Children’s Rights in Senegal
From the Convention to the reality

The first survey by children
We wish to express our heartfelt thanks to the various government institutions and other actors who readily welcomed child interviewers, to the facilitation team and their supervisors, to CONAFE SN member organisations who mobilized children and to CONAFE SN for coordinating the survey, namely EDEN. This initiative has been made possible thanks to the technical and financial support of Save the Children and Plan Senegal.

**What is the “UNCRC”?**

The UNCRC stands for the “United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child”. But it is easier to use its acronym “UNCRC”. It is the first international convention ever to consider children as rights holders rather than “objects” to be protected.

To date, all African countries have ratified the UNCRC, except Somalia. The UNCRC encompasses civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, as well as rights relating to social solidarity. It is comprised of 54 articles all of which are interdependent.

CONAFE Senegal is an umbrella organisation gathering over 200 child focused member NGOs and associations. Created in 2004, the coalition works primarily to promote and protect children’s rights, with a national geographic coverage.
About 22 years ago, an event occurred that was going to change drastically the way the world considers and relates to children. On November 20, 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. By ratifying it the following year, the Senegalese government committed to abide by the Convention. Ever since, considerable progress have been recorded; however, several challenges still persist.

For the last twenty years however, never were Senegalese citizens asked what they think about their children’s rights. This observation gave birth to the idea of a national survey on the rights of the child... to be carried out by the children themselves, under the supervision of the National Coalition of Child rights Associations and NGOs (CONAFE Senegal).

This study does not claim to be a comprehensive diagnosis of the actual situation of children in Senegal. It is more about reflecting the perceptions of parents, civil society actors, government authorities and of course children, of children’s rights and their implementation. Based on major concerns that emerged during the survey, children themselves and CONAFE recommended that priority measures be taken to address those concerns.

This mine of information should be of much interest to all those working for children in Senegal. Government institutions as well as local associations or international NGOs can use the findings of this survey, the first of its kind, to guide their programmes and redefine their intervention priorities. Understanding better what Senegalese people think of children’s rights should help us face together the challenge of improving the UNCRC implementation.
What would be the use of a survey on children’s rights in Senegal... without children themselves? It was common sense to interview children but giving them an opportunity to play an active role throughout the process was equally important. Thirty five children were trained and supervised by adults to collect information on the field. Another dozen were involved in the processing, analysis and verification of the data collected. Here are a few testimonies from some of the “child investigators” from CONAFE member organisations...

What do you think of the UNCRC?
It is a Convention that does not really exist in Senegal. However, I think that it is a good Convention.

Why do you say that the Convention does not really exist in Senegal?
Because, in practice, its implementation is only limited to Dakar. In faraway regions like Kolda and Matam, for instance, it is not implemented. This is what children from these two regions have told us.

What role do you play in the survey on the Convention on the Rights of the Child?
I will inquire and inform other children about their rights. At the same time, I will speak about child beggars.

What is your role in the survey?
I conduct interviews to know if there are many people who know about the UNCRC. We talk to parents, religious authorities and the Prime Minister.

What will the survey findings be used for?
This survey enables us to know better if many people know what the CRC is about. The findings will be shared with the State so that they know what children need.

What do you think of the fulfillment of children’s rights in Senegal?
The big change that has occurred is about girls being sent to school. Before, there were not many girls at school. Now one can see the “Cases des Tout-Petits” (early childhood care and development centres) almost everywhere in Dakar.

Who carried out the survey?
A survey by children, for children

SERIGNE FALL, 15

KHADIDIATOU DIALLO, 16
What would happen if the UNCRC didn’t exist?
If it did not exist, I think that children would be in dire strait. We always come across children who are abused. I say that parents and the Government are responsible for this and there are people who don’t understand what the CRC is about. For me, Senegalese people have not fully taken ownership of the UNCRC.

How to convince people that the UNCRC is useful?
Awareness campaigns should be organized to talk about the Convention on the rights of the Child. Based on the UNCRC, a focus should be put on providing assistance to children in Koranic schools, street children, and other abandoned children.

What is your role in the survey?
I am an investigator. We walk across the districts, particularly in my district, Guediawaye, to conduct interviews with children, parents and local authorities.

As a child, which one of your rights has been the least fulfilled?
It is the right to education because I went to school late at the age of 8. I was living in the village and there was no school. Moreover, over there, children are left on their own, doing whatever they want. They are not well protected and are left playing even in dumps.

What do you think of the UNCRC?
Thanks to the UNCRC, children know better their duties and their rights. There was a child who lived near my home who was marginalized and who was forced to do all sorts of works, even the hardest chores for his age. Now, he is with me, he managed to stop all that. This is why I say that the Convention is a good thing.

What has the UNCRC done for children concretely?
The UNCRC fights for children’s rights, for example in education; in the past, we used to say that girls should not go to school but rather stay home for domestic chores. With the UNCRC, parents know now that girls have their place at school just like boys.

If somebody told you that the UNCRC is not important, what would you answer?
I think that people who say so know neither what the UNCRC is about nor its raison d’être. The survey will help us see the positive and negative aspects of children’s rights.
How was the survey carried out?
A decentralized and participatory methodology

The survey was carried out in a participatory and decentralized way; this is where all its originality lays.

- No less than **7 regions** of the country were covered, from Tambacounda to Matam, going through Fatick.
- In total, near **1,000 people** were interviewed, out of which half were children.
- The opinions of **school children** were collected. But the views of other children usually “unseen” were also sought for, including out-of-school children, such as **talisé children** or **working children**.
- It was children themselves who went across the country **to carry out the survey for about 6 months**, from December 2009 to May 2010.

### Where was the survey carried out?

![Diagram showing number of people interviewed by region.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of People Interviewed</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dakar</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td>Diourbel</td>
<td>134</td>
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<td>Fatick</td>
<td>172</td>
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<td>Matam</td>
<td>241</td>
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<td>Sédhiou</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tambacounda</td>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ziguinchor</td>
<td>133</td>
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**Number of people interviewed by region:** 985 people in total

### Who were interviewed?

![Diagram showing number of people interviewed by category.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of People Interviewed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government authorities</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>215</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil society organisations</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>524</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Number of people interviewed by category:** 985 people in total

### Which categories of children were consulted?

![Diagram showing percentage of children interviewed by category.]

- Students: 64%
- Koranic school children: 13%
- Working children: 17%
- Others: 6%
- Parents: 215

Whether in school or at work, various categories of children shared their views.
Approximately 35 children and their supervisors from the 7 target regions participate in a national workshop where they produce the necessary tools. Together, they prepare the questionnaires and the interview guide which will help them collect information during the survey.

Meetings and working sessions are held to put all actors playing a part in the survey on the same page. The objectives were made clear to everyone; documents handed out and responsibilities shared.

With authorities, civil society actors and parents, child interviewers carry out individual discussions. For children, focus group discussions are organized. Child interviewers are supported by adult supervisors during field interviews.

The information collected by children on the ground is sorted, analyzed and exploited. Data collected locally are then put together and shared at meetings held at regional level.

A draft report is submitted to children for amendment and final validation at a national workshop. Children from the different regions of Senegal discuss the various issues they are confronted with, as well as solutions that they implement in their localities.

The 5 stages of the survey process

1. Preparation
2. Training
3. Data collection
4. Data processing
5. Dissemination of information
Key findings of the survey

What do they know about the UNCRC? How much do they know about child rights? Are children’s rights considered adequately fulfilled? How do they assess the level of child participation? Such questions were asked to each of the four categories of people interviewed in the seven target regions of Senegal. Here are the trends emerging from the survey.

1. Is the UNCRC known?

• BY CHILDREN

Less than 1 of 2 children (44%) has heard of the UNCRC.

Only 1 of 8 children (13%) considers that the UNCRC protects children.

About 1 student out of 10 (11%) displays a satisfactory knowledge of the UNCRC.

However, even if they do not know about the Convention, many children are able to list some of their rights, especially the right to education, to health and to a family.

• BY PARENTS

Almost 3 parents out of 5 are not aware of the content and scope of the UNCRC. Only 41% of them define the Convention as a means of fighting for the fulfillment of children’s rights, an instrument which helps improve children’s conditions. However, the majority of parents who were interviewed recognized that children do have rights and could list children’s rights to health, education, protection, expression, leisure, a family, peace and food in particular.
• BY CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

3 civil society organisations out of 4 (76%) know the existence of the UNCRC.
This is an important proportion but, do all those who pretend to know the UNCRC use it as the basis and guiding tool for their advocacy programme strategies?

• BY STATE AUTHORITIES

Over one fourth of state authorities (27%) are unaware of the existence the UNCRC.
This shows that the majority of the administrative authorities, municipality and government officials know about children’s rights, which is positive. However, isn’t it worrying that even a minority of them has never heard of the UNCRC when they are supposed to implement it?

More than half of those who declare knowing the UNCRC define it as a framework of reference that helps take into account children’s rights, and ensure their monitoring as well as children’s protection.

<table>
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<th>How did the respondents learn about the UNCRC?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Actors</td>
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<td>School children</td>
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<td>Parents</td>
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<td>Civil society organisations</td>
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<td>Authorities</td>
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In short, the UNCRC remains widely unknown or little known by respondents, all categories included.
2. ARE CHILDREN’S RIGHTS IMPLEMENTED IN PRACTICE?

• ACCORDING TO CHILDREN

About 3 children out of 4 (73%) declare themselves little or not satisfied with the level of fulfillment of their rights.

Only 1 child out of 6 (16%) declares him/herself satisfied with the efforts made in the fields of education (for example, the building of “cases des tout-petits” (early childhood care and development centers) and health. Also, the existence of a Ministry of Children’s Affairs and a Children’s Parliament are positively appreciated.

Why are children dissatisfied?

• “Parents have given up on their obligations”;
• “Adults do not listen to us”;
• “Talibés live in very difficult conditions, are exploited, and this is not normal”;
• “Many children still don’t go to school”;
• “Children undergo too much violence; they are beaten in school and there are many rapes”;
• “Interventions are concentrated in Dakar whereas children suffer much more up-country”;
• “Children from poor families do not have access to care services”;
• “Children with disabilities are left out”;
• “There are very few programmes on our rights broadcasted in the media”.

• ACCORDING TO PARENTS

Over 1 of 2 parents (54%) declares themselves dissatisfied by the level of implementation of children’s rights

Among the reasons for dissatisfaction are the following:
• “There are still many children in the street and talibés, with no care services provided by the State”;
• “Children’s rights can only be felt in Dakar; children in other regions and particularly in the rural world, are really discriminated against”;
• “Children who dropped out of school have no alternative, the State brings them back to us”;
• “Poverty prevents us from fulfilling the rights of our children and the Government does not help”.
• ACCORDING TO CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

Near 2 out of 3 civil society organisations (67%) declare themselves dissatisfied on the grounds that children's rights are often violated, that they undergo much violence and sexual abuses in the family, in school and in the community. According to civil society representatives, children are not listened to, they are still exploited at work, talibés children are abused, children with disabilities are neglected, early and forced marriages are still practiced on a daily basis, many children are not registered at birth. They also consider that many laws are not enforced, resources mobilized for children are inadequate, several State projects and programmes do similar things but with little impact.

• ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES

More than 3 out of 5 government officials (64%) declared that they are not really satisfied with the level of fulfillment of children’s rights. According to them, much of efforts are still to be made in respect to education especially in rural areas; but also in the fields of protection of girls against violence and provision of care services to child survivors. On top of these are the absence of measures of Implementation and the inadequacy of means to take concrete and viable measures.

Only a minority of the various categories of people declared themselves satisfied with the way children’s rights are implemented (16% of children, 17% of government authorities, 14% of parents, and 16% of civil society organisations). These people acknowledge that efforts have been made to fulfill children’s rights:

• “There is a clear political will supporting children’s rights”.
• “Several laws exist that protect children”.
• “The State has implemented various projects to fulfill children’s rights, in many sectors”.
• “Education for all is a clearly affirmed objective, strongly carried by the State and supported by partners and the civil society”.
• “The ‚cases des tout-petits‘ is an excellent initiative of the President, which should be scaled up to cover all villages of the country”.

All in all, the majority of people interviewed think that the fulfillment of children’s rights is little or not satisfactory. However, the efforts made have been acknowledged, more specifically the Government’s undertakings in the field of education.
3. ARE CHILDREN TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN DECISION MAKING?

• ACCORDING TO CHILDREN

Near 3 children out of 5 (62%) consider their participation as very weak because their views are not taken into account even though they have things to say.

Less than 1 of 7 children (15%) think that their opinions are sometimes taken into consideration through associations, child rights clubs and school governments led by children.

• ACCORDING TO PARENTS

More than 2 out of 5 parents (43%) consider that children are not listened to and are not entitled to speak out in family and community settings.

Here are the explanations to it:
- “Their opinion does not matter”;
- “Children must obey their parents’ decisions”;
- “In the community, children are afraid of some people”.

Why are children not adequately taken into account?

According to children themselves, there are several reasons to it:
- “The floor is given to adults and not to children”;
- “Adults think that we are too young to decide”;
- “Even if children are present at meetings, adults keep the floor throughout”;
- “We are often invited to take part in events without being given necessary information”;
- “Children do not participate in the development of programs and do not have information relating to funding”;
- “The State does not support directly children’s initiatives and children’s organisations”;
- “The Children’s Parliament has not been renewed, whereas most of its members are over 18; They have neither office space, nor resources, nor activities of their own”.

**According to Civil Society Actors**

About 3 of 4 civil society organisations (73%) opine that children's views are taken into account in their projects, particularly in the field of education, preventive health and training.

A minority of them recognizes however that the opinion of children is neither sought for nor taken into account, for the following reasons:

- "We are here for them and we know what their needs are, even if we do not involve them directly"
- "Projects are too technical for children"
- "Lack of projects involving children directly"
- "Child participation is not an easy task"

**According to Government Authorities**

About 3 government officials out of 4 (76%) affirm that children’s views are not taken into account at community level.

- "Taking the floor is often reserved to adults".
- "Parents make all decisions without asking for their children's views".
- "Child participation is not part of our mission and programmes"
- "Children are under the guardianship [of adults]; therefore, their opinions do not matter"
- "Sometimes we ask children what they want but we impose on them what they should do."
- "Tradition and culture hamper child participation"

What are the most often quoted “key challenges” to a better fulfillment of children’s rights?

- Non enforcement of regulations or laws adopted;
- Impunity of perpetrators of child rights violations;
- Child rights are unknown to families, and children, especially out-of-school and working children;
- Lack of access to medical care in rural areas and discrimination against children from poor families who have no appropriate care;
- Inadequacy of school infrastructures in rural areas and school drop outs especially among girls, particularly in the regions;
- Lack of respect for talibés and street children;
- Violence against children, especially sexual abuse and pedophilia. Lack of psychological and health care of child victims of sexual violence;
- Early marriages and pregnancies;
- Early migration from rural areas and involvement of girls in domestic labour;
- Reintegration issues of school drop-outs and talibés upon completing Koranic education;
- Poverty;
- Lack of communication between parents and children;
- Lack of cooperation among NGOs and Associations especially in Dakar;
- Limited resources and inappropriate use of existing resources.

How are children involved in activities?

- By attending meetings upon invitation.
- By setting up child clubs where they meet and propose activities.
- By selecting topics for training.
Over 2 out of 3 interviewees (69%), especially at community level, consider that child rights are against their culture.

- “Child rights stems from modernization which is contrary to our cultures.”
- “Rights are not in conformity with our Senegalese realities.”
- “The Convention is opposed to our cultural values, and will therefore not be easy to apply.”
- “The right of children to exercise the religion of their choice is unconceivable.”
- “Religious and traditional leaders are against this Convention.”

About 1 of 7 respondents (14%) think however that there is no contradiction between child rights and culture.

- “Whatever the culture, children must be protected, educated and nourished.”
- “The Convention merely aims at the wellbeing of the child, which is the dearest wish of any parent.”
- “It is often the lack of awareness of children's rights that leads to their violation by parents and the community.”
What children recommend to the State

5 priority actions to guide public policies

1. Train and support children in promoting their rights

If children know nothing but simply repeating their rights without believing in it, they will not be taken seriously. To convince other children and adults, they should know how to vehicle a message, e.g. by using mainstream communication techniques such as theater but also video or radio. Therefore, children should be encouraged to build new skills.

2. Advocate for funding for children’s associations

For children’s voices to be heard, they should collectively organise themselves into associations or clubs. Yet, governments and international NGOs are often reluctant to support activities of such groups once they have been set-up. It is a pity because children would gain much by learning how to prepare a budget, to manage programmes and plan expenditures.
People who oppose the UNCRC often prove to be unknowledgeable about it. Those who are in contact with children in schools, at the mosque, at church or at the police, view it as a constraint imposed on Africa rather than a tool at their disposal. Instead of forcing them to use it, time should be taken to help them understand how the UNCRC can help them in their work.

When a child has been subjected to sexual abuse, it is not rare that doubts arise about his/her word against the adults’ or that fingers are pointed at their own families, school or community. To overcome such fears, the child should quickly be referred to a specialist who will rebuild his/her confidence and provide legal assistance. It is undoubtedly one of the best ways of ensuring that the perpetrators are taken to court and that impunity stops.

On paper, children in Senegal are very well protected by the legislation into force. Actually, the law enforcement is often ineffective. It is especially the case in the most remote regions of the country where State institutions are generally weaker. From the district police officer who receives the complaints to the judge who returns the verdict, taking effective actions is just a matter of will and resources. This is why laws should be coupled with adequate resources for their enforcement on the ground.
What CONAFE Senegal recommends

Recommendation: the Minister of Justice should hasten the preparation and adoption process of the Child Code.

In support to children’s call for action, CONAFE Senegal recommends the following complementary measures to all relevant State institutions:

1. **ADOPT A CHILD CODE**

   There are very good laws in Senegal. But too often they are contradictory, for example with regard to the age of the child which differs from one code to another (family code, penal code, etc.). The adoption of a Child Code in Senegal would help avoid confusion and ensure a better protection of children.

   **Recommendation:** the Minister of Justice should hasten the preparation and adoption process of the Child Code.

2. **REVIVE THE NATIONAL CHILD RIGHTS COMMITTEE**

   Where can all those who work for children meet? Where can national civil society organizations and state actors exchange good practices with regard to child rights issues? Such an ideal institution would be the National Child Rights Committee which should ensure consistent monitoring of the implementation of children’s rights.

   **Recommendation:** the Ministry for Early Childhood and Children’s Affairs should revive the above-mentioned committee.
Despite the recognition of child protection as a national priority, it yet represents less than one percent (1%) of the national budget of Senegal. And seldom are children consulted in the selection of programmes designed for them. Allocating more resources to children’s priorities is good but, managing these resources together with children is better.

Recommendation: the Minister of finance, the Minister in charge of local government structures and the local governments themselves should allocate substantial budgets to address children’s issues, so as to reflect the priority attached to them.

Children’s rights remain widely unknown in Senegal. But those who declare being familiar with the UNCRC often have an erroneous perception of it. As evidence, nearly 70% of respondents state that children’s rights are against the Senegalese culture. If disseminating the UNCRC is deemed necessary, it should then be made widely known so that Senegalese people could grasp the real value of it.

Recommendation: the Minister of education should integrate child rights education in the school curriculum and all the government officials should be educated on children’s rights.

How can children make their voices heard on Issues concerning them? In Senegal, efforts have been made to stimulate children’s participation, as shown with the children’s parliament. But this is not enough. Today, it is important to open new spaces to consult children more widely, for example by facilitating their access to the media in an organized and systematic way.

Recommendation: the Minister for Information and media outlets should broadcast more programmes for children and by children, particularly at community level.
In Senegal, who knows the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child? What do we exactly know about it? Who thinks that children’s rights are fulfilled? Do children feel that they participate enough in decision making? Which measures do they propose to improve concretely their wellbeing?

For the first time ever, more than 1,000 people were interviewed in seven regions of Senegal. Parents, representatives of local authorities, members of the civil society and of course many children shared their perception of child rights situation throughout the country.

For the first time ever, children themselves accompanied by specialists, carried out interviews with citizens from all over the country. Find out what stemmed from this first national survey on children’s rights in Senegal led by children, on the initiative of the National Coalition of Child rights Associations and NGOs (CONAFE Senegal), with the joint support of Plan and Save the Children.