



Save the Children
Norway

Save the Children Norway's Framework to improve quality in work on child participation



**Kann Kall, Susanne Kirk, Annette Giertsen
Mozambique, October 2005**

Framework to improve quality in work on child participation

1. Introduction

Save the Children Norway wants to improve the quality of its work in order to make a greater impact on children's lives. We want to do this in all country programmes and working areas. In doing so, we must strike a balance between local contexts and a common, overall way of thinking and working that will characterise Save the Children Norway's work. There are several ways to approach this, and Save the Children Norway has developed ten key quality elements for different global objectives. We felt this was also necessary for our work on child participation, and a proposed framework was developed. We hope this will be a dynamic framework, in constant development and an inspiration for improved work.

Projects to improve the quality of work on our strategic objectives have begun, and quality has become a central component in thematic evaluations. In 2004–2005, a pilot project was run in Nicaragua and Mozambique to improve work on child-led groups. Children and young people identified the characteristics of a well-functioning child-led group, and the processes and conditions that could lead to this. The results of the pilot project are contained in the report *Child Participation – Increasing quality in the work with child-led initiatives and organisations*. The report aims to be an inspiration and reference for other country programmes as they set out to improve the quality of their child participation work. To support that aim, it was decided to arrange a global workshop for all Save the Children Norway staff around the world working on, or with special responsibility for, child participation.

One objective of the workshop was to prepare a common framework that could support the development of quality in child participation work. The framework is meant to assist country programmes when they are planning, implementing, monitoring, assessing and/or evaluating their work on child participation for the strategic period 2006–2009. This framework has been developed out of initial ideas, and should be tried out, developed further and improved.

This document was prepared in the Child Participation Workshop held 10–14 October 2005 in Mozambique.

Conceptual framework of child participation¹

Our understanding of the concept of child participation has been gained from the experiences of Save the Children Norway's programmes. Child participation is seen as a need, a right, a working principle and a political tool. Participation is also related to the fight for justice and democratic values, including every citizen's right to be involved in decision-making.

A need: Save the Children in Nicaragua explicitly states that participation is an inherent human need, fundamental to a person's socialisation and self-realisation. Participation is aligned with decision-making – and with that, self-esteem and self-determination. Participation is about concrete situations, in which realising an interest, a need or obtaining a benefit is what motivates people to do it (*Save the Children in Nicaragua: Participation by children and adolescents – February 2004*).

¹ From *Child Participation – Increasing quality in the work on child-led initiatives and organisations*, Save the Children Norway, March 2005

A right: The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) contains various articles related to a child's right to take part in society: Article 12 refers to the right to be heard; Article 13 to the right of expression; Article 14 to the right to freedom of thought and religion; and Article 15 to the right to association and assembly. The right to participate is also seen as one of the four human rights principles: human rights establish the right of individuals to participate in political and cultural life. Child participation is a goal in itself. Boys and girls have the right to participate and to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. Children are recognised as social actors in their own lives and in society. States are obliged to encourage participation by people in all spheres (Save the Children: *Child rights programming. A Handbook for International Save the Children Alliance Members*, page 14). Save the Children has included child participation as one of the main components of a right-based approach and of child rights programming (see Save the Children: *CRP Handbook*, pages 21 and 25).

Several organisations, among them Save the Children Norway, see child participation as a **working principle**. Children and young people are a resource, and they should help to set the terms for our work. Save the Children Norway will facilitate children and young people's meaningful participation in matters that concern them in different contexts and at different levels in society, including our own organisation (Save the Children Norway's strategy 2002–2005 and for 2006–2009). The Indian NGO Concerned for Working Children (CWC) does the same: child participation is a running theme, a crosscutting issue, in every action or intervention, and it requires a major paradigm shift (*CWC: A Journey in Children's Participation*). Participation is often seen as a process: far from a simple recipe, meaningful child participation involves a philosophical approach rather than simply a set of mechanical steps. "Participatory work should never be extractive, [it] should be flexible and, above all, must focus on process rather than output. Participation should be understood as an approach or process not simply as an outcome" (*CWC: A Journey in Children's Participation*). In Nicaragua, Save the Children defines participation as a process in which people are involved in constructing their autonomy and their influence in decision-making that affects and concerns them. It is a way of relating to oneself, to other people, to objects and to spaces. It is a capacity to educate and to develop, and has to be experienced personally. Participation is seen not only as a political process and a right, but also as a pedagogical process of learning and teaching; it is conditioned by the context in which people live and the arenas in which the child socialises (family, school, community, work, sports, etc) – and therefore the construction of an ethic is required (Save the Children in Nicaragua, *Participation by children and adolescents*, February 2004).

A political tool: Participation in general is also related to power sharing and political issues. This means that children's participation cannot be completely detached from them, although it is more often related to group relations and local communities, although not always. "[Participation] is an encounter between powers, developing the powers each one has... Participation implies responsibility to oneself and to others. It implies commitment and power sharing, thus its focus must come from an eminently political and not psychosocial perspective..." (Save the Children in Nicaragua, *Participation by children and adolescents*, February 2004).

Participation is also related to the **fight for justice and democratic values**. Participation appeared in the development context as an approach to addressing power relations in society. It is seen as part of the process of empowering the disadvantaged. It has firm roots in liberal democratic values and gender justice. It is not seen as a means to achieve developmental

goals, but as an end in itself (C Upendranath, *The Theory, Potential and Challenges of Participation*, Exchanges, 1997, in CWC, *A Journey in Children's Participation*).

For many actors, child participation means that children are actively engaged in ***decision-making and promoting their own rights***. Furthermore, participation implies that people are exercising their rights as citizens and their right to be listened to.

Explanation of terms

These explanations are not meant to be clear-cut definitions, but rather reflect a summing-up of how the concepts are understood and applied in this Save the Children Norway framework. They are, first and foremost, meant for internal use.

Accountability

We want to be accountable to children who are part of the programmes we are supporting. In practical terms, accountability refers to the involvement of children as stakeholders, which also includes children as actors, in preparing and implementing projects, and in developing policies and advocacy work. It also means that we want to inform and respond to children about what we have been doing and what we have achieved, rather than only informing donors and other adult institutions. (For more information see the attached document, *Children as stakeholders*, Save the Children UK, 2003.)

Mainstreaming

This means that an issue is part of all ongoing processes. It also has a dimension of priority, which ensures that the issue has to be worked on. It means, for example, that child participation ought to be an integrated part of all activities in the organisation, in terms of being a component of the programmes in all strategic objectives (education, children affected by armed conflict, children exposed to violence, sexual abuse and HIV/AIDS, etc). It also means that children should participate in decision-making in project cycles, such as in designing and planning of a project, in implementation and management, as well as in monitoring and evaluation.

Crosscutting

Crosscutting and mainstreaming are close in meaning. Crosscutting also means that an issue is part of ongoing processes. The difference between them is that crosscutting is more descriptive; it does not have the same dimension of priority as mainstreaming or say anything about importance given to it.

Integration

In programme work, integration means *bringing together* different approaches, objectives and projects to achieve a single, strong effort. Integration occurs when work on different strategic objectives is co-ordinated, for example: when children's rights or HIV/AIDS issues are included in the primary education curriculum; when working with children affected by armed conflict, or when our work in opposing sexual abuse against children and in child participation. Integration is sometimes used to mean *inclusion*, for example, when children with disabilities, working children, etc are fully included in the education system.

2. Developing the framework

Experiences and results from the pilot project served as a basis for the development of the key quality elements for Save the Children Norway's work on child participation. The workshop's proposals were reviewed and ten key quality elements (KQEs) were drawn together. They form the basis for improving quality in child participation work and are meant to support different ways of working, such as practical projects or advocacy.

The workshop provided input to the next step, which was to find out how to achieve work on child participation that is characterised by the KQEs. Mainstreaming and accountability are two main working areas that participants were willing to introduce for the coming strategic period. The workshop therefore identified activities relevant to mainstreaming that will respond to the questions such as: What are the activities and processes needed to mainstream child participation in the strategic objectives? Activities relevant to the issue of accountability were also identified, responding to questions such as: What activities and processes are needed to make children stakeholders? In addition, activities related to improving quality in child-led groups and organisations were also identified, and they are gathered separately.

Purpose of the framework

The purpose of this framework is to inspire and support child participation work, improve the quality of work on child participation, and support the implementation of the strategy in this area. The framework should be a relevant reference for all country programmes.

How to use the framework?

This framework is a supporting tool for work on child participation in country programmes and at the head office. It should be relevant for preparing strategies and annual plans; for programme and project work; for emergency as well as advocacy work; and for policy development. A set of proposed activities for each KQE are set out. They are ideas to support the development of work so that it will be characterised by the key quality elements. In addition to the proposed activities for each KQE, the workshop presents more general activities relevant to all KQEs.

Our initiatives on child participation are based on the assumption that children want to take part. Referring to our country programmes, we are often right, but not always. Children in the projects we are supporting and with whom we are co-operating should always be aware of the fact that they have a right to say no to participation and should feel free to do so. Participation is a right, not an obligation.

3. The key quality elements on child participation

1. Process is recognised as important to achieve quality outcome. This includes ensuring preparation and follow-up of child participation events and activities (provide and receive feedback on their participation).
2. Children are involved from the beginning of each stage in the project cycle (preparation and planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation). Children can be involved in different ways, such as being consulted, having their representatives in a

council or in the decision-making forum. They may be involved in different stages in the preparatory phase.

3. Child participation processes are based on inclusiveness, equity, respect, honesty, transparency and non-discrimination, and promote the principles of sharing leadership and decision making.
4. Children who participate benefit in terms of individual development (such as increased knowledge, acquired skills for facilitating meetings and workshops and communication skills).
5. Child participation is based on, and promotes, children's rights.
6. Participation is relevant to children in terms of content and methodologies. Children's participation is informed, voluntary and enjoyable. They should not be overloaded, and different groups of children should participate alternately.
7. Protection is a priority during the process of child participation, including protection from any risk situations that may arise from their involvement in an initiative.
8. Adults ensure that children's views and proposals are taken into consideration. Adults have knowledge and commitment towards meaningful child participation. Child participation can foster good relationships between children and adults.
9. The values, beliefs and positive cultural/traditional practices of children and families are recognised and respected.
10. Staff members have the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary to promote and support child participation.

4. Proposed activities to improve child participation

The workshop identified possible activities relevant to work that is to be characterised by the ten key quality elements. The proposed activities are related to work in country programmes.

Proposed general activities

Documenting experiences and sharing information

- Document good practice and achievement, share and apply lessons learned on child participation in ongoing work.
- Share and disseminate information about UNCRC and other relevant information with adults and children, to raise awareness on and promote the fulfilment of child participation.

Co-operation with partners

- Child participation should be a condition of co-operation agreements with partners.
- Support partners in developing a strategy on child participation.
- Encourage and support partners to include children in their decision-making structure.

- Reinforce institutionalised programmes to strengthen partners' practice on child participation.
- Work with partners in developing tools, methodologies and processes for ensuring a meaningful participation in project cycle.

Internally in Save the Children Norway

- Request that country representatives and management teams consider direct co-operation with and support for child-led groups.
- When working directly with child-led groups, legal issues regarding responsibilities should be considered so that neither children, partner organisations nor Save the Children Norway find themselves in a difficult situation.

Training and capacity-building

- Integrate child participation in training programmes on the different strategic objectives for Save the Children Norway and partner staff.
- Prepare and train Save the Children Norway and partner staff, children and community resource persons on various methods and monitoring tools to enhance child participation.
- Develop relevant materials, targeting children and young people as well as adults, for training on the UNCRC and child participation.

Guidelines and methods

- Develop guidelines for training on the UNCRC and child participation.
- Develop follow-up systems, methodologies and tools to gather feedback from children.
- Develop guidelines for monitoring and evaluating child participation on country-specific programmes and objectives.

Proposed activities for child-led groups

By child-led groups we mean groups that are led more by children than by adults. In the child-led groups, most often – but not always – children take the initiative for when and where to meet, and for deciding what they want to do and how they want to do it. However, child-led groups will often have adults supporting them in different ways, such as facilitating communication with adult decision-makers and their institutions. Adults may provide training in certain skills such as street theatre or how to develop project proposals, or they may give practical support to arrange a meeting or implement a project such as building a school or a play ground. Child-led groups are most often developed from child groups promoted by adults (in most cases, promoted by organisations working for child rights), where the adults recognise that children have the need and the capacity to organise activities, do planning, implement activities and follow up, and select participants for training courses or participation in external meetings, etc. The child-led groups take many forms, and may be called clubs, commissions and committees, parliaments and councils, governments and organisations. They may be based in a school or community, at national or regional level.²

Proposed activities are:

- Ensure that staff prioritises budget and human resources to strengthen child-led groups.

² Save the Children's Professional Exchange Network on Child Participation (PEN-CH) will publish document on child-led groups by the end of 2005.

- Ensure that child-led groups have access to a budget for activities and are provided with support in managing it.
- Promote children’s initiatives by empowering CLIs and CLGs (child-led initiatives and child-led groups) to learn and practise project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Make visible and share achievements, knowledge and information accumulated by Save the Children Norway (SCN), partners and child-led groups.
- Ensure capacity-building on facilitation of meetings and workshops , communication and dissemination of information – in particular on child rights and child participation.

Proposed activities relevant to the ten key quality elements

KQE 1: Process is recognised as important to achieve quality outcomes. This includes ensuring preparation and follow-up of child participation events and activities (provide and receive feedback on their participation).

Accountability

- Identify necessary processes to strengthen children as stakeholders and actors, including issues for training.
- Provide enough time and resources in planning, to reflect preparation and follow-up of child participation.

Mainstreaming

- Include child participation processes in all plans, considering time and budget, for all strategic objectives.
- Conduct training of SCN and partner staff on significance of processes in child participation as part of training on the different strategic objectives.

KQE 2: Children are involved from the beginning of each stage in the project cycle (preparation and planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation).

Accountability

- Develop/apply practical tools for children to participate in project cycles.
- Train children on project cycles.
- Create tools for monitoring and evaluation on child participation, and prepare baseline statement.³

Mainstreaming

- Develop models for training on different stages of project cycles.
- Train SCN and partner staff on how to involve children in all programme cycles.

KQE 3: Child participation processes are based on inclusiveness, equity, respect, honesty, transparency and non-discrimination, and promote the principles of sharing leadership and decision making.

³ This means to prepare a pre-assessment, against which to measure future achievements and changes.

Accountability

- Support children and adults in internalising the content and in practising KQE 3.
- Give special emphasis to and encourage participation of marginalised groups.
- Promote opportunities for participation for all children (including those who are out of school) Develop/apply assessment tools [the Spider web model] for the implementation of KQE 3.

Mainstreaming

- Integrate the content of KQE 3 at the organisational levels and incorporate the KQEs in all relevant documents.

KQE 4: Children who participate benefit in terms of individual development (such as increased knowledge, acquired skills for facilitating meetings and workshops and communication skills).

Accountability

- Ensure that the individual development of each child is considered and given priority.
- Pay adequate attention to power relations among children – avoid children dominating each other.
- Take into account children’s age and maturity and other relevant characteristics for participatory activities.
- Sensitise and train adults and train children on democratic processes and participatory decision-making.

Mainstreaming

- Adapt and apply approaches and methods that allow child representatives to be chosen by and from among their peers.
- Ensure that SCN and partner staff members have necessary basic skills and capacities to involve different groups of children.

KQE 5: Child participation is based on, and promotes, children’s rights.

Accountability

- Ensure that no agendas against children’s rights are promoted.
- Promote child participation as a fundamental human right among stakeholders.
- Train children and other stakeholders in children’s rights and link these issues to practice.

Mainstreaming

- Train SCN and partner staff on the UNCRC and link these issues to practice.
- Apply and promote principles of rights-based programming approaches in emergency situations.

KQE 6: Participation is relevant to children in terms of content and methodologies. Children’s participation is informed, voluntary and enjoyable. They should not be overloaded, and different groups of children should participate alternately.

Accountability

- Listen to children to find what they are really interested in doing and achieving.

- As far as possible, ensure participation takes place in child-friendly environments and that child participants have fun.
- Prepare and disseminate to children and adults child-friendly versions of documents such as SCN's strategy, policies, plans, reports and other documents such as baseline descriptions, studies for their informed consent, preparations, planning to participate, etc.

Mainstreaming

- Be prepared to support children's initiatives (within the frame of the UNCRC) by supporting them directly or indirectly, for example by facilitating contact with other adults and institutions.

KQE 7: Protection is a priority during the process of child participation, including protection from any risk situations that may arise from their involvement in an initiative.

Accountability

- Ensure that children's choice to participate is based on informed consent, including information on possible risks and how to manage these risks – remembering that it is always the adults who have the responsibility.
- Ask children their opinions regarding general and local guidelines on protection in particular situations and in general.
- Do awareness-raising on child protection with children, parents, caregivers and other stakeholders.

Mainstreaming

- Disseminate the child protection guidelines to all SCN staff and partners.
- Set up systems for monitoring of the adherence to the guidelines.
- Provide ethical guidelines on children's participation for all SCN, including support staff, and partner staff members, volunteers and partners and ensure they are followed up.

KQE 8: Adults ensure that children's views and proposals are taken into consideration. Adults have knowledge of and commitment to meaningful child participation. Child participation can foster good relationships between children and adults.

Accountability

- Create regular opportunities for adults in the community to meet the children and learn about their activities.
- Create room for open discussions between adults and children.
- Provide knowledge and information to adults about the benefits of child participation for children and the society.
- Build the capacity of key community actors to promote the incorporation of children's views into development agendas.
- Encourage (adult-led) partners to include children in their decision-making processes.

Mainstreaming

- Ensure that all SCN staff members have regular meetings with children involved in SCN supported activities, where children and adults exchange views and ideas about the programmes.
- Ensure that children's views and opinions are reflected in SCN advocacy activities at national as well as international level.

KQE 9: The values, beliefs and positive cultural/traditional practices of children and families are recognised and respected.

Accountability

- Front line staff and facilitators must be aware of the culture of children and their family.
- Explore and promote the existing positive aspects of cultural practices that enhance child participation at large in the development process of their own society.
- Promote change of all negative forms of cultural/traditional practice that hamper child participation practice and children's interests, or that place children in danger.

Mainstreaming

- Initiate anthropological/sociological assessment and documentation to promote programme development and enrich SCN and partners' staff capacity.
- Apply Save the Children Child Protection Guidelines (see also KQE 7).

KQE 10: Staff members have the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary to promote and support child participation.

Accountability

- Promote a basic level of understanding and awareness on child participation and its importance (added value) among all staff members with different roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure that all SCN staff members and partners respect key value-based indicators while working with children and their organisations; this should be part of their job in the organisation.
- Create opportunities among staff members to discuss openly the learning and achievements as well as challenges encountered while working with children in their personal and professional lives.

Mainstreaming

- Conduct training on various aspects of meaningful child participation targeting different groups of staff within SCN as well as partner organisations.
- Ensure that minimum one staff member has the overall responsibility for child participation at country programme level followed by a job description and guidelines.
- Ensure guidance and support from management levels, including from head office level.
- Ensure that all SCN staff considers child participation an important aspect of their work and that it is included in the job descriptions of all programme staff.

Recommended literature – updated by June 2006

- *Child Participation - Increasing quality in the work on child participation Save the Children Norway*, Project report, March 2005
- *Building Peace out of War – Children and young people as agents of peace; The young generation's challenge*, Report from workshop and seminar, Save the Children Norway, September 2005
- Baseline Description on child participation, Save the Children Norway, October 2005
- *Workshop on child participation*, Workshop report, Save the Children Norway, October 2005

- *Listen to us! Children's rights in peace processes and peace agreements*, Seminar report, Save the Children Norway, January 2006
- *So you want to consult with children? A Toolkit of good practices*, Save the Children, 2003
- *Children as Stakeholders Policy*, Paper, Save the Children UK 2003
- *Child rights programming. A Handbook for International Save the Children Alliance Members*, 2nd edition 2005
- *Practice Standards in Child Participation*, Save the Children, 2005
- *Spider Tool, A self-assessment and planning tool for child led initiatives and organisations*, Save the Children, 2005