



DEFINITIONS& EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

As one of the four guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and enshrined in articles 12 to 15 and 17, participation implies that States Parties and responsible actors (families, communities, professionals, etc.) guarantee children "the right to express his or her own views freely in all matters affecting the child", those views "being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child". Necessary and indispensable, the right to participation is cross-cutting and constitutes a lever for the realisation of all other children's rights.

It is an ongoing process based on mutual respect and a right to appropriate information, characterised by dialogue between children, but also between children and adults. Through the voluntary exercise of this right, children can play an active role in all decision-making processes that affect them and learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and influence the outcome of these processes. Several degrees of participation are possible, from simple consultation to full participation (e.g. a project initiated and carried out by children).



However, participation must be supported so that children are not subjected to decisions taken by others and can enjoy this fundamental right, as long as they are capable of forming their own opinion and expressing it. Professionals play an essential role in this. They must also ensure that participatory programming is 'ethical' and emphasises non-discrimination, protection, the best interests of the child and the principle of 'Do-No-Harm'.

Created in 2014 as a working group of the association Coordination Humanitaire et Développement, the Groupe Enfance gathers 19 NGOs committed to defending children's rights internationally.

These organisations share the conviction that constant and sustained attention to children and their rights is a powerful lever for starting a virtuous circle towards equality, the achievement of sustainable development goals and peace.

Combining their expertise and know-how, the organisations are working together to ensure that the integration of children's rights into their operational strategies and France's international solidarity policy has a lasting impact.

To find out more, see the Groupe Enfance's Participation fact sheet (in French): www.groupe-enfance.org/fiches-participation



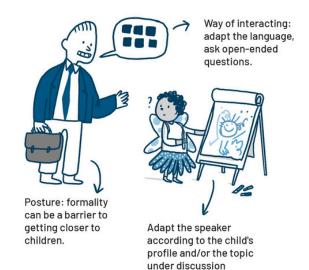
This document is supported by Agence Française de Développement. Nevertheless, the ideas and opinions presented in this document do not necessarily represent those of AFD.

The titles and drawings in this document are taken from the poster 'Best practices for safe and effective child participation', produced for the Groupe Enfance by Anna Lentzner, graphic facilitator: www.lheuredelasieste.fr

1 Adapt one's BEHAVIOUR

Children's participation must above all be voluntary. They must be reminded that they have the right, at any time, not to respond or participate if they do not wish to. Professionals must be aware of and take into account the external contexts and circumstances that may hinder children's participation.

To facilitate this participation, professionals also need to adapt their behaviour and posture: dressing too formally, for example, can impress and create a barrier to getting closer to children.



Actors working with children are advised to:

- be at the same level as the children when they speak;
- adapt the language and the way they interact with the children: avoid technical terms, speak in the local language, be careful not to use certain taboo terms or subjects that may be mistranslated, ask open-ended questions to open up dialogue (What do you think of...? For you, what is...?), etc.;
- be attentive, caring and a good listener;
- · don't try to justify oneself or impose one's point of view;
- choose the speaker according to the child's profile and/or the topic under discussion: for example, give preference to staff who have been trained in the subject being discussed with the child, which can sometimes be complex and sensitive and require specific support, including mental health support; give preference to women when talking to girls and young women about sexual and gender-based violence or sexual and reproductive health; give preference to educators who may or may not know the children, depending on the subject being discussed, etc.

ILLUSTRATIONS

As part of the multi-year programme to support education in remote villages in Oudomxay province, the association Enfants d'Asie distributed reusable sanitary pad kits in 2022 to promote good menstrual hygiene practices in isolated communities in northern Laos. These distributions are accompanied by awareness-raising, information and training sessions on menstrual hygiene, a sensitive subject for girls/young women and one that is sometimes taboo in certain communities. Although the official language of the country is Lao, these isolated villages are home to ethnic groups with different languages, namely the Akha, Hmong and Khmu communities. Girls and young women from these groups are at greater risk of having their fundamental rights violated, particularly due to a lack of access to information in their own language. For Enfants d'Asie, this meant ensuring that awareness-raising, information and training sessions were delivered not only in Lao, but also in ethnic languages where necessary. Discussions with the translators and education facilitators of the sessions in local languages enabled a glossary of technical vocabulary to be prepared in advance of the sessions, enabling them to familiarise themselves with this sensitive subject. In addition, the education facilitators were recruited from outside the villages in which they were working, so as to encourage people to speak out anonymously without fear. This approach led to particularly interesting exchanges with the girls and kept the concepts that were not translated or discussed during the sessions to a minimum.

As part of its "Children Rights Club" (Club droits) project run in Madagascar since 2021, the NGO Un Enfant par la Main (UEPLM) has been working with a local association, the Association des Enfants d'Antananarivo (AEA), to run rights awareness sessions.

The direct beneficiaries of these awareness campaigns are children aged 8 to 12. UEPLM preferred to outsource this service to an association whose core is the promotion of children's rights and the active participation of children. AEA is unique in that it works for and with children. It favours a peer-to-peer approach and children's participation. Today, the AEA has over a hundred child members and 3 education facilitators, each with their own specialisms (working with different age groups).

The association runs fun awareness-raising activities, organises educational support and green classes, and also works with parents to raise their awareness of child protection issues. AEA is a member of the Civil Society Platform for Children (PFCSE), through which it receives training and capacity-building, particularly in the area of benevolent communication.

As part of the UEPLM Children Rights clubs, the AEA uses tools that it has developed with its child members. The education facilitators know how to use clear language that is suitable for children and how to pace the sessions to capture the children's attention and motivate them. They are able to adjust the sessions (duration, subject matter, methods of facilitation) according to the children's responsiveness, but also according to their profile and specific vulnerabilities (street children, children who are victims of violence, economic difficulties).









© Un Enfant Par La Main



To ensure their participation, children need a safe space in which to express their opinions freely. This can be home, village, school, neighbourhood, but also a dematerialised space such as the Internet. The route to this safe space must also be considered through and anticipated so as not to endanger the children; similarly, people present in this space should be considered to ensure that the children express themselves freely.

Furthermore, children's participation must be made possible by choosing times and durations that are adapted to their reality. Finally, tools must be developed and made available to children to enable them to share their ideas and proposals or to report problematic situations. Feedback or complaints from children must be taken seriously and require an appropriate response from the professionals supervising the children.

ILLUSTRATIONS

In 2023, Enfants d'Asie rolled out its "KeepMeSafe!" (KMS) project in 9 partner schools in the Philippines and to 17,000 children and young people. KMS aims to prevent, detect, and report cases of child abuse in schools and communities. Mailboxes and forms have been set up in key locations in schools to collect reports. A Facebook page and an online chatbot can also be used to report abuse. In each school, a children's rights referral group has been set up, comprising representatives of the children, parents, teachers and social services, to deal with reports and forward them to the authorities if necessary. Finally, a vast awareness and information campaign on child abuse has been carried out. This began in schools, with speeches during the daily flag-raising ceremonies, presentations in classrooms, posters in school corridors and playgrounds reminding children of their rights and how to prevent, detect and report abuse. In addition, specific times were set aside for discussion and speaking out by and for girls, a group that is over-represented among victims of abuse. These "sorority safe spaces" were run by exclusively feminine social workers from Enfants d'Asie.















As part of the "Secondary Education Support" project (PAESB - Projet d'Appui à l'enseignement secondaire), run between 2019 and 2020 in Benin, the NGO Action Education has improved children's school environment, protection and academic results by installing suggestion boxes in 114 secondary schools. These simple tools, accessible to all (children, parents, administrative staff and teachers), are based on a collective and participatory approach: the boxes help to better identify and target the problems that hinder the success and well-being of children, in particular by anonymously highlighting situations of physical and mental violence and harassment to the school management committee, which is then responsible for discussing and proposing solutions. For each solution identified, a manager is responsible for implementing it within a given timeframe. Problems that go beyond the remit of the school staff must be summarised and passed on to the relevant deconcentrated state services.





© Stefano Maggi / Action Education

As part of the "ARPEJ" regional project (Regional Approach for Child and Youth Protection) set up from 2021 to 2023, SOS Children's Villages in Burkina Faso, Togo and Ivory Coast with the support of SOS Villages d'Enfants France, children's clubs play an active role in the child protection system. Children's clubs are spaces reserved exclusively for children, where they can express themselves freely and learn about children's rights through play, practical situations and the creation of artistic works, potentially in partnership with schools. These clubs help children to develop protective behaviour and implement the principle of children's participation. Here are just a few examples of the activities carried out by the children's clubs: fun and educational activities (mobile library, theatre workshops, etc.); training on how to run a club, children's rights, civic responsibility, public speaking; organisation of activities within the community: radio broadcasts by children on children's rights, celebration of children's days, school competitions based on children's rights, etc. The children's clubs are also involved in raising the alarm when a child's rights are being violated, to the Child Protection Committees (CPE), which in turn report the matter to the Social Action Department. The project has enabled children's clubs to play an active role in the child protection net, by providing a forum for children to discuss and express their views, and by reporting cases of violation.



© SOS Villages d'Enfants Togo

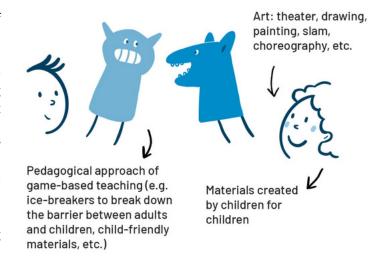
3 Deploy appropriate FACILITATION METHODS

To ensure children's effective participation, the facilitation methods used must allow them to express themselves freely, without fear of judgement, creating caring environments in which children feel respected and protected.

Well-designed facilitation methods must therefore:

- take account of differences in children's ages and cognitive abilities, so as to adapt discussions to their level of understanding and development;
- take into account the individual needs of children, including those with special needs, to ensure that every child can fully participate in and benefit from the activities on offer (inclusion and accessibility);
- facilitate active learning, allowing children to discover and explore new concepts in a fun way;
- provide concrete explanations and demonstrations to help children understand certain concepts that are difficult to grasp;
- help children to develop confidence in themselves and their abilities, to encourage them to take the initiative and participate actively.

To facilitate discussion and the free expression of children's views, fun activities can be used. These include a variety of methods such as role-playing, simulations, board games, art activities and outdoor games, offering multiple ways of capturing children's interest, thus encouraging them to participate. Children are more likely to get involved and stay motivated when they find activities interesting and fun. Play stimulates children's creativity and imagination, allowing them to explore new ideas and solutions in unconventional ways. This encourages more dynamic and inventive participation. Playful activities reduce stress and anxiety in children, creating an environment where they feel more comfortable expressing their ideas.



Group activities can help children develop social skills such as collaboration, empathy, active listening and leadership. Children learn to interact with their peers, reinforcing their social skills.

ILLUSTRATIONS

As part of the "ARPEJ" project (Regional Approach for Child and Youth Protection) set up by SOS Children's Villages in Togo, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast with the support of SOS Villages d'Enfants France, children take part in radio awareness-raising spots on subjects that concern them, such as promoting their rights, the importance of involving them in decisions that affect them, and the fight against harmful cultural practices (early marriage of girls, female circumcision, etc). This approach is relevant because it allows children to express themselves directly on subjects that concern them and to address their peers with simple, accessible messages.

As part of the "Yes I'm In" project, carried out in 2023 in Sliven (Bulgaria), Satu Maré (Romania) and Lyon (France), Action Education and its partners are working collectively for equal opportunities and the inclusion of children and young people living in precarious housing who suffer discrimination linked to their living conditions and/or their Roma or presumed Roma origins. In particular, the project aims to create an open, secure and stimulating living environment for these young people, who face extremely precarious living conditions, and to involve them in a shared learning dynamic to help them discover the pleasure of learning, boost their self-esteem and facilitate their social integration. These young people's self-expression and ability to project themselves are worked on in art workshops (photography, painting, writing) with professionals, and their work is showcased in a junior magazine published every year. In order to provide the best possible support for these young people, Action Education and its partners have developed a self-analysis grid for postures and practices to enable professionals to take a step back from the way they act and to encourage exchanges and horizontality with the young people (in particular by ensuring that a welcoming space is set up, adopting a benevolent, open-minded and listening posture, fostering trust, etc.).







© Médecins du Monde (Partenaire d'Action Education sur le projet « Yes I'm In » en Bulgarie)



© PARTAGE

As part of its "Children of the World Committed to the SDGs" project (Les enfants du monde engagés pour les ODD) being carried out between September 2022 and August 2025 in Madagascar, Benin, Cambodia, Egypt and France, the PARTAGE association is training and supporting educational teams to create times and spaces within primary schools that are conducive to children's participation. Through this Education for Citizenship and International Solidarity (ECIS) project, PARTAGE brings together 3,000 children from 5 countries around the world to take part in a structured dialogue and then to carry out joint projects linked to the SDGs, children's rights and global citizenship (by taking part, for example, in an artistic tour).

4 PROMOTE a CULTURE of PARTICIPATION

To promote safe, effective and inclusive participation of children, the organisation must be aware of the issues surrounding participation, but also of the responsibility it entails, and put in place a variety of mechanisms to take it into account. It is therefore necessary to question the organisation's approach or intention with regard to children's participation and, when the commitment is confirmed, to ensure the safety of children and to allocate time and resources to it, which implies a high level of accountability towards them.

It is essential that all professionals working with children, and more generally all members of the organisation, are aware of and trained in children's participation, in a climate of listening and trust.

Furthermore, participation must be encouraged at all ages and with all children, particularly the most vulnerable, as soon as possible and relevant. To achieve this, it is important to raise their awareness and train them in their rights. In addition, workshops on leadership or project management, for example, can be offered to enable them to develop specific skills and the ability to participate actively in the life of the organisation. These workshops can take the form of a peer-to-peer mentoring system, enabling children to learn from others. It is also necessary to involve them in decision-making, whether through committees set up to gather their opinions and ideas or by giving them specific responsibilities for more important decisions. Organisations need to be flexible and open to children's suggestions, so that activities can be adjusted to meet their expectations. Finally, it is important to value the contributions made by children in order to give visibility to their initiatives and projects.



ILLUSTRATIONS

IIn Cuzco (Peru), the Qosqo Maki association, a partner of Apprentis d'Auteuil, helps children living on the streets and in very precarious situations. Since 1991, Qosqo Maki has run a night shelter for children under the age of 18. This dormitory is open to young people and adolescents who request it, free of charge, to enable them to spend the night in safe and dignified conditions.

From the outset, the centre was conceived not simply as a reception area, but as a resource centre with an educational dimension, enabling young people to regain the confidence to develop skills, assert their own identity and be fully recognised as citizens.

This is made possible by a system of co-management in which the young people are as much involved as the educators. This ensures that the space meets their demands and needs, but also involves them in keeping it in good condition. In concrete terms, this system is organised around weekly assemblies with transparent exchanges between the young people and the educators, enabling mutual recognition of complementary skills as well as individual and collective responsibilities with rules that generate trust, security and a feeling of belonging. At these 'assemblies', decisions are taken jointly and everyone has a say. In this way, responsibilities are shared and the expenses of the "common fund" (children contribute 1 sol per day to participate), which is used to finance educational and cultural outings, health costs and collective expenses, are decided collectively.

Apprentis d'Auteuil also promotes a culture of participation by organising training courses and exchanges of practice with its partners to develop participation within structures, projects and advocacy actions.

As part of the "AIM" project carried out since 2021 with children and families living in extreme poverty in Madagascar, the local Asmae team experimented with reporting the findings of a final project evaluation to the children. To do this, the media were adapted, as were the key elements of the presentation, in agreement with the evaluator, to ensure that the children fully understood the content. Although this approach required more preparation, it was a success in terms of accountability to the children, who were curious and interested to learn about the changes that the project had generated.

In addition, a "participation" focal point has been appointed at Asmae's head office (in France), to give greater importance to this subject and successfully integrate it across all the NGO's projects. This focal point has developed a training module on the challenges of participation for Asmae staff in various countries where it operates, as well as for local partners. Sharing practical tools, this module addresses the reasons for and means of implementing participation. Developed and delivered in several of Asmae's intervention countries, some field teams have in turn redeployed it to local partners.







© Asmae

5 Support Children to become AMBASSADORS For their peers

Child ambassadors are a good example of children's right to genuine, safe and inclusive participation. These children have a special role to play in transmitting knowledge to their peers, encouraging them to join the project and reporting the expectations of other children and any infringements of their fundamental rights. On a voluntary basis, these children can be mobilised to help identify duty-bearers, during inclusive, gendersensitive intergenerational dialogues or during processes of political and civic influence (advocacy meetings, conferences, etc.). Child ambassadors can also represent children's interests on project steering committees or on the children's and young people's advisory councils of civil society organisations.



Care should be taken to ensure that these children are representative, for example by including children from minorities, and also to ensure that participation in these bodies does not lead to conflict between children and/or to resolve it if necessary. Particular attention should also be paid to formalising a chain of communication between child ambassadors and other children. Finally, it is essential to inform them about the impact and uses of their actions and the follow-up that will be given

ILLUSTRATIONS

In its "J2A" project (Jeunesses Actrices de leur Avenir or Youth Acting for their Future) being carried out between 2023 and 2026 in Madagascar, the Asmae organisation has adopted the Young Peer Educators approach aimed at identifying and training a young person, called a YPE, to support their peers in their community to adopt healthy and responsible behaviour with particular regard to the issues faced by young people of their generation (e.g. reproductive health).

At Asmae, young people also take part in project steering committees. A technical sheet on young people's participation in project steering committee meetings has been developed by Asmae Madagascar to help staff ensure that young people participate safely and appropriately. Children are consulted on subjects that they have chosen and that they feel are important to them, without the organisation passing judgement on these choices. Taking their opinions into account is a very important factor in motivating them. In addition, all the project steering committee meetings are organised in a fun and participative way to arouse the interest of the children and young people and motivate them to attend. They are generally accompanied and prepared to take part in the project steering committees by a trusted person with whom they are used to interacting.

In Plan International France's Tamkeen III project (March 2022 - March 2025) carried out in Egypt, the young people involved in the project take part in the Boards of Directors of the local partner NGOs. As part of it, they take part in decision-making concerning the organisation of alumni clubs composed of former young people who took part in the previous phases of the project (Tamkeen I and II), with a view to building their skills (for example in terms of the action plan, communication, logistics and the budget). They also take part in the running of the project's activities (training, awarenessraising, employer networking, etc.) as well as all those implemented by the partners beyond the project.





©Asmae



How to support a child to speak at the United Nations?

Two children who have lived on the streets of Madagascar spoke at the United Nations about their experiences. Supported by Apprentis d'Auteuil and its partner the NRJ Centre, they spoke at the Human Rights Council's Annual Day on the Rights of the Child and at a conference organised by Apprentis d'Auteuil in Geneva.

Before the meeting, it is important to prepare accessible documentation for the children, adapted to their age and context, to inform them about what they will be doing, the places they will be visiting, the people they will be meeting and the purpose and terms of their participation (a PowerPoint with simple explanations, illustrations and images has been prepared to facilitate understanding). It is also important to explain the potential repercussions of their participation and to remind them that they have the right not to respond or to participate at any time: do they agree to be photographed or filmed? How will these photos, videos and what they say be transcribed and published?

Then comes the time to prepare the children's speeches, as ambassadors for their peers. As part of this activity carried out by Apprentis d'Auteuil and its partner the NRJ Centre, the children prepared the messages in groups (20 children). For a whole day, they took part in activities and shared their experiences in discussion groups. The educators present helped with the facilitation and took notes, allowing the children to express themselves freely. Two further working sessions were organised with the two children chosen for the trip, to rework and take on board the messages discussed in the group. At the same time, the children were prepared for public speaking.

As far as possible, it is also important to organise a meeting beforehand between the children and the people who will be taking part in the event: in the case of Apprentis d'Auteuil, a meeting was organised with the journalist who was moderating the conference and a time was taken with the other children who were speaking at the United Nations.

On the day of the speaking, the teams had taken care to:

- provide a quiet place for the children to concentrate, prepare and play,
- allow time to decompress before the event,
- identify a chaperone for the child: a reference person was identified
 to whom the children could turn if they needed help, who could
 support them in their discussions with other adults, help them
 answer certain questions, etc.
- provide an interpreter for the children, if needed in addition to the people accompanying them. This gives them more freedom and independence.



Apprentis d'Auteuil

After the event, a close follow-up was put in place to support the children in their expectations (children often think that the impact of advocacy actions will be immediate) and in their return to everyday life after this very rich experience.

On their return home, the two children shared their experience at the centre, where they are looked after by the other children and the educational teams. Two debriefing sessions were also organised to discuss what they liked about the experience and what could be improved.

6 Ensure child PROTECTION



Children's participation must not be at the expense of their protection and safety. It must respect the principle of "Do No Harm" throughout the project cycle. As a result, some precautionary measures must be respected: organisations must establish and communicate a clear code of conduct for all participants in the activity in which children are taking part, train facilitators in child protection (reporting, recognising signs of abuse, etc.) and take account of all exclusion factors. Children can only participate with their consent, in safe and appropriate places, and using pedagogical methods that are understandable and adapted to their age group; it is also the responsibility of the organisations to support the children prior to the activities.

Finally, children must be protected from any harm when they speak out and interact with decision-makers and responsible actors. Organisations must also help them prepare for these meetings and ensure that the people they talk to are informed of the safety measures to be observed.

Protecting children necessarily means preserving their personal information and anonymity. In certain contexts or for certain subjects discussed, it is crucial that children cannot be identified and located. Particular attention must also be paid to messages/videos/interpellations/violence disseminated on social networks, to elements that could be disseminated by journalists present at events or interviewing children, and also to communications made by the authorities during institutional meetings. Regular monitoring mechanisms - before, during and after the event - must be put in place to assess the risks and adjust protection measures if necessary. If the risk occurs, adaptation and response measures must be adopted.



©Gilles Oger / Action Education

ILLUSTRATIONS

In the Plan International federation, policies, mechanisms and procedures have been put in place to ensure the protection of children.

All Plan employees, partners and associates are trained in the "Global Policy - Safeguarding" and related procedures developed by Plan International. This global policy is linked to the Protection from Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (PSHEA) policies, as well as Plan International's "Values Conduct and Whitleblowing- Global Policy". Regular training ensures that staff and others in contact with children and young people are able to safeguard their rights and report any concerns or allegations of violence, harm or PSHEA. More in-depth training is also organised on request by Plan International's Global Safeguarding Unit, particularly for those whose duties require them to work closely with children and young people.

Similarly, each Plan International office has a Safeguarding referent. Plan International's safeguarding policy applies to all children under the age of 18 and young people up to the age of 24. Any child, adult and/or member of a community in which Plan International works can report any concern, allegation, suspicion or lodge a complaint via the various existing reporting procedures.

Lastly, Plan International uses child-friendly feedback and complaints mechanisms for each programme. This mechanism is designed at the start of the project before the feedback loop is implemented, ensuring that feedback and complaints are received and responded to, all through the activation of various child-friendly feedback communication channels. Plan adapts its means of information and communication to girls and boys of all ages and sexual orientations, in an inclusive approach towards people with disabilities, by putting in place measures to ensure their safety at all levels of the feedback circuit. The NGO encourages the involvement and leadership of children and youth in the design and implementation of feedback mechanisms.

This process also contributes to organisational learning, enabling Plan to learn from past mistakes and risks and improve the effectiveness and quality of its intervention programmes.

Un Enfant Par La Main (UEPLM) applies strict child protection principles and a zero-tolerance policy for behaviour that could undermine their well-being. In 2020, the association adopted a Child Safeguarding Policy (CSP), which all its employees, partners and service providers in direct or indirect contact with children must respect. The CSP sets out various procedures to ensure that children are not harmed or put at risk as a result of the design and implementation of programmes, projects, events or activities in which they participate. For example, informed written consent for children to take part in a one-off event as part of a project or any other activity run by the association is obtained from parents or guardians before the activity takes place, by means of a "consent form for participation in one-off activities and image rights". This sets out the content of the activity, its purpose and the protective measures put in place to ensure the child's safety (e.g. adequate number of responsible adults to accompany and supervise the children during the activities/events). It also informs the parents/tutors of the use that may be made of any images taken of the child. If the parent/tutor agrees, they are asked to sign the form and provide contact details for the person to be contacted in the event of an emergency.

All new UEPLM staff receive a short training session on the Safeguarding Policy, so that they can fully understand the issues and sign up to it in an informed manner. The training covers the main chapters of the CSP (recruitment, communication, reporting training, care, etc.), with a focus on the duty to report.

GROUPE ENFANCE

www.groupe-enfance.org







In 2024, Groupe Enfance is made up of 19 NGOs:





































