to join political parties and labour unions. However, many obstacles exist for children in influencing public decisions. There is a need to ensure that children who are involved in policies and politics are protected and are not exposed to violence and other unacceptable risks.

Are children citizens?³

Though the human rights framework clearly defines a citizen and participatory role for *all* people, the question of whether children are citizens or not, is pertinent, for there is the common belief that children are 'citizens in waiting'. However, all children are born with civil, political, social and economic rights. These rights enable them to practice their citizenship – at least to some extent. Children's entitlement to being citizens does not depend on their future contributions to society. Children's ability to exercise their citizenship rights and responsibilities evolves as they grow and learn. As competent social actors, children are making important contributions to society. As members of society, they have a strong interest in their society's development.

Children's citizenship rights: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) is the first human-rights treaty to explicitly recognize children's civil rights (see Box 1). However, the CRC does not extend all political rights to children. Some countries, such as Nicaragua and Iran, go beyond the rights enshrined in the CRC and offer the right to vote to some older children. As children's rights continue to be adapted to the social, political and economic realities of fast-changing societies, we may see increased demands to extend the right to vote to older children in the coming decades. Irrespective of their lack of formal political rights, children are taking part in political actions, movements, campaigns, political and armed struggles, and are members of political parties.

Some civil rights of children according to the CRC

Article 2 – Non discrimination:

All rights must be granted to each child without exception. The State must protect all children without exception. The State must protect children against all forms of discrimination (irrespective of a child's political or other opinions).

Article 7 – Name and nationality:

Children have the right to a name at birth (and a child's birth should be registered). Children also have the right to acquire a nationality, and as far as possible, to know and be cared for by their parents.

Article 8 – Preservation of identity:

The State has an obligation to protect and, if necessary, re-establish basic aspects of a child's identity. This includes name, nationality,

and family ties.

Article 12 – The opinion of the child:

Children have the right to express their opinions freely and to have their opinions taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting them.

Article 13 – Freedom of expression:

Children have the right to express their views, obtain information and make ideas or information known. Article 14 – Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion:

The State shall respect children's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, subject to appropriate parental guidance.

Article 15 – Freedom of association:

Children have a right to meet with others, and to join or form associations.

Article 16 – Protection of privacy:

Children have the right to protection from interference with privacy, family, home and correspondence, and from libel or slander.

Article 17 – Access to appropriate information:

The State shall ensure that children have access to information and material from diverse sources, and it shall encourage the mass media to disseminate information which is of social or cultural benefit to them and take steps to protect them from harmful materials.

Article 23 - Rights of children with disabilities:

A child with mental or physical disabilities should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions that ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate his or her active participation in the community.

Article 29 – Aims of education:

Education shall aim at developing each child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to the fullest extent. Education shall prepare children for an active adult life in a free society and foster respect for a child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, and for the cultural background and values of others. Other relevant articles and principles include: the best interests of the child as an overarching principle, children's right to life; and the inter-relatedness of rights.

Children's economic rights are generally restricted. Children are unable to sign valid contracts, open bank accounts, borrow money or conduct other financial transactions. They are constrained in their ownership and control over property, and in their right to work and employment.

NOTE: There are Regional examples of disharmony amongst youth which has lead to children and young people becoming involved in civil unrest and violence, and often one of the causes of their involvement is the fact that many young people feel totally excluded from democratic processes in the family, the community or in their society.

- NCCC Membership should include:
 - At least 1Child
 - Representative
 - At least 1 Civil Society or NGO Representative
- NCCC Sub-committees should include:
 - Child representatives
 - All relevant civil society, NGO, and government agencies
- Child Participation must meet standards
- Important to consider viewpoints of:
 - Girls
 - Children on the outer islands
 - Vulnerable Children



Ways of considering the voice of children



Children's involvement in public decisions is best built from the bottom up.

Community-level decisions are the best starting point for building lasting mechanisms for children's participation. Recognizing and facilitating children's meaningful participation in public decision making helps build a better future for all of society.

National-level and international-level decisions are high stakes, high-powered and can be heavily contested. These are difficult areas in which to start.

Participating in public decisions teaches children about government, democracy and strengthens their sense of social responsibility.

- Research with children allows agencies to gather the views of large numbers of children and feeds children's concerns into public decisions. Minority, stateless and illiterate children should be included.
- Community-level planning can offer opportunities for involving children in decisions that affect them, such as the use of public spaces.
- Children's advisory boards consist of selected children who provide advice to adult organizations.
- Internet-based consultations and video conferencing need to be used more as they offer new ways to consult large numbers of children. Electronic conferencing has to be combined with local-level consultations to include children who don't have access to the Internet.



- Children's councils, committees and parliaments have been established in many countries. They have different meanings in different contexts. They should give children some real influence over important decisions, rather than being just a role-play. Children's committees should start in schools and communities before being expanded to district, provincial and national levels.
- Children have been involved in promoting, monitoring and reporting the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This mobilizes children to raise awareness and to campaign for the implementation and enforcement of their rights.



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What governments can do:

- Create mechanisms and structures within government at local and national levels for children to be consulted and to have influence over public decisions and resource allocations.
- Ensure that policies are developed based on the views and concerns of all groups of children.
- Create opportunities for children to provide feedback on the quality, accessibility and appropriateness of public services by involving children in monitoring and social auditing.
- Ensure the protection and safety of children involved in public decision-making processes.



Examples of Child Participation in the Pacific



Child and youth participation in the Pacific Sub-regional Meeting on Legislative Reform and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).⁴

UNICEF Pacific conducted this sub-regional meeting in August 2008 in Port Vila, Vanuatu. Delegates from six Pacific Island governments, representatives from the University of South Pacific, United Nations agencies, NGOs and young people gathered together in Port Vila, Vanuatu to consider progress, challenges and the way forward with regards to legislative reform for children and the realization of children's rights. As a matter affecting children, it was important that their voices were considered in the deliberations at the meeting. At the same time, it was neither practical nor child-friendly to have children present in the room together with the high-level delegates attending the meeting. The participation of children and youth was facilitated in the following ways:

 A questionnaire was developed based on an analysis of Concluding Observations issued to the five Pacific Island Countries which had submitted their initial CRC report. The issues related to: 1. Adoption; 2. Corporal punishment; 3. Justice for children; 4. Discrimination against special group (children with special needs, minority etc); 5. Importance of establishing an independent monitoring and advocacy body such as Ombudsperson; and 6. Child exploitation including the issues of child labour, sexual exploitation and abuse.



- The questionnaire targeted children aged 5 to 18 years old from Early Childhood Education/ Development Centres (ECE centres), primary and secondary schools, Special schools and NGOs working with out-of-school children in Kiribati, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Fiji. Responses were received from Kiribati, Vanuatu, Fiji and the Solomon Islands – a total of 499 child participants.
- The top-line results from the survey indicated that the children across the Pacific think that of the issues considered, discrimination (particularly on equal access to education for disadvantaged children) is the highest priority to be addressed, followed by the need to address the widely practiced corporal punishment at home, in school and in community, as well as the issues faced by the children living in and mistreated by adopted (informal and formal) family environments. This generalization needs to be complemented by more detailed country analyses which highlighted differences across these five countries. For example, the highest priority issue being treatment of children and young people in contact with the law (justice for children) in Fiji and second highest issue being child exploitation in Kiribati.
- Analysis also revealed that children understood underlying causes of those six issues and many children pointed out the inter-linkages among them. Of note, is that older children in secondary school also understood that the younger children such as in ECE or primary school were more vulnerable to certain risks such as physical punishment.
- A video documenting the opinions of the three girls from Vila East Primary School was also presented at the meeting and allowed the children to describe their experience participating in the questionnaire survey and deliver key messages to the meeting delegates.
- This child participation exercise revealed that if provided with opportunity, children as young as five years old have and can express their opinions in meaningful ways that can inform legislative reform priorities and processes.

Seeking children and young people's awareness, views and recommendations on their rights in the Solomon Islands.

Following the presentation of the Initial CRC Report to the Committee in Geneva in 2003, the Solomon Islands Government was provided with Concluding Observations by the Committee. One of the Committee's recommendations was to promote and facilitate respect for the views of children and their participation in all matters affecting them. The Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs in partnership with UNICEF and Save the Children conducted a national survey of children and young people, which was carried out in 2009.The question the survey aimed to address was:

How has implementation (of the Convention on the Rights of the Child) affected the lives of children in the Solomon Islands?

The study wanted to know from children and young people about the reality of their lives and needs; their views and recommendations in key areas of children's rights and children's awareness of their rights. 150 students in each province were surveyed – 1500in all. They were drawn from two or three schools in each province, with attempts made to get diverse representation of rural, urban and remote locations; a range of ethnic groups and to have 50% aged 7–11 and 50% aged 12–17 in the sample. Efforts were also made to get a gender balance that reflected the nation.

The final report presented the analysis of the national survey and is being used as an important contribution to the government's periodic report on implementation of the CRC. The effectiveness of government's service delivery for education, health and welfare services is understood when their primary clients - children - are able to assess their satisfaction and pinpoint the concerns they face on a daily basis. The analysis provides a comprehensive picture that supplements current information provided by service statistics. The solutions and recommendations that have been derived from the analysis adds specific guidance to Government's plans, programmes and reforms across a range of sectors.

Child representation on Fiji's National Coordinating Committee on Children (NCCC)

For a few years, Fiji's NCCC had effective representation of children. A member of the child-led organisation, Kids Link Fiji, supported by a member from the Kids Link Alumni (members who have graduated from 18 years) attended NCCC meetings. The children's representative sat on three Sub-committees: Family Welfare, Education, and Media and participated in several NCCC activities including the preparation of the Periodic CRC report. However, due to study and other responsibilities the child rep was not often able to attend and so the support person attended by themself. There is a need to explore how a broader representation of children can be channelled through the existing Kids Link organisation.

Civil society organizations that work with and for children can also actively represent children's interests. In 2002, Save the Children sought space in the NCCC agenda to hear a plea from a 17 year old child who wanted the Government of Fiji represented in the regional Ministerial Consultations (MinCon) series of meetings. Young Peter Chung (Kids Link Fiji founder) lobbied the NCCC, highlighting why it was important that the Pacific's issues were included in regional deliberations on children. The NCCC responded by selecting a Government delegation. It was the first time the Pacific had been represented in the Asia-Pacific MinCon series.

See more on Kids Link Fiji at http://kidslinkfiji. blogspot.com/2012/01/first-meeting-of-2012. html



Child and Youth Representatives on NACCs:

JUST FOR YOU!

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Child and Youth Representatives on NACCs: JUST FOR YOU!



What are children's rights?

You may have heard of human rights – the basic respect and things that every person is entitled to as a human being. Children's rights are the special human rights that apply just to children – the respect and considerations that every person younger than 18 deserves, no matter what. Children have rights – but also responsibilities – in school, at home, at the doctor's office and in every area of their lives.

What is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)?

The countries of the world decided that it was important to spell out clearly – in a legal commitment or Convention – the rights of all children because they are different from adults. Since the Convention was completed in 1989, almost every country has committed itself to uphold children's rights, and to accept responsibilities for their governments to make sure that all children's rights are protected. The Convention on the Rights of the Child explains both children's rights and governments' responsibilities, including how governments have to publicly report on their progress.

What is a NACC?

A NACC, or National Advisory Committee for Children, is a country's committee that oversees all the work needed to make sure that children really do enjoy their rights. A NACC doesn't actually work directly with children, like teachers do, but instead looks after important laws, plans, programs, funding and research for children. It also has to make reports every five years on the country's progress in putting the Convention on the Rights of the Child into place.



What should I do on the NACC?

You are on the NACC because children's rights and your government believe that children's voices must be included on all decisions that affect them. It isn't possible for you to speak on behalf of all children, or even all your friends. But as much as you can, your job is to be yourself, to speak up for the ideas and interests of the group that sent you (for example, if you were sent as a Representative of the National Youth Parliament, the National Association of Youth Leaders, etc.), and to help make sure that the views of children generally are taken into account. Ask questions when things don't make sense, share your thoughts and ideas with others on the NACC, offer to help in the work you find most interesting, and learn as much as you can. It will be challenging, frustrating, and maybe scary, but you are on the NACC because people already recognize you as a leader and believe in you.

Who can help me with the NACC?

Seek out people – children and adults – that you trust, that listen to you, and that give you advice you find helpful. They may be on the NACC, or may be friends, family, teachers, or neighbours. One good place to start is with the very people that first approached you about the NACC and that helped you join it. Explain to them your doubts and questions, and don't be afraid to ask for help.

What is this Tool Kit for?

This Tool Kit should help you and other NACC members in your work. It cannot and does not answer every question, but offers good starting points that you can choose and use to help improve the NACC's work.

Here are some places where you can learn more:

www.crin.org/forchildren/index.asp www.tagd.org.uk/BeInformed/Rights.aspx www.unicef.org/magic/users/children.html www.unicef.org/voy/explore/rights/explore_rights.php www.unicef.org/siteguide/resources_27932.html www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/humanrights/index.asp www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/index.htm

INTRODUCTION: CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

An active and robust civil society is an asset to any democratic society.

"The Committee also welcomes the inclusion of NGOs in the membership of the National Committee on Population and Children and its work in cooperation with the Council of Chiefs."

Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations – Palau's 1st Report

Civil Society Organizations: Individuals and organizations that are not part of local, national, or other levels of government. This includes community-based and non-governmental organizations, trade unions, religious groups, academic institutions and other private and voluntary groups

Civil Society Organizations are made up from members of society and can include children and youth. Civil society organizations may be formed by groups of like-minded people based on a common set of beliefs and interests, e.g. religion, gender, culture, politics, sport, recreational, educational and/or any manner of other reasons. Some civil society organizations are groups of people who meet informally, whilst others form communitybased organizations who are working on a voluntary basis supporting local government or community programs e.g. Pre-school Association and/or the Parents and Teachers Association.

The NACC assessment found that a wide range of civil society organizations were represented either on the NACC or in the Sub-committees. However, sometimes these organizations had limited understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the NACC, and of children's rights.

In many countries Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) are also civil society organizations and are normally Not for Profit Organizations and/ or Charitable Organizations and are required to be registered and licensed by the government (legally constituted). International Non Government Organizations (INGO) are non-government Organizations who are operating internationally, and who would be legally constituted in their country of origin. **Civil Society Organization as partners of** Government: The NACC is well placed to take the lead in the coordination of all development efforts for children and young people particularly when it works in partnership with, and has the support of civil society organizations who are working directly with children, youth and their families. Civil cociety programs such as youth parliament, civic education and life skills, church youth groups, village children and youth groups, theatre, music and drama groups, primary school groups and high school groups are all vehicles through which children and youth's participation can be conveyed. Civil society organizations such as religious bodies play a significant role in the development of their communities, societies and nations throughout the Pacific. As well as pastoral care, church organizations make major contributions to the education sector, vocational training, women's organizations, youth activities and social services. National NGOs and international NGOs also make considerable and lasting contributions to local, provincial and national key development thematic areas and work in partnership with government at either the local, provincial or national level.

The creation of formal and informal partnerships between governments and civil society organizations can provide a solid foundation on which to build NACC coordination mechanisms. Formal partnerships provide opportunities to create, endorse and implement national policies and standards which will form the framework for all child centred development. Formal partnerships can be legitimised through signing of Memorandums or Understanding or Partnership Protocols which set out the basic tenets of how agencies will work together. The strength of a partnership approach will emerge as the thematic NACC Sub-committees, government agencies, and member organizations begin to implement programs and/or services that comply with government endorsed national policies and standards.



TOOL 9

Links to further information:

Child Participation

- www.crin.org/
- www.crin.org/hrbap/index. asp?action=theme.subtheme&subtheme=15
- www.savethechildren.org/
- www.worldvision.org
- www.plan-international.org
- www.ecpat.org
- www.unicef.org

Children as Citizens

- www.childwatch.uio.no/
- www.unhcr.org/459a79142.html
- www.zamcivic.com.zm/

Building Partnerships

- www.iblf.org
- www.anao.gov.au/uploads/documents/ Developing_and_Managing_Contracts.pdf
- http://thepartneringinitiative.org/ mainpages/rb/toolbooks/actual.php

Child Protection Policies and Code of Conduct

- United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, www.ungei.org/resources/files/UNGEI_Child_ Protection_Code_of_Practice.pdf
- www.savethechildren.net/alliance/resources/ child_protection.pdf
- www.savethechildren.org/
- www.worldvision.org
- www.plan-international.org
- www.ecpat.org
- www.unicef.org Are children citizens?



Cover drawing: By Jericho Lee-Rao Content by: Don Cipriani, Sandra Thompson, Mereia Carling

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF Pacific) 3rd& 5th Floors, FDB Building 360 Victoria Parade, Suva, Fiji

Email: suva@unicef.org Copies of this Tool Kit can be downloaded from: http://www.unicef.org/pacificislands