Children know so many things even we didn’t know:
Consultations and Children’s Participation in Myanmar
“Before the consultation we thought:

Children don’t know anything.  
Children don’t have the ability to make decisions without help from adults.  
Children can’t exist without adults.  
The words of children talking are not important.  
Children’s feelings are not serious.

After the consultation we found that:

Children work the same as and like adults.  
Children have differences and each child has strong points.  
I am aware that the children don’t depend on adults.  
I know that the children like or dislike how they are called.  
For children I must care about their views and their desires.  
We should listen to children’s feelings.  
There are many things we learnt from children.  
Children become leader and they can make decisions.  
Without being adults, they can exist.”
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Written by Andy West, with colleagues from the Child Protection Programme – thanks to Guy Cave, Win Ma Ma Aye, Lamia Rashid, Claire O’Kane, Nyi Nyi Lwin, Naw Ku Ku, Kyaw Zin Tun, Khin Nyein Chan Win, Ei Thant Khing, and to Saw Thiha Aung, U Aye Hlaing, U Khin Zaw, Thein Thein Nu, Min Win Bo, Aung Aung, Htay Htay Myint, Saw Khu Sae, Nway Nway Paing, Khawn Ra, Mai Aik Lawt, Nilar Tun, Win Htay, Ei Shwe Zin Oo, Lu Lu Aung, Nan Kham Hom, Nan Mya Thazin Win, Saw Htayaw Ar, Phyo Thu Soe, Su Su Htwe, Kyaw Min Htet, Hseng Khawn, Salai Thura Aung, Mingalar Thein, Naw Olive, Nyan Min Htut, Sai Soe Nyunt, for workshops and support, and thanks to area managers and other staff across the programme, and volunteers for their involvement and for work on consultations. Apologies for not naming you all. Finally, most importantly, thanks to the girls and boys who participated and whose contributions enlivened our perspectives on protection programming.
Overview: Consultations and Participation

1. Introduction  .......... 9

2. What is it? Components of the Consultation and Participation  .......... 16

3. Why is it important? The Need for Children’s Consultations and Participation  .......... 21


5. Consultation Format  .......... 39

6. Some Learning  .......... 47

7. Conclusion  .......... 53
This report is about the use of consultations with children – with girls and boys of different ages and from different backgrounds - as a means of developing good practice in community work, social work and development work. It is based on work done by the Child Protection Programme Team of Save the Children in Myanmar. The process and findings from the consultation have been extremely important for the learning of adult staff and for the future development of programme work. This report aims to document how and why these consultations were carried out. This practice of children’s consultations and participation can be adapted for, used in, and benefit a wide range of programmes in different contexts. In particular, this report looks at:

- how children’s consultations are an important, even a necessary activity for the design and implementation of programmes for children;
- how they can operate as a means of initiating children’s participation; and
- how they influence adult staff development.

OVERVIEW: CONSULTATIONS AND PARTICIPATION

A surprising thing to me was that children could tell us about the problems of the village and they know so many things even we didn’t know.
The knowledge and detail of information learned from girls and boys about their lives, circumstances and problems is too rich, complex and large to be described here.

Consulting children is closely linked to children’s participation as well as being a primary method for children and adults to learn about children’s lives. Information and understanding about girls and boys provided through consultations is often unexpected and unknown to adults. As a result of this new knowledge, consultations with children provide an essential background for programme development.

The process of consulting girls and boys also develops the competence of programme staff in working with children in several ways. Adult staff not only gain skills in children’s participation, but the experience also leads to shifts in attitudes toward children. These shifts include changes in adults’ perceptions of girls and boys, especially adult recognition of children’s capacities, and the contributions they make to family and community.

Children’s participation is defined here simply as children:

• Expressing their views – being able to speak out and, if necessary raise problems and issues;
• Being consulted – adults going to find out children’s views, ideas and opinions;
• Being involved in decision making – children making decisions individually and in groups, and sharing decision-making with adults. They make decisions on issues in their personal lives, in the lives of their families and communities, and in organisations (such as school);
Taking action to respond to particular issues and problems, based on their own views and decisions, and sometimes with support of adults.

Consultations with children formed the start of a process of what will be ongoing children’s participation in child protection programme work. The content of the consultations produced monitoring information for later assessment and evaluation of change. The process of doing the consultations established new relationships between adults and children, including practices of learning from children. From this point, a process of involving girls and boys in programme planning, design and implementation will continue.

Structure

Following this Overview, the report is divided into seven parts. Part 1, Introduction provides a background to the development of consultations and their use by the Child Protection Programme of Save the Children. Part 2 outlines the basic components of the consultation process, and its links with children’s participation Part 3 explains why consulting girls and boys, and children’s participation is both important and necessary. Part 4 describes the approaches and the stages used in the development and implementation of the consultations, and its integration with a process for children’s participation. The general format of the consultation that was used is provided in Part 5. Some of the learning that staff gained from the consultation process and the information from girls and boys is given in Part 6. A brief conclusion completes the report. Throughout the report some of the reflections of the staff who were the adult facilitators of the consultation are quoted in italics.

“The children from the workplace have more experience than our staff.”
The lives and problems of girls and boys are very different; children have different feelings, but they don’t have the chance to show and share these feelings with adults.

A series of over 100 consultations with children were initiated in Myanmar in 2008. These consultations will be held in every community (village or urban area) where the Child Protection Programme of Save the Children is working. The purpose was twofold, both to develop children’s participation, and to identify a monitoring line for ongoing work and establish a baseline for the start of new programmes. The development of consultations arose from a commitment to strengthen children’s participation in their own protection as well as the need for Save the Children to have a clear picture of the nature and scale of protection issues and children’s views on how to address them. The commitment included an intention for children to actively participate in addressing protection problems with the support of adults.
Learning from the process of doing this consultation work with children demonstrated three key points: it highlighted the necessity of learning from girls and boys of different ages and from different backgrounds for implementing programmes; it emphasised the importance of children’s involvement in community development; and especially it showed the vital contribution of children’s participation in transforming the competence of adults in working with children and communities.

Experiential training on children’s participation, which included some consultations with girls and boys in four regions of the country, took place in February to April 2008. The series of consultations to develop monitoring information built on this experience. Planning and preparation was completed in September 2008 and the consultations with children were started in late October 2008. Over 60 consultations had been completed by January 2009.
In early 2008 Save the Children had ongoing child protection work in four regions (three states and one division). These programmes focussed on anti-trafficking and safe migration for children and young people in the context of establishing child protection systems and mechanisms, and were to be extended to urban Yangon in April 2008. Cyclone Nargis altered plans. Following Cyclone Nargis, new protection programmes began in three rural delta areas to the south in mid-2008.

These eight locations of protection work are diverse: with different languages and ethnic groups, different local economies, different environments (from the hill plateaus of Shan States to the dry zone of Mandalay Division, the border hills of Kayin State, the seabord of Mon State, the watercourses of the Ayeyarwaddy Division, and the peri-urban areas of northern Yangon. Before the consultations, some similarities (such as poverty), and some differences (such as migration patterns) were expected. The initial training on children’s participation, and consultations with girls and boys, showed that the scope of protection problems, the differences in children’s circumstances and issues, needed to be explored detail. Staff and the programme needed to gain an understanding of the lives of girls and boys, and their problems for monitoring, planning and implementing effective strategies and activities in response, for children’s protection.

We learnt unexpected things, such as adults asked the children to do gambling for them, and there are teachers who favour the female students and so on.
Children and good practice in community development work

Three basic themes of good practice in development work and community work are:

(i) the importance of finding out about community problems and issues and local people’s concerns and views, and using these as the basis for action and intervention;

(ii) identifying and exploring the diversity of people’s circumstances, experiences and views, especially recognising differences due to gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, economic background, and other locally important differences; and

(iii) enabling and ensuring the participation of local people from diverse backgrounds, and especially the most marginalised, in the processes of finding out and taking interventions.

Usually these themes and approaches are considered in relation to the adults in a local community. But the practices of finding out about problems, people’s lives and their concerns, and of participation are even more relevant, important and applicable to work with children as they are to work with adults. This is because in most communities around the world children lack power and influence compared to adults. In fact, adults tend to oppress children directly and indirectly in various ways. The oppression of adults experienced by children ranges from violence (under the name of corporal punishment), discrimination (for example, not including children in community festivals), to exploitation (such as giving children the worst domestic jobs, or paying children lower rates for the same work done as adults, or even not paying children at all for work...
completed). These experiences vary according to different locations but also according to gender, age and other aspects of diversity. This means that differences in the real lives of girls and boys, and differences in the real lives of children from different backgrounds, and different ages, need to be better understood.

Projects and participation

Children’s participation and the importance of their involvement from the start of a project is frequently written into funding proposals, particularly by children’s organisations, but in reality even then the practice of their participation is often limited. Many excuses are given for the failure to properly develop children’s participation. For example, the process of involving children is seen as time consuming in itself, or delaying a much needed programme intervention. Responding to children’s decisions and views, and working at children’s pace can run contrary to the process of organisational programming, where ideas, workplans and indicators are developed and compiled by adults into logframes and proposals for donors. In reality often the fundamental difficulty is that children are not believed to be capable of expressing views or taking decisions. Also, many adults assume they know about communities and children’s lives, and so they believe that it is not necessary for them to take action to find out from girls and boys about their circumstances, or to work with children to learn about their communities. Rather than a practice of involving children at the outset of a programme, and developing work based on their contributions
and ideas, children’s participation has too often involved a few children expressing views at mainstream meetings of adults. This form of participation is very public and visible, but it does not engage with girls and boys, diversity, local issues, problems of marginalisation and exclusion, and the difficulties in community life.

Necessity of children’s participation
Instead of ignoring children, or involving children only at adult public events, this report aims to show how and why children’s participation is integral to daily programme practice and its effectiveness, and to proposed and potential outcomes. The report will outline the links between understanding the facts of children’s lives from children themselves and the development of programmes in response to problems and issues that are also identified by children along with local adults and agency staff. We aim to show that it is possible, important and, in fact, necessary to find out from children about their circumstances, issues, and problems they encounter. This means finding out from girls and boys, and including all of their situations, for example whether they are out of school children, working children, and school going children. It is also necessary to find out from children themselves what they see as priorities for action and any suggestions for solutions.
to problems. After the processes of consulting children, they can be involved in the development of strategies and plans for work, and in making interventions.

Adult staff involved in the consultations soon found and identified changes and benefits for the child protection programme and for themselves. For example, in comparing the situation before and after the consultations, they found:

- The programme now has better information – better able to identify problems and the context and to devise responses;
- After the consultation staff were better able to understand and respond to children;
- Since the consultation staff were better able to work in partnership with children, and now see them and understand them as the main stakeholders.

"Before doing the consultation I thought that children are innocent, emotional, dependent on parents, moulded by adults, and need to have rights. Afterwards, learning from the consultation I realised that children can lead their families, can earn money, and can take responsibilities. I found a difference between children depending on gender, age. Children are the future star, and they have resilience. Children can solve problems, and they can face vulnerable conditions."
The purpose of developing children’s participation was twofold. It was initiated for the effective design and implementation of programme work, and it was part of broader efforts to increase fulfilment of children’s rights to participation. This section looks at the main components involved in preparing and conducting the consultation project.

Consultations with children were first used as part of training on children’s participation in March 2008, to provide the experiential learning that is essential to developing children’s participation practitioners. A series of consultations were then set up later in the year to establish monitoring information in existing programme areas with ongoing work, and baseline information for new locations for child protection work. The consultations provided both information and systematic
processes of involving children in planning and implementing work. They also provided an opportunity for experiential participation training of staff throughout the Child Protection Programme.

The work of doing the consultations began with the initial training of adult staff and experiential learning through consulting with children, then a training of trainers on children’s participation before training other staff and conducting a series of consultations, leading to following up the consultation findings and work on the development of ongoing practice of children’s participation. These stages are explored in section four, and the main components are outlined here.

**Goal:** The overall goal was for understanding and practising approaches to children’s participation in order to know about the diverse realities of children’s lives and to involve girls and boys in defining and responding to issues and problems.

In practice this involved several components including: work with staff, active learning from children, taking account of diversity, working with children, creating monitoring and baseline information, following up with children, and ensuring protection.

**Work with staff:**
- Developed staff understanding of principles of participation and the diversity of childhood and children’s lives.
- Developed staff capacity to be effective and confident in involving children in expressing their views, being consulted, involved in decision making, and in responsive actions/activities.

**Active learning from children:**

Found out from children and worked with girls and boys from different backgrounds for:

- Knowledge and understanding their lives, concerns, ideas, issues and their perceptions of the world;
- Knowledge and understanding of the context of children’s lives, the scale and scope of protection problems, and the circumstances that bear upon and contribute to the reasons why problems develop;

in order to facilitate and develop children’s own responses to their concerns, issues and problems and to develop their communities.

**Diversity:**

Found out about the key local differences in childhood and included a wide range of children reflecting local diversities of childhood in the process of learning from and working with children. In the consultation sites this meant involving girls and boys of different ages and different backgrounds, particularly including out of school children, and working
children in addition to school going children. Attention was also paid to children from different ethnic groups, and children with disabilities.

**Worked with and in support of children so that:**

- Girls and boys defined and prioritised their main issues for action;
- Boys and girls were and are involved in identifying solutions and strategies for resolution of problems and issues;
- Girls and boys can take action and undertake activities in resolving problems.

**Created monitoring and baseline information to inform programme work:**

From children’s identification of concerns, issues and problems:

- established a monitoring line for an assessment of work at an interim stage in ongoing programme work;
- created a baseline for the development of programme work in new locations.

This monitoring and baseline information has and will continue to inform programme work and activities and set a basis for ongoing monitoring and subsequent evaluation.

**Follow up work with children:**

After working with children to identify issues and problems:
- involve children in identifying strategies, solutions and actions in response;
- support children in actions they decide to take;
Before the consultation I thought that children are always under the control of their parents. They are playing, going to school, studying their lessons and they can do only things that their parents decide for them. After the consultation I understand that the children know and see what is going on, and observe more than adults. They have to work for their family businesses. They don’t save themselves from dangers, but they have to work despite difficulties.

- work with children to include other children in activities and expressing their views. This follow-up work is ongoing, and will be part of a continuous cycle of involving girls and boys, planning and working with them, assessing results, identifying new issues and circumstances with children, planning and working with them, and so on.

Ensuring child protection:

As part of the training and preparation, review and reflection, follow up and ongoing work, staff are prepared to respond to personal concerns and issues divulged by or raised by children in the process of participation, including consultations. This includes considering how adults in the community react to children’s views, decisions and actions.
3. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT? THE NEED FOR CHILDREN’S CONSULTATIONS AND PARTICIPATION

From the consultations we found that: children know more about their community than adults; children know things that adults don’t expect them to know; children have a high ability to lead; children see and know many things that adults don’t notice.

The results from the consultations showed that children’s participation is important and in fact necessary in planning, developing and implementing programme work that is aimed at children. There are practical reasons in addition to points of principle. The practical reasons include the knowledge of their own lives that children have, which adults do not have, and which is essential if programmes are to respond to children’s problems, particularly in the area of protection. The points of principle include the fact of girls and boys having rights to participation, to express views and influence decisions. These rights are enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is almost universally ratified, and was ratified in Myanmar in 1991. Any children’s organisation that is rights based, and promotes children’s rights, must ethically practice participation of girls and boys in all its work.
Planning work and adult assumptions

Discussions, workshops and experience show that without children’s participation adults make assumptions about childhood based on understandings from observation that is limited, or based on their own experiences as children, or on their perceptions of conventional or ideal childhoods. These assumptions often bear little resemblance to reality. For example, adults generally fail to see the experience of corporal punishment, or its frequency, from the perspectives of children. Children’s experiences and lives change as they grow and develop, and as the social environment changes around them. Adults often underestimate the diversity of children’s experiences, including differences in perceptions, in the way they are treated, in the opportunities available to them. These differences are based on gender, age, disability, rural or urban living, the family economy, ethnicity and other characteristics.

Children as experts

The experience, setting and circumstances of childhood changes over time. The life of a girl or boy now is quite different to the life of a girl or boy twenty years ago, even in the same location. Social and economic change brings new and different opportunities, pressures, pleasures and problems. In order to know about children’s lives and the context of their lives it is necessary to find out from children themselves. In order to take account of the diversity of children’s lives, the process of finding out must identify major categories that cut across childhood (such as gender) and seek out girls and boys in different circumstances.
Finding unexpected, new and different information

Through children’s participation, and from these consultations, adults learned facts about children’s lives that they had not expected, and information that was new to them. For example, the extent of children’s work and its importance to the family economy; the responsibilities some girls and boys have for providing for their family; issues of sexual abuse; different forms of exploitation; the risky work in which some boys are engaged; the sexual harassment from adults at work and school experienced by girls.

Children as contributors

Children are active and not passive members of local society. Children make contributions to family and community life. They have various domestic responsibilities and many are involved in working for cash. They know about the state of the family and community economy and their role in it. They are interested in participating in and contributing to improvements in community life as well as in activities such as festivals. They are taking responsibilities for care of family members and contributing to the family economy.

“We have found that children are not appreciated or acknowledged by parents and communities whenever they try to contribute their efforts.”
Children as stakeholders

As local contributors and residents children are stakeholders in family and community. Children are also the main stakeholders, targets and beneficiaries of Save the Children’s programme work: it is fundamental, if work is to be effective, that programmes are developed:

- with a knowledge and understanding of the realities of children’s lives;
- that take account of girls’ and boys’ issues and concerns; and
- that responses are made to children’s identifications of problems, solutions, and ideas.

As stakeholders, children should have the opportunity to choose to be involved in ongoing work, and to bring their perspectives to bear in influencing the course of that work.

Programme work

The processes of change in childhood, children’s activities in family and community, and their understanding of local issues and the problems they face, mean that it is necessary to consult children and include their views and actions in programme work. Children are both experts and stakeholders, and their participation brings benefits for the development and implementation of programme work.

Knowledge and understanding of children’s lives and circumstances, their perceptions and identification of problems is necessary in order for adults to be able to devise and select interventions that are appropriate and potentially beneficial. Working with children,
and ensuring inclusion of diversity of children, provides opportunities for monitoring and evaluation in ongoing programme work.

Children’s participation is needed to understand the connections between different aspects of their lives. Children’s lives are not divided up in separate sectors, but they move between home, school, work, community, in good health and bad, dealing with relationships with family, friends and others. Their issues and problems, and the different parts of their lives, are all interconnected which means that a holistic approach to consulting with children and developing responses with children’s participation is most effective. Just as children’s lives are not restricted to one sector, integrated programme approaches may be more responsive to children’s issues and problems.

**Better protection**

Consulting children and learning about their lives and difficulties means that adults are better able to know about children’s circumstances and respond to child protection issues and problems. Children’s participation enables children to more easily raise problems and concerns. Programmes are better able to devise strategies and work to protect children from abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation within the context of their lives. By giving children a voice we are increasing their opportunities to protect themselves. Many girls and boys are abused and exploited because they have no opportunities to speak up or voice their concerns. If children are given a stronger voice in their homes, schools and communities they will be better able to prevent problems arising and protect themselves and their peers from different forms of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation.

We found that children are facing so many problems that adults weren’t aware of.
4. HOW? APPROACHES AND STAGES OF PARTICIPATION AND CONSULTATION

Because of trust building, children express their voices to the staff.

The different stages used in developing children’s participation and the consultations are outlined in this section. The crucial initial stages revolved around adults and their power, attitudes and roles in enabling children’s participation. The process of taking children seriously and treating them with respect is often a new practice and requires a change in self-understanding for many adults. Following on from this, the work of participation began with adults enabling children to express their views and make decisions. Given the importance of adults understanding their power and roles in
participation, the stages began with training for adults who will be involved. This section looks first at the background of adult attitudes and relationships with children as the context for the staff being facilitators and consulting children. The second part describes the different stages followed, from training adults to the consultations and follow up work with children. The format used in the consultations is given in the following section 5.

**BACKGROUND**

**Adults, power and processes of participation**

The role of adults is crucial because they hold power, and so they must initially facilitate and support children's participation. This facilitation means adults taking children seriously and treating them with respect. The power structure of local communities generally places adults above children on grounds of age, and other forms of status. Although power and status differences exist between children (for example, between rich and poor children) it is the differences between adults and children which is important at first in facilitating children's participation in programme work.

Children are mostly used to seeing adults in positions of authority and power, who tell them what to do (and in many cases beat them when they disobey, or when the adult is upset or stressed about something). In order for adults to learn from children, to enable girls and boys to express their ideas, and to develop children's participation in decision making, then adults have to change the way they present themselves to and work with children. In turn children have to get
used to different relationships with adults in order to develop their own potential for contributing to local community life on different levels.

Adults usually present themselves to children as teachers or bosses, in speech and body language. Since participation includes children expressing their views and opinions, and being involved in decisions, the conventional adult/child relationship of teacher/student or boss/inferior needs to change. The consultations with children are about seeking children’s views of their lives and concerns, not a ‘correct’ answer from a textbook. This process of change in the relationship begins with adults shifting their usual and accustomed roles from teaching to learning, and from working for to working with children.

**Taking children seriously and treating children with respect - adult transformations**

Working toward children’s participation requires taking children seriously, and treating them with respect, while listening to, learning from and working with children. Some adults find the very idea of taking children seriously and treating them with respect to be challenging and difficult. To others it sounds simple and straightforward, but they then find the practice of doing it to be difficult in real situations with children. Some of the obstacles to taking children seriously arise from embedded attitudes of adults, believing that certain skills,
knowledge and understanding are reserved for adults - and that children to do not have these capacities. Such attitudes can obstruct the practice of learning from children, and so block children’s participation.

Overt and covert discrimination in communities are also a block to children’s participation. Adults need to model and practice non-discrimination in facilitation and other work with children, and include marginalised and excluded girls and boys. Discrimination towards particular groups of children needs to be better understood and transformed. These groups often include the poorest children, out of school children, working children, girls and boys from minority ethnic backgrounds, children with disabilities. The processes of taking children seriously, encouraging and enabling girls and boys to express their views, listening to children and treating them with respect, are to be applied to work with all children, but especially with marginalised and excluded girls and boys.

Adult competence in children’s participation requires knowledge and understanding of forms, benefits, purposes and uses of participation; skills of facilitation, observation, reflection, and work with children; and attitudes that value children’s ideas, take children seriously and treat them with respect, and look to the inclusion of marginalised and excluded girls and boys. Thus, adults preparing for and making a commitment to change their practice is the first step in a series of stages to develop children’s participation. Such work with adult staff comprised the initial stages in the project to set up consultations.
STAGES

Staff awareness and training on children and participation

Training on children’s participation covered both children and participation. That is, adult participants need to look at and understand diversity of childhood, particularly age, gender, disability, ethnicity, and other important local categories, such as rural and urban childhoods, and whether children are attending school or not. Different behaviour is expected of boys and girls, usually depending on age. Opportunities open to boys and girls vary in urban and rural areas. Local communities have ideals of how children should behave. Some children experience marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination because their lives fall outside socially approved and desired formats or behavioural limits (for example, because parents are infected by HIV/AIDS, or because children are not at school).

It is important to consider which children will be involved in a project or consultation, for example, what ages, gender, disability, ethnicity, looking at local childhoods and differences is important. An understanding of this diversity of childhood, along with the concepts of children’s evolving capacities, and basic knowledge children’s rights, sets the context for training on participation.
The training on participation for adult staff covered practical areas such as reasons for and benefits of children’s participation, different forms of participation, definitions, ethics and practice standards. This also included child protection issues. The 2005 Save the Children Alliance Practice Standards in Children’s Participation was translated into Myanmar for the training and subsequent use.

**Experiential training and reflective practice**

Classroom based training on children’s participation is not enough. Participants need to develop practice, and preferably with a mentor or coach. Experiential training is necessary in order that participants properly realise the implications of learning from children, facilitating children to express views, take decisions. Understanding and discussing the principles and methods of participation in the classroom is straightforward, and agreements easily reached, but cannot be compared with the experience of meeting a group of children for the first time and not resorting to teacher-like or boss-like behaviour.

The processes of experiential learning meant that participants were involved in planning their own consultation workshops with children, conducting this, and reviewing it. They then planned the next session in response to their review analysis and the learning and experience gained. The classroom sessions trainer becomes a coach and then mentor rather than instructor, to support planning, and particularly the processes of review and reflection.
The review is central to the processes of reflective practice in children’s participation work. This reflection involves spending time after a session of working with children to think about, analyse and discuss how the work went, areas for development, issues to be looked at. The review considers the roles and facilitation of the adults, the reactions of the children, the process of developing relationships and children’s participation. Issues arising in the discussion for example may concern the actions or reactions of adults (including their attitudes to children), shyness or dominance of some children, potential or divulged child protection problems.

**Children taking a lead**

Children’s participation is often initiated by adults. It frequently begins with adult facilitation, for example, adult staff consulting children, or facilitating girls and boys to do their own research, or facilitating theatre for development, or children’s forums. As children’s participation practice develops, girls and boys become used to expressing views, taking decisions together, and doing their own activities. In this process children respond to the changed adult/child relationships, and then girls and boys themselves will be involved in deciding ideas for workshops and activities and in their planning and facilitation. Over time, children may take the lead. An ongoing partnership between adults and children in projects will also need continuous attention to diversity and to
renewal. Facilitators, who may be adults or children, will have to ensure power relationships between children are not distorted, and for example, poorer children or younger children are not excluded. The question of renewal is also important, that is continuously involving new groups of girls and boys. Without renewal, there is a tendency for adults to work only with the cohort of children involved together at the start of a project, who get older and in a few years become adults (see below after ‘follow-up’).

Training of trainers and staff preparation of courses

In order for children’s participation practice to be widely and rapidly disseminated, locally appropriate courses and materials (including language materials) need to be developed. Competent local trainers are important in ensuring that standards for ‘meaningful’ participation are met. Trainers can be drawn from a pool of trained and experienced practitioners of children’s participation.

The process of initiating consultations and developing children’s participation in Myanmar included a training of trainers. A group of staff who had gained experience through both classroom and experiential training, and run consultations with children, attended a training of trainers workshop. In this workshop they identified the elements necessary (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) to be a competent practitioner of participation work with girls and boys. The workshop also included participants designing their own training courses, and planning production of their own materials.
Staff found children’s participation to be so important to programme work that they decided it was essential learning for all programme staff, and they prepared two courses. A short course that took less than a day was designed to be used as part of induction for new staff. A longer course (two days) was also developed, that would also be a preliminary to experiential training. Prior to all of the consultations with children, all staff involved as facilitators or recorders received at least basic training in children’s participation as well as time spent on planning for their roles and responsibilities in the consultation.

**Preparation of consultation**

Every participation project is different, and so it is important that staff plan and prepare for each workshop with children. The planning depends on and takes account of the local situation, the aims of the project, which children are coming, which adults are present and which facilitating, the degrees of decision making possible within the meeting session, follow up, place and time.

For the consultations that were intended to provide monitoring and baseline information, a standard format was devised (see the next section 5 for a description of the format). The format was based on previous experience of staff in working with children, including the experiential training, and particularly in the workshops developed to find out about children’s lives, circumstances and views. As part of the preparation, pilot consultations were undertaken. The processes of reflective practice that were used provided the opportunity to look at the training needed for staff as well as alterations to the consultation format. The pilot consultations indicated the importance of understanding differences in the lives of children in and out of school.

The basic structure of the consultations was the same in every place, but adult facilitators prepared for each one separately, since the children, place, time and issues would be different. An essential aspect of preparation was
ensuring all staff had basic training on participation, and some preparation for any emerging issues of child protection. Specific roles and responsibilities were allocated to each adult facilitator. The consultation format also included review meetings, which were particularly important when consultations took two sessions of work with children, mostly on succeeding days. The timing for the consultations was done by negotiation with children, since many of them worked or had domestic responsibilities, in addition to those who were at school. Some flexibility was built into the format in order to respond to children’s situation.

**Planning – co-facilitation and children’s groupwork**

The consultation aimed to enable girls and boys, who were out of school, working and school going children, to raise their own ideas and then discuss and make decisions in groups. The adult staff worked as a team, with lead and co-facilitators. A lead facilitator ran an overall session, for example on daily life. Since there were staff available and it was intended for as many staff as possible to gain experience of participatory ways of working with children, co-facilitators were allocated to smaller groups of children within sessions (for example, boys in school, girls out of school looking at daily life). The processes of review at the end of each day provided opportunities for staff learning. Children also gained experience and learning through working together in groups.

**Consultations – recording learning from children**

The process of implementing consultations included recording children’s views, discussions, their ideas, issues and problems. This recording went beyond simply noting down what children wrote or
adults wrote for them on flipcharts and other materials. In the processes of discussion in groupwork children gave reasons why particular issues are important. In debates on priorities, children explained the significance of different problems. In order to understand children’s lives, their descriptions, perceptions and opinions must be recorded.

In the consultations sufficient staff were available and allocated so that the discussions of girls and boys in different groups, as well as in main plenary sessions, could be recorded with their permission. The process of facilitation and recording needed to be balanced so that recording not dominate, and children benefit from process of participation in the consultation.

Consultation Review with staff

After the consultation format was piloted, the core group of trained field staff dispersed to the different locations where they are based. They trained other staff and with them conducted consultations with children. A review meeting was held to check for variations in the process and that may have come up, to bring together learning from the process and about children’s lives, and to re-check the format.

The review meeting enabled recordings and documentation to be consolidated, as well as the consultation process to be checked and any variations reviewed. Some details in the consultation format process were discussed, reconfirmed or revised according to experience and to ensure some standards for collection of information. Sharing information about children’s perceptions and lives enabled adult staff to consider what are the major issues emerging from children and make some preliminary comparisons. The staff also indicated that they and other colleagues had gained a new depth of understanding of children’s lives and problems, and especially a range of new and unexpected learning about children’s situations.
Follow up with children

The completed consultations are the start and not the finish of a process of children’s participation that will be ongoing in programme work. Learning about the structure shape and variety of children’s circumstances, their daily life at home, school, work, in the community, their concerns, issues and problems, all provides a context, basis, and subjects for programme work. The first step after the consultation is to discuss with children what can be done about problems and issues and how other children in the community can also be involved.

Children can suggest which issues are real possibilities for change and which are priorities for action. There may be some activities that girls and boys identify that they can do themselves, and some they can do with support. They can discuss what action could be taken by the programme and other organisations, including civil society groups. They can be involved in discussions on what issues need advocacy, or further information. Partnerships between children and adults in the community can be fostered and developed for ongoing participation work. The benefits for children, families and communities of participation, such as building resilience, personal development, improved relationships, better community functioning are now generally well established from practice assessments, evaluations, and through research by children. These benefits mean that the process of children’s ongoing participation is valuable at many levels. Work with children does not preclude programme work with adults: rather the development of children’s participation is a process of their roles in family and community life being recognised and acknowledged, and their views, decisions and actions included and taken into account.

Renewal and regular consultation

Developing and practising ongoing children’s participation in programme work requires attention to renewal. The first group of children that a programme consults and continues work with, will grow older and in
time will become adults. New children are born, and younger groups of children will want to be involved. A process of renewal is necessary so that the programme does not only work with a small group of children, but continue to involve new groups of children. Different groups of children, of different ages, and at different times, will have different experiences and childhoods. For a programme to continue to be relevant, children’s participation including regular consultations, will be necessary.

As part of the process of renewal, children themselves should be encouraged to reflect on and work to address any forms of discrimination that may exist among children. For example, richer children may dominate, ignore or exclude poorer children; school going children may question the capacity and knowledge of girls and boys who are out of school and working children; some children may tease and exclude children with disabilities. Such forms of discrimination are also common among adults. Part of the process of participation is for all children to be able to express their views and be included in decision making, and for all children to be respected. Facilitators can support children in recognising and appreciating difference and promote an environment of respect and inclusion.

“Before the consultation we were aware that children might face problems and abuse cases. After the consultation we know the real problems children are facing.”
The basic structure of the consultation used by staff in the Myanmar Child Protection Programme is outlined here, with some explanation of the rationale for each part. In most places the consultations were conducted over a two day period. The detail of individual and groupwork activities, such as games, breaks and so on, is not included here. The principles of the approach used in the consultations are elements that should be transferable to other settings and programmes: the detail should be planned in response to local circumstances and issues, and so the format is not a recipe that can be taken up without other analysis and planning.

**Preparation**

The first steps in preparation are the identification of adult staff to conduct the consultations. The staff need to have time available, but also flexibility with their time so that they can respond to children’s availability. Basic training on children’s participation was provided.

**5. CONSULTATION FORMAT**

"Every child has feelings. Every child faces problems but these vary in different places. Children have very little chance to express their views."
The final part of this training included planning and allocating roles for particular consultations. The need to facilitate children expressing views and discussing in groups, as well as to record what they girls and boys discussed and prioritised meant that adult staff needed to fill two roles. Since the consultations were also used as experiential learning for staff, as well as means of learning from children, enough staff were available to facilitate and record small groups. The preparation aimed to ensure they understood the principles and practice of children’s participation, methods of working with children, and the detail of their own roles.

The identification of children is also part of this initial stage. The selection of children was generally done through programme staff already working with the communities: even in the case of new programme locations some contacts had been established. The process of selection included informing children about the activity, and obtaining consent and permissions from children, parents and where necessary teachers and/or employers. Village authorities were also informed and granted permission.

As part of the selection, attention to diversity meant that half of the children were girls and half boys. At least twenty children were involved in each consultation. The pilot consultations revealed the importance of another major difference that had to be taken into
account, whether children were attending school or not. This difference is so important, and has an effect on children’s discussions, so that in the selection half of the boys and half of the girls were in school and half out of school. The main age range for these consultations was 12 to 14 years. Later consultations need to work with younger and older children. Increased efforts to involve children with disabilities will be made in future consultations. Previous experience demonstrated the difficulties of involving a group of children that is too diverse. For example, having a wider range of children available in one workshop, especially a representing a large age range, and particularly at the outset of a long term process of participation, presents more of a challenge and requires more experienced staff than were available.

**Establishing a child oriented ethos and forming relationships**

At the beginning of a consultation the early processes and activities aimed to establish the ethos and type of environment for the meeting. The ethos is child oriented, aiming to empathise with children’s perspectives and from the start use and maintain a child friendly and environment. This ethos involved developing relationships between adult facilitators and children in an environment where girls and boys felt safe and free to share their experiences and express their views. Such a type of ethos and environment is different to children’s experiences of life at school or work, where they also meet with adults who are not their family. In the consultations adults paid attention to children and encouraged them to express their views: there is no corporal punishment, violence, humiliation or emotional abuse. The process of children understanding this ethos and forming a new style of relationship with adults is not usually immediate, but develops over the course of the workshop. It is necessary for adults to be consistent
in their approach of working with children, in taking them seriously and treating them with respect. In some of the consultations, children offered to massage the adult facilitators, as they would do their parents or be ordered to do by teachers. The staff declined the offer, because they wanted to create a different ethos and environment, emphasise that the relationship in participation work was not the same as that of teacher-student.

In the early part of the workshop, the adult facilitators and children made agreements on what the consultation was about, times, how to behave and the style of the meeting. It was emphasised that this was an agreement and not rules or ‘groundrules’. The languages of ‘rules’ and use of this term does not fit well with the intended ethos and environment. Rules are both rigid and similar to the notion of school rules or work rules. An agreement that is voluntarily entered into can be changed. The process of agreement also aims to be inclusive, and to begin to practice non-discrimination. The voluntary nature of the workshop was also emphasised.

The forming of an agreement was part of the process of establishing the type of relationships, ethos and environment that enables girls and boys to express their views. It is the relationships and ethos that are the key to developing participation, rather than the need for a special building. The relationships are formed through discussions
as well as games and sharing food. Experiences from these and other consultations and research projects by children show that children find the processes of being asked their views, of developing their ideas, collecting and writing or drawing information to be enjoyable. Children do not always need or want games to play, because of their interest in the ‘serious’ aspects of consultations. The consultation workshops can also be, and were, fun!

Key segments in the consultations

The main structures of the consultations involved groupwork around three themes, interspersed with games for recreation, fun and energising. The three themes of daily life, likes and dislikes and child protection priorities built on each other. They were oriented around the places where children spent their time (home, school, work, community) to provide a holistic approach and to allow for interconnections to be made.

Initial groupings of children were organised according to gender and whether they were school going or out of school children. This meant four separate groups: for school going girls, school going boys, out of school girls and out of school boys.

The method of the consultation involved starting from children as individuals looking at their daily lives and building up group activities through sharing, discussing and then deciding priorities. The process linked their individual concerns with the lives of their peers and children throughout the community. As part of the process an activity on thinking about the lives of friends was also included between likes/dislikes and child protection issues and problems. This activity provided additional information, particularly on the lives of children who were unable to even be considered for attending the consultation because of their work outside the community.
Daily life. In this activity children individually describe their daily life before sharing and discussing with others. They use a diagram and drawings as the basis so that it is not necessary to depend on children being literate. The reason for starting in this way is not only that it will provide useful information to share, but also that the process has practical benefits. The description is something that it is possible for children to do, and so they develop confidence in the style of the meeting. It is information of their own, and adults demonstrate that they are interested in what children say and do so by listening to and discussing with children, and respecting their views.

Likes and dislikes. The use of arenas such as home, school, work, community acts as a stimulus to provide information from different aspects of children’s lives. This broad approach helps draw out interconnections but also differences between girls and boys, in school and out of school children. It also helps to enable children to discuss all areas of their life, recognising that some are not at school but valuing their contributions to the discussion as well as their life and work in the community. Children work in gender and school/work based groups.
Identification of protection concerns. The issues identified by children in their dislikes are used as a foundation for girls and boys to identify their protection problems and concerns. The dislikes were written out on separate small papers, and in this next part of the workshop children then grouped these papers. Children discussed the clustered groupings, and decided which are the main issues and gave them headings. Girls and boys experienced some similar and some different problems: in addition there are differences in problems and issues raised by girls in school and out of school, and between boys in school and out of school.

Monitoring or baseline information. This segment builds further on the understanding gained through children’s daily life, likes and especially their dislikes, and identification of the main problems they face. This process involves starting in gender and work/school groups and then assembling information on main priority issues in a plenary discussion. In the development of monitoring information, children also consider the frequency and extent of the problem, based on their knowledge and experience (for example, how many children are involved or experience the problem and how often it occurs). They also note which children are most involved, and with whom they could raise or talk about the problem, and what kind of response there would be (if any).
Review and reflection

An individual consultation does not end until there has been some reflection on the process and learning, at least by the adults or facilitators.

Compilation of information

The monitoring or baseline information gathered is compiled and kept for use in future work. The information will be used in planning strategies, designing programme activities, monitoring and evaluation. It will be used with children to show what they have produced, so that girls and boys can check with their friends in the village, plan and participate in follow up work. The information gathered from girls and boys was supplemented through focus group discussions with adults.

An analytical report on the findings will be prepared for the managers and staff of Save the Children.

A chart was used to record information. The headings of the chart are given below, with a short explanation of what information is recorded in each column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIORITY</th>
<th>PROBLEM</th>
<th>CHILDREN</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>TIMES</th>
<th>WHOM</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Priority number allocated by children</td>
<td>Nature of the problem</td>
<td>Which children are affected, for example, girls or boys, age,</td>
<td>An estimate of the proportion of local children affected by this problem</td>
<td>The number of times this problem happens for example over a week, month or year</td>
<td>Who children can or do tell about the problem</td>
<td>What is the response when they do tell about the problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now we know, whenever we are collecting data, that we must be aware of `staff assumptions’ and we must take care to that these assumptions are not included in information about children
6. SOME LEARNING

"Children have skills of understanding themselves and their problems. It is still needed for staff to pay more attention to learning about children’s lives."

The consultations have provided a useful monitoring line for programme work, and baseline information for new work locations. The information and findings are not presented here, because the main purpose of this report is to document the process of consulting children that can be used in many other programmes and in different contexts. The information includes particular protection problems that have been identified by children in each community where the programme operates. Other significant and important learning for programme work has come both from the process of doing the consultations, and the findings about children's lives and their local communities from the consultations. Only some examples can be provided here.

The benefits of consultations and children's participation for programme work were immediately apparent in a range of areas. For example, in the process of discussion in one consultation, a group of children found they were individually paid different amounts for the same work. This was taken up with the employer and rates changed.
Other examples have included the identification of abuse cases (and identified repeat perpetrators) which the programme took up at once.

"I didn’t expect so much sexual abuse and exploitation."

Consultations lead to improvements in wages and work benefits

In their discussions during a consultation in one southern village, children found out they were paid different amounts for the same work. Some were getting 10,000 kyat and some 5,000 kyat wages. The children made a drama about this and presented it to the community in the Pagoda festival. After this festival, the children who received only 5,000 kyat had their wages increased.

In a village to the north, children found there were differences in the wages paid and other benefits (such as holidays, or payments if they are sick) for domestic work. An older child who was a programme volunteer collected information about the differences and showed it to employers and to a local association. After this all children received the same salary range and benefits. The salary depended on length of service, but holidays and sick pay were provided.
The adult facilitators were generally surprised at the extent of sexual abuse children reported, even when they had only just got to know the children. They had not expected that there would be so much.

In one community, three girls separately talked about being sexually abused. In the discussion, they realised it was the same man. As they shared this with adult facilitators, the staff were able to take up the case and report to the authorities.

The interconnections between different areas of children's life indicated a need for a holistic response. What happens in one part of life can affect children's circumstances elsewhere, such as reasons why children are not in school may be due to problems at school or at home. To understand and deal with protection problems in different arena, particularly including school, requires some knowledge of all areas of children's lives. In many countries violence at school is one underlying reason why some children do not attend, but there can also be problems of some teachers discriminating against boys, and favouring (and even sexually harassing) girls. The consultations identified the need to respond to particular issues of different groups of children, for example, particular problems of girls, different problems in different types of work. The consultations highlighted the different context, opportunities and problems for children in different parts of the country, and showed how programmes need to understand and respond to local areas rather than use standardised workplans. For example, patterns of migration for work, risks of child trafficking or early marriage, types of employment where children are preferred, and opportunities open to girls and boys, all vary in different parts of the country.

Some of the children who are victims of sexual abuse cannot express their cases, and we should encourage them to talk through participation and workshop activities.
An example of the complexities of children's lives and the need to understand more for programme work to be effective emerges through what is apparently a key divide in all communities - whether children are in or out of school. Pilot consultations showed the difficulties of mixing groups of boys or of girls who are in-school and out of school. For example, in discussions of daily life, because of the status and importance attached to school and the shame some children felt of not being in school, those out of school children did not talk much about their lives, and some pretended they were attending. Some children are ashamed about not going to school, not simply because of poverty but it seems because of the lower status that comes through being poor. The degrees of lower status are complex, depending on family economy and work done by parents and by children. The problems of stigma and discrimination through status mean that in discussions children might focus on school life and talk less about their work experiences. Initially they did not want to admit they were not in school and since many had some, albeit brief experience of school and knew about school life, it was easy to pretend. Yet children not at school face a range of protection problems. Through the consultations children were able to describe aspects of their life in a variety of places, and identify problems that require resolution - but which the programme can only work on by understanding the context and with children's participation.

Staff highlighted the importance in practical work of understanding children's lives especially in terms of diversity such as gender, age, rural/urban, in and out of school, ethnicity,
disabled, rather than thinking of and planning for a homogenous idealised childhood. The variations within a place but also between places were identified, along with some similarities. Despite diversity, many types of problem were found across the country, but often with distinct local variations (for example in types of corporal punishment).

The process of doing the consultations also provided learning for all the adult staff facilitators about working with children. The interaction with children and discussions about children's lives led to a much greater appreciation of children's knowledge, abilities, resilience, and mature capacities. This learning gained by staff amounted to a transformation of their ideas about children and local childhoods before and after doing consultations. This included a realisation of the extent of children's knowledge of their communities, which some staff saw as being equal to that of adults. Children's levels of responsibility for contributing to their family economy, and their sense of duty for this, were also highlighted. Some children were seen to be taking what staff thought of as adult levels of responsibility, and work.

These changes in staff knowledge and understanding about children's lives were accompanied by a realisation of the importance of consultations and children's participation. Adults also reflected on methods of facilitation and work with children. They pointed out the importance of dress, in order to be acceptable to children, and to show
children the respect that children are expected to give adults. For example, children are used to and admire traditional dress, rather than skirts or trousers. As one staff pointed out `Sometimes because of dress there is a gap between children and facilitator'. The facilitators pointed out the importance of training and experience for adult staff.

The intensity of consultation work, with individual work, group discussions, plenary debates, along with the scale and scope of problems presented, required a lot of concentration on the part of adult facilitators. They found that children expected them to be focused and not to appear sleepy (unlike children’s experiences of some teachers). The facilitators learned that it is important that they are mentally prepared for the work, and that they can leave their own problems in the office or at home. Also the facilitators learned it is necessary to have some time for relaxation themselves and not to work overtime in the days before a consultation. They recommended that no more than two consultations should be done by the same staff in one month, to allow time for preparation and follow up.

Finally, staff also saw that girls and boys changed and developed through participation, even through the short consultation process. They saw how children overcame some shyness, and began to express themselves and to discuss with their peers, and to share their views with adult facilitators. Staff could see this was an important process for their work. One commented that "after the consultation I see that staff should respect children.' The fact that some children began to look at and take action to change and improve their circumstances, also indicated new possibilities and the growth of different relationships between adult staff and children.
he process of consultations with children proved more successful than envisaged in bringing a range of benefits for the programme. The monitoring information and baseline data themselves provide a foundation for future work. The process of consultations enables the quality of work to improve because of developments in the relationships between staff and children, the growth in knowledge and skills of facilitators, and the shifts in attitudes towards children. Also, the children developed during the consultations, in sharing information, expressing views, making decisions and working with adults in new and different ways. Some children have already begun to take action, in discussions with adults. In the local communities, adults have begun to observe differences which they value.

7. CONCLUSION

“From the consultation we learned the likes and dislikes, problems and issues of girls and boys in and out of school. So that we need to continuously learn about the problems/issues of children - to be responsive to the things learned from children.”

""
Apart from the follow up to individual consultations, the next stage will be for the integration of children’s participation into the programme and local community life. This is important if communities and children are to respond to changing problems. There needs to be some sustainability of a mechanism for children’s participation, in order for processes of renewal (that is, new children becoming involved), and to deal with the fact of ongoing change which means that new problems and difficulties emerge which will need a response. Opportunities for, and pressures on children and families change, and so protection issues also change. New groups of children experience different childhoods and it is only with their participation that opportunities and problems can receive appropriate responses. Regular consultations provide a format for programme work to learn about children’s lives and issues, and the integration of children’s participation into regular work in an integrated manner across different sectors will mean that in the future such consultations become an ordinary part of programme work.

“**We need to give a chance to children to express their views.**”

Broader efforts to use children’s views and experiences to inform programme strategy and advocacy developments are also being taken forward by Save the Children. The Child Protection team will present key lessons learned from the process and outcomes of the consultations to other sectors. Children’s views and suggestions will be used to inform and update Save the Children’s assessments, plans and strategies.
The consultation process of part of a journey to actively involve children in all stages of programming, from identifying problems and suggestions for responses, to planning strategies, activities, monitoring and evaluation. This involvement of children must go beyond organisational programme work, to make the participation of girls and boys an aspect of everyday life. The aim to enable and support children’s meaningful participation in homes, schools, workplaces and communities, is so that they may contribute to creating change that better protects and realises their rights, and so improves family and community life.

“Children request staff to do more consultation with them.”

“Children are so brilliant. Even at 12 years old. Clever enough as an adult.”

“All of the children are different, but they can be at risk.”

“Children value their relationships among their families.”

“Children don’t like sexual abuse.”

“Children are facing problems but they have no chance to share problems with adults.”

“Different children name different problems.”

“Both poor and rich children have been abused by adults.”