APPROACHES TO CHILD PARTICIPATION

Introduction

Save the Children's mandate is to make child rights a reality. In 1995, Save the Children's document `Towards a Children's Agenda: New Challenges for Social Development' articulated the need to put children at the centre of all development policy and planning. SCF's draft global strategy also mentions the importance that the organisation will place on child focused work in the future. A key aspect of SCF's strategy concerns the participation of children in development. SCF recognises that there is shortage of documented experiences of children's participation. There is also relatively little analytical literature on this theme.

This paper focuses on child participation in development activities. It seeks to generate discussion, and greater clarity, among those who wish to promote the principle of child participation as enunciated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and contribute more broadly to the development of the 'Children's Agenda'. The aim is to clarify concepts which otherwise may end up as meaningless, and to contribute to a debate on the subject which can lead to better practice and the realisation of 'child rights'.

The paper begins by analysing some of the reasons for promoting participation by children in development programmes. It then considers some specific approaches to child participation that are being practised by agencies in India. Finally, it suggests some possibilities and limitations of children's participation in matters that affect their lives, and identifies areas in which further exploratory work may be required.

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Section 1

Children, Childhoods and Rights

"We may be unnecessarily sabotaging our present, and our children's future, by being blind
to the inconsistencies and irrationalities of adult-child interaction in family and community in this century... special feeding, health and education programmes undertaken for children [cannot] substitute for joint community projects carried out by adults and children together, in which capacities of the young to contribute to the welfare of all receives full recognition."

Elise Boulding, Children's Rights and the Wheel of Life, New Brunswick, USA (1979)

Looking beyond the stereotypes

All societies have care for their young ones in their own way. Their perceptions of children, needs of the childhood and what is required has been based largely on personal experience. All adults have been children and adults operate the society.

If women asserted their identity in the dominant development paradigm in the latter half of 20th century, child rights has now started emerging as an issue. About two decades back child labour issues brought to the forefront the idea that there is a special quality about childhood that needs to be preserved and nurtured. The media brought home the fact that child sexual abuse was indeed not too uncommon even in the Indian conservative society. It would be erroneous to picture a "standard Indian childhood" on the basis of such morbid and macabre stories which `sell' and attract attention.

Children are often defined as a human beings between the newly born stage and a time when government considers them grown-up enough to cast their vote. This misses the point that even among children of a certain age groups there are attributes, qualities and maturity levels determined by culture, environment, circumstances, upbringing and other factors. A child on the street is more likely to be a worldly wise survivor than an educated middle class adult. It also implies that people stop developing when they reach adulthood and that adults can be considered in one sense to be "complete" human beings.

The popular perceptions of children and childhood have revolved around what they should be rather than what they are. It is becoming common knowledge that as no two individuals are alike, childhoods are many and varying. To understand children and childhoods necessitates the need to study a variety of diverse lifestyles and practices.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that the child (defined as any person under 18 years of age) who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters that affect her or him. The CRC argues that these views should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. For this purpose, the CRC suggests that children be provided an opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting them as individuals, either directly, or through a representative, or an appropriate body in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law (Article 12).

The onus lies on national governments which ratify the convention. The CRC has been ratified by over 170 countries, a singular achievement for an international legal instrument.
The legislation in India stipulate different ages to define children. Legal instruments and the definitions that they use are very useful for public policy, practice and accountability processes. Nevertheless, they miss out the importance of individual aptitudes and societal biases.

The distinction between children and adults is based on social, cultural and temporal norms. There is not one childhood but many, formed at the intersection of different cultural, social and economic systems, natural and man-made physical environments. Different positions in societies produce different childhoods, boys and girls experience different childhoods (even) within the same family. Social and economic changes affect children in ways very different from adults, as when increasing standard of living for parents does not necessarily imply the same for their offspring, or when pollution affects children more seriously and in different ways than adults.

There is a wide diversity of childhoods, produced not only by factors such as wealth, poverty, class, status (including class, caste, gender and disability) and global position, but also by wider processes of social change. Just as it is incorrect to treat adults as a homogeneous group, children also are not a homogeneous group and have different aspirations, needs and agendas. This has important implications for development agencies and planners concerned about children and the issues affecting their lives.

A cursory analysis of data on children suggests that aside from some information on health (such as infant and child mortality, nutritional status, immunisation coverage) and education (such as enrolment, retention and literacy) most development agencies do not as a rule collect very much information about children and childhoods. Much of what has been compiled has been written by adults rather than children themselves and reflects a paternalistic attitude on the part of adults who feel that they know about children and childhoods because they have themselves gone through childhood. There is very little data disaggregated on children’s lives and relatively little is actually known about children’s lives.

Note: SCF has begun to develop case studies about children and childhoods in India, following a training course in ‘Child Centred Participatory Research’ led by Dr Judith Ennew. See also Ennew J (1994) Street and Working Children, A guide to planning, development manual 4, Save the Children (UK).

Human rights, child rights and participation in development: making the connections

The idea that all human beings have rights simply on grounds of being human is not new. The principle of universality demands that all human beings have specific rights and that these rights cannot be negated or taken away.

In India, and in many parts of South Asia, there is sometimes a resistance to the concept of human rights. Individualised rights are often viewed as a creation of western societies and philosophies. National and local contexts, including the social and political order, and
religious and cultural practices, have led people to question the relevance of human rights perspectives for many parts of South Asia.

Despite this, the concept of individualised `human rights' is gradually gaining acceptance in India. This is reflected in the recent emphasis on human rights training within the National Council for Education Research and Training and the work of the Administrative Staff College of India.

The context largely determines the perception. People do not always expect the same level of adherence to `good practice' on human rights in poorer countries, or in poorer parts of a country, as in more affluent areas. The level of affluence however is not a guarantee of adherence to good human rights practice. Indeed the laws pertaining to human rights establish a set of ideals not yet realised in even the most affluent societies.

The extent of civil unrest in a country or an area also conditions the level of adherence to good human rights practice. Violations of human rights are generally viewed as resulting from conflicts between groups of people (primarily adults) and the state. The role of civil society in supporting human rights has been a relatively neglected area. A considerable amount of human rights work has focused on the responsibilities of states, multilateral agencies and international treaties.

If the concept of human rights is gaining wider acceptance, what then of children's rights?

Though the literature on child rights has increased in recent times, awareness and understanding of the concept is still limited. Three reasons help to explain this:

1. Children's rights have not generally been acknowledged as part of a `sub set' of `human rights'. Human rights groups have in the past felt that their work would be taken less seriously if child rights is explicitly recognised as part of `human rights'. Few human rights groups seem to have taken an active interest in discussions about child rights. An exception is the Anti-Slavery International which focuses on groups of people (including children) who are condemned to work under conditions of bondage.

Conversely, organisations concerned about children's development have not equated their work within the broader `human rights' framework. Not wanting to politicise their work, they have been reluctant to link with human rights agencies. End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT) is an exception as it focuses on the exploitation of children as a result of tourism.

Child rights need to be recognised as a distinct category of human rights worthy of special attention because in most societies children are relatively powerless. Linked to this is the idea of `the special quality of childhood' in which children are vulnerable and therefore must be protected from adverse influences. This partly explains the reason why children's rights can be assigned a special status within the human rights canvas.
2. In virtually all societies there is a strong bias against the idea of children as individuals in their own right making their own social, economic and cultural contribution. It is especially the case with girls.

A part of the solution to improving children's lives must involve supporting families and communities to do what they have traditionally done - to care for their children in a stable manner consistent with their culture. Families and communities also need to be encouraged to open up traditional practices to promote greater involvement of their children as part of a general move towards creating a more democratic society, with greater opportunities and equal rights for all.

There are many domains in which children's competence and ability to participate is undervalued. The idea that children are the off-spring of individual parents but that society shares responsibility for providing every child with an equal start in life, and thereby investing in future generations to develop capable and responsible adults, is not widely acknowledged or accepted.

3. Children's needs are viewed as synonymous with the needs of their families. Child rights are accepted as adults' responsibilities (generally parents or guardians and the state) so far as they relate to survival, development and protection. The rights of children to participate in matters that affect their lives is least well understood. Children's rights to participate in decisions that affect their lives are generally treated by adults with either non-comprehension or ridicule! A frequent assertion about child participation is "How can children decide what is right or wrong? They are not mature enough!" This is based on certain assumptions about levels of participation and about children.

Children need to learn that the rights of citizenship are based on certain individual and societal responsibilities. To learn about societal responsibilities children need to engage in collaborative activities with others including people older and more experienced than themselves. This partly explains the significance of children's participation in community projects.

Why is participation important?

Five sets of arguments help to explain this:

1. The arguments for participation by people in development activities can be briefly summarised as:

   From efficiency  It is more productive (in terms of use of resources and drawing on local knowledge systems) for people to participate in matters that affect them rather than be excluded.

   From enrichment  By participating in matters that affect their lives people can contribute to and enhance the quality of decisions taken and thereby gain useful
From empowerment By participating in decisions that affect them, people's capacities and capabilities can be developed and they gain more control over decisions that shape their lives.

The argument from efficiency can be broadly equated with economics, the argument from enrichment is generally used in cross-cultural discourse, whereas the argument from empowerment can be broadly equated with political (not party political) processes. The empowerment approach seeks to develop skills, knowledge and experience amongst the participants themselves.

Participation by children in decisions that affect their lives can similarly be justified on the grounds of efficiency, enrichment or empowerment depending on the specific circumstances.

Roger Hart lists two major kinds of benefits of participation:
- those that enable individuals to develop into more competent and confident members of society; and
- those that improve the organisation and functioning of communities.

Participation not only allows a child the right to have a voice, it is equally valuable in enabling children to discover the rights of others to have their own very different voices and views.

A typical Indian parent would be alarmed about the idea of involving their children in "political processes". It is however important to note that this process is part of a wider socialisation and growing-up process that children in all societies undergo. Three key points to note here are:

(i) The degree of opportunity for a child to collaborate in the everyday management of family, schools, neighbourhood and community groups is a reflection of the participatory opportunities available for adults in that culture.

(ii) Children's participation does not mean supplanting adults. Adults do, however, need to learn to listen, support and guide; and to know when and when not to speak.

(iii) Through their participation in activities children can be more "visible" in development planning and policy making.

Young people's participation cannot be discussed without considering power relations and the struggle for equal rights. This is especially so for disadvantaged children, for through participation with others ... children learn that to struggle against discrimination and repression, and to fight for their equal rights in solidarity with others is itself a fundamental democratic rights.
2. Participation can enable "learning by doing". This can be viewed as part of the process of empowerment. Participation by children in development activities can contribute to their learning. It can provide a basis for the development of skills, knowledge and experience and it can assist in the transfer of these from one generation to another.

3. In most poor households (especially in poorer countries), children often contribute to the well being of other household members. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that children's productive contribution to household well being has been grossly underestimated. The universal tendency in families not to recognise the capacities of children as decision-makers even when, as workers, they are critical to the economy of the family.

4. Participation by children in matters that affect their lives is in fact not such a novel concept as might first appear. Historically it is only in recent times that 'young people' (including under 18s) have been adjudged to be incapable of participating in public policy decisions (most notably political decision making).

In western pre-industrial societies "childhood" was not a recognised concept. Nevertheless communities tended to divide their members in age-sets. These age hierarchies often constrained the possibilities for action by young people. At the same time however there were other tendencies too. For example, the role of young apprentices ("no longer children in our sense, but not adults either") who were generally tough and turbulent and did at times resort to direct political action. "...It is a reminder of how different the role of the young was from that which we expect of them today. Modernization seems to have brought with it a greater, not lesser disciplining of the young. It is no less real for being subtle and internal..."

There have been instances of children's participation in various cultures and in different periods of history. An example of children's and young people's participation is mentioned in the anthropological studies of tribals in Central India. Ghotul, a unique dormitory club of Muria boys and girls, has been mentioned by the well-known social anthropologist, Verrier Elwin, in his works. This institution was a central focus of Muria life before it was undermined by external influences. All social and religious functions involved the ghotul. Elwin noted that "...it had an all pervading influence on the grown-ups who could not manage any social function without its help". He described two different forms of ghotul and their influence on lives of tribal Murias. It is believed that similar institutions are widely distributed among communities of the Austro-Asiatic cultures.

In many societies today children and young people continue to make up a high proportion of the total population. According to the 1988 census in India the number of people under the age of 16 comprised almost 36% of the total population. Similarly in countries like Zimbabwe and Malawi, young people (under 18 years of age) comprise over 40% of the national population. For development agencies to exclude such a large segment of the population from participating in decision making (by focusing only on adult participation) is therefore an act of grave folly. Just as the importance of participation by women in decision making has been
acknowledged, in a similar way children's involvement and participation in
development also needs to be promoted. By doing this one can effectively contribute
to a deepening and widening of democracy.

5. If adult participation in politics aims to promote democracy and enable responsible
citizenship, participation by children in decisions that affect their lives can lay the
foundation for this process. There is an inherent contradiction in excluding children
from participation in decisions that affect their lives and yet expecting adults (at the
age of 18) to actively and responsibly participate in decision making. Hence it is
possible to build a basis for democracy, and responsible and capable citizens for the
future, by enabling children to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

"A nation is democratic to the extent that its citizens are involved, particularly at the
community level. The confidence and competence to be involved must be gradually
acquired through practice...there should be gradually increasing opportunities for
children to participate in any aspiring democracy ..."

Roger Hart, Citizen's Participation: From tokenism to citizenship, 1992

Levels or ladders of Participation

In the Indian schools of thought, life is a process of becoming and the life-cycle is governed
by Karma. In the rural areas, there are many people who do not know how old they are.
Children are not seen as a separate or lesser category of person. They evolve into
adulthood with the passage of time, gain experiences, assume responsibilities and go on to
the next stage. It legitimises the arguments about increasing levels of participation - for adults
as well as for children.

Roger Hart presents a `beginning typology' for analysing children's participation in
development projects which is in the form of a `ladder of participation'. This starts with
'tokenism' and proceeds to a `qualified participation' in which children's actions and
decisions are supported and facilitated by adults (See Annexure 1).

A variation is proposed by Barbara Franklin (1995). Her modified ladder begins with
several rungs in which there is no participation and children are ignored, in the middle
stages there are various degrees of consultation, and at the top of the ladder there are
projects characterised by child initiated and directed actions in which "children are in
charge"?

These typologies suggest that:
(a) Participation is not an end in itself. The opportunities for children's to participate in
decisions that affect their lives largely reflect the participatory opportunities available
for adults in a particular culture or community.
(b) Children's participation does not mean supplanting adults. Adults need to learn to
listen, support, facilitate and guide.
(c) Genuine involvement fosters motivation.
(d) Even when participation is encouraged it does not necessarily lead to children having a genuine role in decision making.

(e) There are different levels of participation which can be broadly classified.

The ability to truly participate depends on a basic competence of an individual to understand the perspective of other persons. In a limited way children can generally do this by the age of three, but the process of being able to simultaneously identify with another perspective, while maintaining one's own view, continues to develop through adolescence.

Research in the West suggests that the process of "perspective-taking" begins in the second or third year of a child's life. Up to the age of 5 or 6, although children become more aware that others around them have feelings, there is still confusion between the subjective psychological, and the objective or physical characteristics of a person's behaviour. Hence, intentional and unintentional behaviours of others are not differentiated. Gradually the "perspective-taking ability" improves so that between 5 and 9 years of age children become capable of clearly differentiating the physical and psychological characteristics of a person. During this period, most children realise that each person has their own unique, subjective view of the world.

Between the ages of 7 and 12, children begin to be able to step outside their own perceptions, to reflect on their interactions with others, and realise that other people can do the same thing. This phase of "sequential perspective-taking" means that two children now realise that they can put themselves "in each others shoes". They also recognise that people may have multiple or mixed feelings, such as being interested and happy, but a little frightened.

In the next stage, between 10 to 15 years, "mutual perspective-taking" children develop the ability to organise themselves into "enduring democratic groups". Young people spontaneously coordinate their perspectives with those of others.

Beyond this, lies a stage where people begin to comprehend "multiple mutual perspectives forming a generalised societal, legal, or moral perspective in which all individuals can share". This "final stage" can emerge at any time after the age of 12 and that this stage enables the most fruitful cooperation between children.°

The above sequence is limited to an account of a child's intellectual development and his or her ability to take the perspective of others. It does not consider factors such as a child's understanding of different roles people have and the power they possess as a result of these roles (such as police, teachers and social workers). There may be class and gender based variations in levels of children's participation. Hart states that "...a lack of independence and self-direction in children of ... poor families may simply be an appropriate socialising response to their parents who have little freedom themselves in their daily lives...socialisation [of girls] emphasises protection and dependency, not autonomy, even though they may at 10 years of age already be responsible for feeding and looking after three young siblings". These and other factors, including (dis)ability, clearly need to be borne in mind by practitioners.

One might conclude that:
1. Children do participate to a lesser or greater extent in decisions that affect their lives. This needs to be recognised.

2. If we aim to understand children and childhoods more, we must involve children in this process rather than interpret their lives through adult perceptions.

3. Children's participation can be viewed as part of a "political process" if it seeks to develop their capacities, capabilities and learning, and enables them to gain more control over decisions that affect their lives. Children's participation can also be promoted for other reasons including efficiency and enrichment.

4. Children are not a homogeneous group. They have different aspirations, needs and agendas.

5. The ability of children to participate depends on a variety of factors including competence to understand the perspective of other persons. It is important that advocates of child participation take into account age, class, gender, culture, (dis)ability and other factors which may shape the ability of an individual child to participate in a development project.

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*Note: Sudhir Kakar (1982) provides an outline of "stages of childhood in the Indian tradition" pp 204-211. Kakar's work adds the importance of cultural traditions in order to understand children and childhoods.*

Section 2

Bal Sansad

During the last two decades non-formal education programmes which have included "do-it-yourself" activities have gained popularity. Some NGOs working with children have found that organising children and providing them with political education can enable them to become better citizens and contribute to a just and sustainable development process. In the last few years many of these NGOs have formalised this process into events. The children play, enjoy themselves, and learn simultaneously.

The Social Work Research Centre (SWRC) at Tilonia in Rajasthan is one of the leading voluntary organisations of India. Founded in 1972 it has now evolved into, in the words of the workers, "a Barefoot College". In the late 1970s SWRC took a conscious decision to devolve its activities from the centralised location to field centres in order to be closer to the people. The decision-making also shifted to groups consisting of workers and people from the community. Among these, the Village Education Committee supervises the non-formal education activities of SWRC.
Education which seeks to produce self-confident, skilled persons who can collectively
serve the basic needs of rural communities is central to SWRC's approach to development.
The learning is sought through experience and mutual interaction, not through formal
classroom teaching. The underlying belief is that everyone in the community - men,
women, young people, children - have something to teach and learn. Accordingly, the
interactions take place at different levels. An interesting aspect is the work with children,
mainly through the night and day schools.

SWRC currently runs three day schools and 63 night schools for girls and boys who work
during the day in the Silora Block of Ajmer district. Most of the children who attend the
night school work as shepherds or farm labourers. If they did not have access to the night
schools, it is likely that they would be denied access to education. About 80 per cent of the
students are girls.

The night school curriculum includes literacy, numeracy, origami, science and vocational
training. Children also participate in a unique exercise called Bal Sansad (Children's
Parliament) which helps root the education in the local context and builds appropriate and
relevant life skills - in this instance, governance and decision making. SWRC also assists in
the teaching of adults. This is conducted in other locations and the actual manifestations of
this are not seen or felt by the children. Bal Sansad teaches children about politics and the
electoral process within their own world. It retains the interest of students and enhances
their curiosity to learn, and to ask. Bal Sansad was conceived of as teaching aid for
children - a kind of role play, but one which operates at a wider level.

SWRC has been running `Non Formal Education' programmes since 1975. Panchayat
(village level local self governance system) was one of the topics that was taught to children.
Until 1990 it was taught as a subject. In 1991, a two-day Bal Mela (Children's Fair) was
organised to take the subject beyond the classroom. It included a lot of play activities,
including an impromptu election exercise. Subsequently, the education workers of SWRC
decided to expand it into a process. Their perspective has shaped the Bal Sansad which is
designed to teach children that democracy should be above gender, caste and creed.

The first elections which took place in 1993 were fairly systematic and some thinking had
gone into articulating responsibilities and power for children in this exercise. The entire
organisation turned up to extend support in terms of ideas, organisation and logistics.
SWRC staff took on the role of bureaucracy to the children's government in order to impart
training about how policies are developed, how the electoral process works, what are the
blockages, and how people can exercise their vote.

By 1995 when the second elections took place, there was greater clarity in the process. It
was acknowledged by the SWRC staff that knowledge and exercise of rights and power
had to be imparted and demonstrated within children's fora rather than through training
workshops, and that children had to be linked much closely to SWRC's overall work, going
beyond their immediate area of interest viz the night schools. In the second Bal Sansad the
members are free to ask questions and also have powers to authorise and implement
decisions.
Besides the main centre in Tilonia, SWRC has seven field centres in Silora Block in Ajmer district - Nallu, Singla, Brijpura, Kadampura, Tikawada, Kotdi and Chhota Naraina. These seven field centres represent the seven states of the Tilonia `republic'. (The population of Silora is about 1.68 lakhs living in 110 villages spread over 500 sq. km.). Elections take place simultaneously to the Bal Sansad and the seven state legislatures. About 2,500 students who attend the night and day schools run by SWRC form the electorate. They are between 6 to 14 years of age.

There is one Member of Parliament (MP) for every 50-55 children. Currently there are 17 MPs in all. These include 9 children who belong to the ruling party and are ministers. The remaining eight are members of the opposition. Each Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) represents 30 to 35 children. In each state there are 5 to 6 MLAs. Currently there are 45 MLAs. Most MPs and MLAs are between 11 and 14 years.

While the children are the elected representatives of the masses, all civil servants are adults. The members of SWRC perform the role of the government machinery. The various section in-charges perform the role of the Secretary of the concerned Ministry. The education coordinator in each centre who acts as the Chief Minister's Secretary also gives support to the MLAs. The bureaucrats are required to provide information whenever the elected members so demand and can also be reprimanded for non-compliance of legislative orders!

Bal Sansad is comprised of only two political parties - the Ujala Party and the Gwal Party. Ujala has been in power for two consecutive terms. The last Bal Sansad elections took place in May 1995. An `Election Commission' which comprised of SWRC workers and teachers laid down the rules, supervised and organised the event. Forty children filed their nomination papers. Some were nominated by the other children and some volunteered. Unlike the first election, this time certain criteria for eligibility of the candidates were developed in consultation with children and teachers - regular attendance, ability to read, write, speak in public, and sing! Moreover the parents had to give written consent allowing the children to contest and later, if elected, to assume responsibilities and participate in meetings which could mean visiting other villages. Forms submitted by children who did not meet the requirement were rejected.

Some candidates who lost filed writs. The name of one of the winning candidate was not on the voter list. Following a writ petition, enquiries were conducted. The allegations were found to be true and the opponent was declared the winner.

There have also been cases of malpractice. Some children spent money and some parents also contributed to win votes for their child. Action could not be taken against a candidate who was found to have spent as much as Rs 300 on his campaign as there was no precedent and in any case the errant contestant did not win. Since then rules to avoid corrupt practices have been framed.

The present Prime Minister is a 13 year old, Lakshmi Devi. In her election appeal, she promised cleanliness, timeliness and interesting teaching. The government or the ruling
party consists of nine ministers who hold the charge of various ministries - education, finance, home, industries, energy, communications, environment, women's development and water resources. The others are members of the "Opposition".

Every two months an environment of actual parliamentary proceedings is created through which the child is able to see and feel the results of real awareness in a democratic process. The parliamentarians are elected from among the children studying in the night and day schools. Through this level of learning, the child's world is connected to the larger world perspective. This process of learning broaden's thought, increases expectations and generates curiosity. This creates a feeling of fearlessness among the children who in turn develop the independence of thought and confidence to question and challenge corrupt structures in society.

As the Bal Sansad emerged from the NFE programme, most children ask questions about education. They are now being encouraged to ask other questions which relate to their life and the development activities of SWRC.

The ministers are expected to visit six night schools each every month. Considering the distances and reluctance of most parents to allow their daughters go out unescorted, the teachers accompany them. Often the teachers have been pulled up for any display of laziness.

In case there is a problem, children address their complaint and suggestions to the local elected member who in turn writes to the concerned Minister. The Minister along with his Secretary proceeds to address the problem. The children's parliament meets almost every month to discuss the activities of the previous month and plan for the next month. The decisions regarding the activities of the night schools are also taken in these meetings. The children keep a register of their teachers' attendance and report truant teachers to the parliament.

At SWRC children are increasingly being encouraged to have a say in every aspect of village life, beginning with village improvements such as water pumps and solar-powered lighting, and recreational events like the children's festival. The children are about to launch their own newsmagazine.

By providing children an opportunity to learn about their rights and duties in such a manner, it seems possible to prepare them to face the challenges of adulthood and perform their responsibilities as a conscious participating citizens. At another level, it should also be possible help in articulating development priorities and thereby putting children in the centre of development agenda with overarching links with other concerns whether it is social development or environment. Tejaram, the Development Coordinator of SWRC sums up the work of the organisation, "What we are trying to do with the children's parliament is give children an idea of how democracy works and involve them as equal participants in the whole process. Through working with children for the past 20 years we know they are capable of taking their own decisions. We hope that adults will come to understand and accept this."
Key learning points from SWRC's approach
- initiated by NGO (adults) as a teaching and learning method
- experiential learning through participation
- increasing levels of participation by children in decision making
- broadly an empowerment approach
- facilitating role of adults
- linkages with the NGOs and others
Section 3

Bhima Sangha

The Concerned for Working Children (CWC) has been working in Karnataka since 1985. CWC aims to eradicate child labour by addressing the root causes of the problem. While working with children in Bangalore, CWC discovered three main migration patterns involving children. From the South Kanara district, many children migrate to urban centres to work in hotels. The reasons for this migration are due to social, cultural and economic poverty. CWC have found that middlemen and peer pressure has encouraged the outflow. In the western ghat areas, megaprojects like the Varahi hydro-electric project have submerged land and displaced families (including children). This too has contributed to children working in intolerable conditions. Finally, in the drought-prone areas of north Karnataka families (and children) are compelled to migrate in search of livelihoods. CWC set up a rural programme in 1989 in the South Kanara district, called Gramashrama along with its urban programme in Bangalore, Ankur, prompted by the fact that migration of children from rural to urban areas in search of livelihoods was clearly one of the causes of child labour.

These programmes seek to create time and space for children to grow and develop. They are designed to go beyond literacy and vocational training, and aim to equip children with information and life skills which lead to empowerment. The focus of Ankur is to convert child labour situations which disable children into child work situations which enable children to have more control over their lives. Gramashrama works towards arresting child migration by revitalising the rural economy.

Namma Shale (Our School) programme for the empowerment of children is implemented in both the rural as well as the urban programme. The idea was conceived to: enable children to engage in an occupation that could ensure a reasonable standard of living; contribute to and participate in the development of the community and in the regeneration and preservation of environment; actively contribute to and participate in the political and other decision making processes of the area.

Ankur has 24 centres and 52 contact points in Bangalore while Gramashrama has 80 centres in 60 villages of South Kanara District covering two taluks, Kundapur and Udupi. Through these centres, children can join Bhima Sanghas. Conceived initially as fora that would help information collection about the lives of the children, Bhima Sanghas have emerged as collectives where the members prioritise their needs and articulate their demands. Over the years, Bhima Chakra or the process of making and implementing action plans has become part of informal activities of Bhima Sanghas. The children (girls and boys) share the problems they face in their communities and identify the issues they wish to address. CWC field activists play a facilitating role. They visit these centres at times that are convenient to the children. They support the children through the use of participatory research techniques to collect information, identify and acquire tools.
required to redress the problem, implement their plans and evaluate their success or failure for future learning.

The field activists use a variety of methods and aids such as street theatre and puppetry, exposure trips, games, audio-visual media and Bhima Patrike (Bhima magazine) - a monthly news magazine for working children published by CWC.

When children have been with the centre for at least three years, have achieved a fair level of participation and are 12-14 years old, they are encouraged and assisted to choose a vocation. They are advised to be trained in at least two skills. At this stage they are provided with information about viable occupations and helped to match their ability and aptitude. With consent from parents, children send in their applications. Candidates are selected through interviews for a Residential Training Programme.

Depending on the vocation, they undergo training for 6 to 9 months at the training centres - Namma Bhoomi (Our Land) in Gramashrama and Nammane (Our House) in Ankur. The course consists of general information and vocational training. The former covers subjects like sciences, mathematics, social sciences, literature, economic and social analysis, creative expression, gender sensitisation and basic skills in gardening, sewing, cooking and first aid. The latter includes inputs to access raw material, production processes, designing, marketing, financial management and management skill. Both master crafts persons from the villages and academically qualified people work together as instructors. Each training is followed by an evaluation conducted by a team of established professionals in that particular field. This team presents each with child a toolkit, a letter of assessment and certificate.

As follow-up, children are helped to form teams, draft project proposals in order to secure credit. Necessary inputs to start and run a viable business are provided to them. They are also encouraged and helped to participate in community meetings and in the effective functioning of the village level Panchayat Raj.

Inputs are invited from children for the development of Namma Bhoomi (our land) with the aim of providing alternative life systems and sustaining these - whether it is in terms of planning, production (village based craft like pottery, terra work, weaving, leather works or any other traditional craft), training, design, credit, raw material, marketing and group management, all children are encouraged to contribute. This is expected to stem the tide of migration and entry of children into the labour force.

Bhima Sangha facilitate relevant education and life skills for children that can prevent their entry into the child labour force. It also builds their aptitude for participation in processes and decisions that govern their life. Increasingly, Bhima Sanghas are taking on advocacy roles.

CWC makes an interesting distinction between child participation and child-adult partnership. In situations where children are only participants they become passive recipients of resources and opportunities offered by the adults. They are not in a position to demand as a right what they feel they require. However competent the children are in their participation, they are excluded from decisions related to policy, strategy and planning in the
processes they participate in. Whereas in partnership, both children and adults are active in the process of decision making. Participation of both need not necessarily be equal, it would depend on the experiences, aptitudes, skills and abilities of both partners.

A true partnership nurtures an atmosphere where participation of children and adults is constantly enhanced. The children traverse through a spiral of empowerment where they take decisions themselves, through their groups, their community and their local government. They participate in the design and management of the NGO they are interacting with, but also in the formulation of its policy and vision. They take on responsibilities to use the opportunities created to empower themselves and others. Where partnership is not the guiding principle, the participation of children becomes limited. CWC believes that when children start participating at a very significant level, they may demand for a partnership relationship with the adults. But the decision to permit the partnership still remains with the adults. For CWC therefore laying the foundation for a partnership is the starting point to effective participation. Once this is done, each child sets out on his/her own graph of increasing levels of participation - their starting points determined by their age, ability and the opportunities provided to them.

Children as members of Bhima Sangha play a crucial role in the Panchayat Toofan a programme that is promoted by CWC in collaboration with the Panchayat Raj institutions. Since 1991, CWC has made contacts with panchayats, organised parents and generally done the spade work for Bhimasangha.

The Panchayat Toofan programme currently operates in nine panchayats of Karnataka (five in Kundapur Taluka in South Kanara; two in Malnad in the Western Ghats and two in Bellary in the north). As the objective is to forge effective partnerships, the role of various actors from the adult constituency (including elected representatives, trade unions, bureaucracy, employers, family community and NGOs) in this process is duly acknowledged. Indeed, Bhima Sanghas acquire dynamism through links with other village level groups like Namma Gumpu (women’s self-help groups and artisan groups) and Namma Sabha (a forum of Namma Gumpu).

Panchayat Toofan consists of task forces at two levels - Taluka and Village. The village level task force consists of elected representatives (all village Panchayat members, the Taluka Panchayat member who represents the Panchayat and the Zilla Panchayat member who represents the Taluka); village level government functionaries (including the anganwadi or creche supervisor), representatives of women’s group, Bhima Sangha and CWC. The Taluka task force consists of the President, Vice-President and Secretary of the five panchayats, two Bhima Sangha members, two CWC staff, the President and Vice-President of the Taluka Panchayat, Assistant Commissioner and Executive Officer of the Taluk Panchayat and the Block Development Officer (BDO). Other government officers participate when they are needed.

Bhima Sangha members underscore their identity through identity cards, head bands, flag, an anthem, regular meetings and a savings scheme. The idea is that by organising themselves into a pressure group they are able to identify their problems and seek redressal through the development plans and activities.
They have been actively seeking redressal of their demands, including improved water and electricity supply, ration distribution, anganwadi facilities, and improved pension schemes through the Panchayat Raj System. One example of the work that Bhimasangha has been involved with is in Basur where because letters and repeated appeals did not receive responses from the local Panchayat offices, the representatives of Bhima Sabha and Namma Sabha called for a series of meetings to discuss the sad state of affairs about the Panchayat system.

To begin with, the children wanted to know more about the system. The concern expressed by both children and adults as they discussed the problems they faced in the context of the disintegration of the system of decentralisation led them to address the issue of Panchayat Raj in depth. The most significant aspect of the process of forging a common platform on this issue was that its most active and enthusiastic participants were representatives of children, women and indigenous people. Thus the process of re-building the concept of local self-government began in the area.

At about this time, the Karnataka state government announced elections to the Panchayats. This was preceded by an amendment to the Panchayat Raj Act. Discussions among the people resulted in the decision to activate the Namma Gumpus (Groups of Artisans) and to catalyse them to choose their own candidates for the elections. Children took part in every step of this process - in convincing people about the importance of elections, identifying the problems of the community, fighting for solutions, drafting the election manifesto, choosing the candidates and campaigning for them. A list of the needs and demands of people from 10 constituencies was drawn up. This list formed the basis of the manifesto jointly prepared by children and adults.

Bhima Sanghas and Namma Gumpus identified some candidates who were standing for election and presented a charter of demands (including `Have no caste bias, safeguard the environment, safeguard the system of decentralisation, be accountable to the people of the constituency, find solutions to local problems along with the people, be committed to the people'). The candidates signed the document and affirmed their commitment to work towards meeting those demands. When political parties approached the Bhima Sangha and Namma Gumpus with requests for encouraging votes for their respective candidates, the children replied "We have chosen our candidates. Why don't you accept them?"

In those constituencies, where no representatives had been chosen, the children supported candidate who signed the document and shared their concerns; such candidates were put on a `green list'. Those who refused were put on a `black list'. Children and adults went campaigning door to door for their candidates. Instead of pleading for votes like most others, they introduced themselves and the candidate to the people, discussed their problems and the possible means to resolve them. They explained the criteria for the choice of that candidate. The candidate had discussions with all the prospective voters and laid the ground for an intimate relationship with the constituency.

Some of the supported candidates won, some lost. In the entire process, people's role and the discussion of the children's issues was very significant. The Bhima Sabhas and Namma
Gumpus later decided to participate in the Taluka and Zilla Parishad elections on the same principle.

The Bhima Sangha has been evolving a methodology with adults by which children who enter into their collective go through a Chakra of empowerment. In this process, children's collectives begin by discussing and prioritising the issues of concern to them.

In a meeting organised by CWC and attended by different groups of men, women and adults differences in priorities emerged. When asked to prioritise their needs in the order of importance, men demanded (i) roads, (ii) civil constructions, (iii) bridges, (iv) school building and (v) street lights. Women demanded (i) anganwadi, (ii) site ownership or patta rights, (iii) raw materials (eg clay), (iv) water and (v) firewood. Children demanded (i) water, (ii) firewood, (iii) anganwadi, (iv) raw material (including clay) and (v) schools.

From such a list, the groups select the issues on which action has to be taken at that point of time. All relevant information about the issue has to be assimilated and analysed before developing an action plan. As part of this plan, all the necessary tools and resources as well as sharing of responsibilities are articulated and planned. The plan is then ready for execution. Once completed, the result of the action has to be evaluated and the process documented before it can be internalised. Through such a process, the children gradually move on to enhanced levels of empowerment and are equipped to address problems which are more complex and challenging.

Similarly, Bhimasangha members have a say in the programmes run by CWC. While planning their inputs into education CWC asked the Bhimasanghas to describe their dream school which had the positive features of the formal schools and the non-formal education centres run by CWC.

CWC believes that representation in decision making supports sustainability of development activities. But such representation must be based on the principle of child-adult partnership.

**Key learning points from CWC's approach**
- initiated by NGO (adults) as a process of empowerment
- creating fora at various levels to enable participation
- empowerment through access to information and life skills
- creating distinct identity for children's fora
- child participation in decision making, including 'adult' programmes
- initiated through child-adult partnerships
- learning through participation
- strong NGO support and involvement
- linkages with state governance system
The above case study is developed from documentation by the Concerned for Working Children (CWC), Bangalore.
Section 4

Bal Mazdoor Union

The Bal Mazdoor Union (Child Workers' Union) is supported by Butterflies a Delhi based voluntary organisation. The Union aims to enable street and working children to protect themselves in their daily lives through the formation of a trade union. Harassed by the employers and the police alike, the children live under constant threat of being sent to a remand homes which are more akin to jails than homes.

Butterflies runs eight contact points in areas where there is a concentration of street and working children. The programme focuses on migrant children in Delhi who are self-employed in occupations such as porters, shoe-blacks, ragpickers, vendors, those engaged in roadside restaurants or workshops, garages and small-scale industries. The union members work hard and earn little. Butterflies is in contact with about 800 children of which 400 to 450 come regularly for the collective activities. All activities are conducted on the street or in parks as there are no "centres".

Every fortnight, children (girls and boys) from each contact point meet to discuss their issues, critique on-going activities, and plan future activities. Once a month, five representatives from each contact point come together for the Bal Sabha (Children's Council). The meeting is chaired by an elected chairperson from the group. The meetings decide on the agenda and this is then discussed. One of the literate children is responsible for recording the minutes and decisions. Most often, issues discussed are about police harassment, non-payment of wages, need for better jobs, wages, education, saving schemes, problems of gambling, drugs, as well as planning outings and events.

The Bal Sabha forms the core of the Butterflies programme. The idea is to organise children and create a forum where they can speak, share their ideas, and critique the programmes and orientation of the organisation. Further, they also learn the principles of democracy, including "every person has a right to an opinion and freedom of expression, a consensus must be reached to take a final decision, and that sometimes a compromise is needed".

Butterflies' team of street educators play a singularly important role in initiating contact with street children through regular visits to their places of work and stay, making it a point to say "Hello", spend time with them and occasionally organise some recreational and group activities depending on the mood of the children. This helps to reduce the initial fear and mistrust amongst the children and the aim is to build a trusting relationship. Once the relationship has been established, the next step is to involve the children in developing activities which could include imparting knowledge of three Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic), continuing with their education, and dealing with drug and gambling problems.

Besides participating in planning most of their activities, children also contribute materially. Nothing is given free. In Butterflies' experience, this ensures that children honour their
commitments and participate with a feeling that it is their programme and that they have to make it work.

As mentioned earlier, the children face a lot of harassment. Each time a crisis takes place for the children at their workplace, Butterflies uses the opportunity to discuss the need for solidarity amongst the children, as well as the strength that derives from unity. The importance of forming and maintaining their union is therefore reinforced.

Butterflies has promoted the formation of associations of street children mainly through the Credit Union and the Bal Mazdoor Union. The Credit Union was formed after extensive discussions about collective bargaining power with children over a period of five years. It was difficult for street educators to convince the children as they themselves were not convinced of the idea nor motivated enough. An inspiring presentation by an expert on credit unions and cooperatives helped to highlight their importance in empowering street children economically. This concept was discussed with children at various meetings. The idea caught on and it was finally formed in August 1995. The credit union now promotes savings and economic security and also provides various services.

The children gather once a month, spend time together in recreational and cultural activities. They decide on the venue and draw up a budget to correspond with the expenses such as transportation, meals (they also work out the menu), sports and prizes for the winners. They calculate the total cost and then work out individual contributions. The amount decided upon is never a token contribution, it generally amounts to at least Rs 10. On occasions children have even contributed Rs 20 each for a picnic. Butterflies contributes the balance.

Besides counselling services, the children receive health care facilities, health education (on topics such as personal hygiene, advice on preventing common diseases, the functioning of the human body, effects of drugs, STDs and HIV/AIDS). Butterflies hopes in future to transfer the responsibility for the health project to a cooperative owned by the children. Presently, the children are working on the membership criteria, rules and regulation, and membership fees. Potential child health workers have been identified and they are being trained. Some of the street children are being groomed as street educators and administrators.

The experience of Bal Mazdoor Union offers some very interesting insights on child participation. An event precipitated the formation of Bal Mazdoor Union. In August 1991, a boy named Vijay in the INA market was beaten up by his employer on charges of theft. When he denied the accusation, he was further beaten. In a spurt of anger he slapped the employer. This created a furore. All the shopkeepers and the police joined hands and thrashed all the coolie boys. That evening the children called an emergency meeting and passed a resolution that they would form a union. It took four years, from the time Butterflies started working, for the children to finally accept the importance of collective action and a union.

In 1992 the Bal Mazdoor Union applied to the Registrar of Trade Unions to register itself as a union. The application was rejected on the grounds that as per Section 21 of the Trade
Union Act of 1925, no person below the age of 15 is allowed to either form a union or become a member of it. It was pointed out to the Registrar that the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act (1986) recognised children as workers (children engaged in various occupations) and the basic right of any "worker" is to form a union for their own protection against exploitation. This argument did not convince the Registrar. Thus the Bal Mazdoor Union filed a writ petition in the Delhi High Court stating that the section be struck down on the grounds of it being ultra vires to the Indian Constitution. Their petition was dismissed on submission.

The Union then moved the Supreme Court via a Special Leave Petition, on 15 November 1993. The court admitted the petition on the strength of Article 15 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which recognises the right of children "to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly." On admitting the petition, the Supreme Court issued notice to the three respondents, namely the Government of India, the Registrar of Trade Unions and the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi. The case still awaits hearing.

The Bal Mazdoor Union sees itself as a collective of street and working children. It is a platform of and for children who are denied their access to basic rights. It seeks to educate and conscientise children regarding their rights both as children and as workers. As its members belong to a vulnerable social group without support mechanisms from the community or the state, unionisation offers protection in situations of abuse or denial of access to basic fundamental rights. The Union's aim and commitment is not to negotiate for better wages or working conditions, but to mobilise public opinion to redress conditions and pressures that force children to work, including poverty and unemployment of their families.

The Union meetings take place almost every week. Children want a distinct identity for the Union - letter heads, office space and formation of "Special Action Groups" which would handle any emergencies or crisis situations in the streets. Butterflies has offered them use of their office space.

The Union has been instrumental in highlighting the death of a 15 year old boy, Zafar Imam, who was abused by his employer in April 1994, the deaths of three street children due to medical negligence at the Observation Home at Delhi Gate in May 1994 as well as the brutal killing of Gond tribal women and children in Nagpur by police firing in December 1994. In the case of Zafar Imam, Bal Mazdoor Union's dialogue with the Chief Minister of Delhi resulted in a clear-cut charge of murder against the employer who was earlier booked under "an attempt to murder" charge. A case was also filed in the Delhi High Court for compensation on behalf of his parents.

The critics of unionisation argue that the children are not mature enough to discuss and decide on issues pertaining to their lives; unionisation in fact legalises and institutionalises child labour and unnecessarily politicises children. Some critics also feel that it puts unnecessary burden on the children. They are compelled to work, they should undergo vocational training or non-formal education, they must work out their self-survival strategy and added to all this is the organisation and unionisation work.

Butterflies' response is that children are not considered minor when they are forced to do
adult jobs, in hazardous occupations, for long hours and less wages. However, when it comes to giving them power to make their own decisions they are seen as incapable and too young to shoulder this responsibility. Institutionalising the concept of children's participation and that children need to have their own space has not been easy. "...It is a constant battle with one's mental blocks to truly give children right to freedom of self expression and the right to form associations".

Butterflies believes that an informed trade union movement with a broad socio-political vision can be effective and children can certainly be trusted to fight for their rights as child workers without any bias. When child workers' unions demand wages equal to adults, better working conditions and other benefits which are given to organised adult workers along with additional facilities related to the development needs of children (including education and health services), child labour will no longer be cheap and attractive for employers.

**Key learning points from Butterflies' approach**
- promoted by NGO (adults) as a security system for vulnerable children
- support to creation of a legal entity to enable participation by children
- increasing levels of child participation in decision making
- importance of changing public perceptions and opinions about children
- broadly an empowerment approach

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The above case-study is developed from documentation by Butterflies, New Delhi.

Section 5

Shishu Panchayat

Some experts observe that child participation always begins with tokenism and gradually
comes to incorporate wider and serious issues. They cite history to establish their premise. In the absence of documentation of these processes, this is difficult to establish.

In an effort to put children's concerns and rights high on the agenda of panchayats and increase awareness regarding child rights among children and through them reach the adults in the community, UNICEF organised Shishu Panchayat (Children's Panchayat) at the Panchayat Samity of Bishnupur Block II of South 24 Parganas in November 1995. It was done in collaboration with the district administration and a non-government organisation, Institute of Psychological and Educational Research (IPER). It raised many issues about how child participation is sought to be promoted as an end in itself.

A three days' orientation programme for children was facilitated by IPER. It included needs assessment using techniques like drawing, clay modelling, role plays, puppet theatre and collages, followed by orientation on 'Rights of the Child' using different techniques. Interestingly, the CRC training kit developed by Save the Children Alliance Asia for adults was used for this purpose as there are not any materials available which can be used with children, especially in India.

In the second phase, the children were asked to assess the situation of children in their villages. To do this, they were given a questionnaire to record their observations on life and people around them and the basic facilities (like health centres, schools and water supply) available in the villages. Children made investigations by interacting with other children and adults in their village. They worked out their list of priorities - sufficient and nutritious food (not necessarily expensive); proper, safe house and space for children (that gives them privacy); ways to enable education to all including working children;... vans and rickshaws should be able to ply on the roads, every village should have an ambulance to take the sick to the hospital,...

Finally, at the Shishu Panchayat the children presented their assessment of the situation and demands to the Panchayat members, ministers, MLAs and other local leaders through songs, plays, skits, declamation, etc. The 'adult' Panchayat considered the charter of needs presented by the children (who were present there) - subject to the availability of funds. Their response is to form the basis of a block level Plan of Action for Children. It needs to be noted that the Shishu Panchayat was a platform and not a decision making forum.

Bishnupur II was selected because of accessibility, support of the State Government, a fairly commendable Panchayat raj track record and higher level of involvement of women. The 11 Gram Panchayats (village level panchayats) were asked to nominate children (one boy and one girl) from different backgrounds in the 9 - 14 years age group as participants. In the final event, 27 children - girls and boys, school-going and out-of-school children, working children and disabled children - participated. Those who attended school got permission to abstain. They were provided with transport to come to the training and meetings at the Bishnupur II Panchayat Samity office.

A similar exercise, though on a much smaller scale, was conducted by Madhya Pradesh Council for Child Welfare (M PCCW) again at UNICEF's behest in Phanda block near Bhopal. The M PCCW representative regretted the fact that they had not been able to match...
the scale of operations because of limitations of funding.

It was suggested that Shishu Panchayat has the potential to be developed into a state-wide and possibly even a nation-wide movement by children for children with panchayats to guide and look after their interests and needs. Perhaps it has. Yet there are many issues it raised. The participating children gained a lot of confidence and the parents who witnessed the event were obviously very proud of the achievements of their children. But who were these children? Were they selected by the Gram Panchayats for their confidence and articulation. It has been observed that very often the children voice the thinking of the organisation which facilitates the process.

Most often, such experiments fail in their objectives because of lack of follow-up. It would be interesting to get feedback from the adults and children who participated in this initiative. Media attention to such events tend to begin a trend.

Events can help highlight the concept of participation but they fail to sustain the interest of children and adults if the process before and after the event is neglected. Child participation is an idea whose potential needs to be explored not by one-off events but through carefully considered and supported processes.
Section 6

Limits and Possibilities

"...Childhood is a once-and-for-all biological window of opportunity for investment in human beings; miss it, and the losses incurred can never be made good."

- Michael Edwards in PLA Notes (1996)

There is much that can be learned from Bal Sansad, Bhima Sangha, Bal Mazdoor Union and Shishu Panchayat. These experiences emerge from different situations. Like different childhoods, there cannot be one perfect approach to child participation. There are limits as well as possibilities.

There are both negative and positive examples of participation by young people in different societies at different periods in time.

Young people in many parts of the world have been involved with environmental issues since the early 1980s, sometimes characterised as youth radicalism as a response to adult inertia. In Sri Lanka, the Sarvodaya Movement has used its early childhood work with children as a key to the development of community participation. A contemporary example of participation by young people in India is provided by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences field action programme called Mel-Jol. This project began in 1991 and aims to create equity amongst school children through a process of linking municipal schools and private schools in Mumbai. It involves approximately 20,000 children from 12 private and 11 municipal schools. Children have been successfully involved in a variety of local activities including building communal harmony in riot affected areas of Mumbai.

Conversely, there are also negative examples of young people being used. The Hitler Youth Movement in 1930-40s in Germany, and the Young Pioneers in the 1970-80s in Malawi, incited young people to spy on their own parents and family members. The use of child soldiers in many war and conflict situations are well documented.

These examples help illustrate that participation by children, or adults, is not an end in itself. It can lead to positive or negative outcomes for society as a whole.

Many organisations in India have been promoting `child participation' in their work. Interestingly, not many regard their efforts as a deliberate attempt to promote `children's participation'. Many agencies have begun supporting activities involving children out of a genuine concern for children and their welfare. The synthesis of thought and practice has resulted in various models which embrace interesting learning points.

Some examples of this include:
1. In all the cases mentioned earlier, adults’ have initially taken the initiative to introduce the concept of solidarity and support to groups of children. Children have over a period of time begun to organise themselves.

Very often when issues are identified for campaigns they take the shape of campaigns and slogans. For these to be effective they need to be focused and targeted. Unfortunately even well targeted campaigns and slogans tend to miss certain important constituencies. As adults are a dominant force in Indian society their perspectives, concerns and interests need to be addressed.

The challenge is to make the connections between the adult and child perspectives.

2. Many people without deviating from their concern for children’s issues express the fear that promotion of the concept without adult backing can be used by other adults or groups of adults for ulterior motives.

Cadre-based political parties could use the opportunity to create potential cadres. This could lead to confusion, loss of goodwill and credence. Such reasoning is based on certain assumptions about children and childhoods. Child participation is really not very different from adult participation. Participation by adults and children can be used by others for ulterior motives.

Do children and adults have a choice to participate in certain activities? Advocates of child participation generally argue that children should be involved in things and issues which are of most relevance to them. Otherwise the process instead of becoming self-sustaining degenerates into tokenism.

3. Perhaps the greatest resistance to child participation results from its being promoted as a right. This can in part be blamed on the neglect of the related concept of responsibilities which takes the view that while individual rights must be exercised and safeguarded, it is imperative for all to ensure that others too are not deprived of their rights.

Without participation, all other rights (adults and children’s) become superfluous. An individual or groups right to participate therefore determines other rights. This is a point on which further discussion and debate would be very useful.

Few would disagree that a citizen’s right to participate in political processes should be based on a reasoned analysis of situation and the right to be informed and enabled. If adults must participate to determine their future why not the children who are the future adults. The role of children as potential political actors evolves from their right to participate.

Most advocates of child rights agree with the framework provided by the CRC. Individual interpretations including the cultural context, more pressing priorities, practicability, and whether the implementation should be gradual or immediate are essentially regarded as peripheral to the CRC.
Child participation is essentially about human values, attitudes and behaviour and cannot be regarded as a right that can be guaranteed through legislation alone.

4. The promotion of the children's agenda can form an important component of a sustainable approach to development. It offers markers for social development and environmental projects. It establishes links between the present concerns and the future aspirations. For any approach to succeed, it should be practical and relevant to the established social and political order. A convergence even at a limited level may well improve chances for success and pave way for the next step in the process.

5. State institutions like the Panchayat are adult concepts but they do offer possibilities when related to the process of children's education, empowerment and institutionalisation towards achieving child rights and promoting the children's agenda.

What happens before and after any event which is organised to enable children to participate is very important. The process has to be thought through and there is need to reach out to a variety of people - children as well as adults - within families, in the community, and in key decision making bodies.

There are cost implications in terms of time and money (including loss of wages of working children) in getting children together often from afar. Perhaps one needs to have modest objectives to begin with, without losing track of the bigger problem - that is, how to promote the idea of child participation and children's rights, and build an understanding of the concept in practice.

6. An important step in promoting participation is to create spaces for children to be involved in activities and also to make adults more sensitive to children's views and needs. Citizenship training through the processes of education and empowerment and providing fora for 'political spaces' can be created for children to express their views and ensure that their agenda is recognised in development processes.
Some difficulties and barriers in involving children in development

- Most development agencies lack experience on communicating with children.
- Lack of understanding especially amongst adults about children's rights.
- Failure to collect child specific information.
- Prejudices among adults about children's ability to participate.
- Paternalistic attitudes on the part of adults who feel that they know about children and childhoods because they have gone through childhood.
- An assumption that adults are better able to speak about children's lives rather than children themselves.
- Cultural attitudes may discourage children's participation.

Some areas for further work

In the process of writing this paper a number of areas for further work have occurred to us. These include:

- In situations where adult participation is complicated by the complex social processes and power equations, it seems unlikely that child participation beyond a basic level will gain acceptance in the near future. Child participation is a sensitive issue especially in a society where children are largely seen, but not heard. In most cases involving child participation, experience suggests that children are exposed to processes which are essentially controlled by adults. Despite this, the idea of involving children is catching on. Individuals and agencies can therefore usefully contribute ideas about ways of practically encouraging participation by children in development activities.

- The need for documenting child initiated (and adult supported) activities as well as child-adult partnerships, and analysing the difference (if any) that child participation actually makes in terms of the quality of specific activities. The distinction between child focused programmes (in which children are seen very much as part of the wider community in which they live, including adults and youth) and child centred programmes (in which the children are viewed as the primary beneficiaries) also needs further exploration. To what extent is this distinction useful for practitioners? Does it lead to different types of programming results?

- Relations between generations is another important area for further work. The increasing number of elderly people worldwide has implications for the child participation debate. Older voters wielding ever-greater political power might lend support to policies that encourage higher spending on health, social services and law and order at the expense of young people's priorities. This could spell trouble between generations. As the population ages, the state of affairs becomes critical. An ironic situation is developing in the UK whereby fewer younger people in the future will become responsible for the welfare for the largest population of older people yet known.
The divergence of interests between children and adults will no doubt stop well short of inter-generational warfare. The reasons for this include the fact that most older people have children who provide them with a window of understanding about the next generation, and may cause them to pursue their own interests less selfishly. Moreover, many younger people have surviving parents whom they would like to see adequately supported by society. In addition, younger people know fully well that they themselves will get older and tacitly assume that the next generation, collectively will look after them in turn. By paying up today, they are accumulating a credit which they expect society to repay when they themselves get old. In short, they are investing in their own futures. But does this form of reasoning make sense in all situations? Will it hold good even in situations where resources become more constrained?

* Another priority area for further work concerns ways of promoting more sensitivity and listening to children by adults.

As with any behavioural concept there will not be any perfect answers for such questions. There is a need to continue with the debate in our search for "best practice in development" and the realisation of child rights.

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