Turn Up THE Volume
Children and youth advance their rights in media
Get the big picture

There are around two billion young people under 18 alive somewhere in the world. That’s 2,000,000,000 individuals, one-third of the world’s population! Yet despite these numbers, children and young people in many societies are rarely heard. They often have little chance to express themselves about issues affecting them. Many do not have the skills or tools to communicate their messages to others. All too often, adults are unaware that children and young people have something useful to say. So they become passive spectators in their own lives, unable to affect decisions that impact on them directly. This situation must change: the media is a powerful way to draw attention to youth issues and to let young people speak out.

“People don’t let children talk. They beat them sometimes. Parents should listen more to their children and not hit them. They should let children do more things, but not everything. Say that on the radio or on TV, so that as many people as possible can hear my message!”
Child actor, 13, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

About Plan

Founded nearly 70 years ago, Plan is one of the largest child-centred community development organisations in the world. We work in 66 countries on projects and initiatives that address the causes of poverty and its consequences for children’s lives. We work with children, their families and communities to build a world where children are safe, healthy and capable of realising their full potential.

Plan’s Vision is of a world in which all children and young people realise their full potential in societies which respect people’s rights and dignity.

Plan assists poor children and their communities to have their voices heard at the highest levels in order to make a difference in addressing the root causes of child poverty and realising child rights.
Plan’s approach to child and youth media work

Plan operates close to 60 youth media projects in over 30 developing countries and in a number of developed countries. Through these projects, children, youth people and media-makers produce high quality media programmes promoting children’s rights. They use television, radio, video, print, internet and other forms of media. Plan’s approach to media work is rights-based and child-centred.

RIGHTS-BASED

Plan’s media work is informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The treaty says that all children have the right, amongst others, to:

- Participate in decisions affecting their lives.
- Have their own views and opinions.
- Express themselves freely – without fear.
- Have access to information, including through the media.
- Their own privacy and to be protected from harmful treatment through the media.

Working from the basis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Plan recognises and encourages youth media initiatives and, where possible, supports them to become stronger and sustainable. We work to create channels for more children in more circumstances to speak out and be heard. With our partners and with youth, Plan also advocates for adult-orientated media to improve the ways they cover children’s issues.

CHILD-CENTRED

Plan’s media programme is built around meaningful child participation. We encourage children and young people to take the lead in creating and maintaining projects to express themselves. This approach puts children, their views, their needs and their rights at the centre. Through our youth media projects, Plan works to ensure that children have a say - and that what they say is listened to and acted on. Young people are supported to take actions to improve their lives and the lives of other children and young people. As presenters and media-makers, they become positive role models for both children and adults.

“Being part of a media programme means having new adventures, new dreams, new goals, which little by little and with patience are turning real.”

Maria, Ecuador

In Nepal, children produce a radio programme, ‘Bal jyoti’, every two weeks on issues of their choice, which is then broadcast on local radio. The programme, made in the local language Abadhi, includes a radio feature, drama, jokes and songs created by children.
Child and youth media makes a difference

Media projects involving children and young people are both fun and beneficial for the children who participate. They can generate many positive spin-offs at the individual and community level – and for society at large. The following pages give a glimpse of some of the impacts of Plan’s youth media projects around the world.

INFORMATION IS POWER

Youth media projects create channels to spread information from children and young people, to children, adults, and even to decision-makers. Often children have the best understanding of what they need to know more about – and what information will make a difference in their lives. Children also tend to be more receptive to information from other children. Reaching larger audiences with better, clearer, more accurate messages should be the most important goal of any youth media project.

“Children who don’t know their rights will have problems in the future. The media can help spread the message.”

Girl, 13, Anie, Togo

• In Bangladesh, children make short documentaries on issues affecting their lives. Produced under the name ‘Agami’ (Future), each episode is broadcast on national television twice a week – reaching an estimated audience of 20 million.

• In Malawi, a weekly radio programme ‘Rights of the child’ has been broadcast by the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) since 2001. Anchored by an MBC journalist, the programme involves children in round-table discussions and interviews.

• In Haiti, close to 200 children have been trained to produce their own radio programmes, as part of the project ‘Child rights and child participation in the media’. They have created shows on a wide range of topics, from birth registration, health and education to culture and violence. All of the children’s productions are posted on the website www.vwatimounyo.org.

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

BBC Africa Radio Awards, 2007, UK/Africa
Regional finalist in the Young Broadcaster of the Year category, awarded to Plan Sierra Leone’s Modcar FM Radio project.

One World Media Awards 2003, UK
Special recognition award for Plan India’s ‘Children have something to say’ video magazine project.

New York Festivals 2003, USA
Finalist certificate in the Best Children/Young Adults Programme category, awarded to Plan West Africa’s regional radio project ‘I am a child but I have my rights too!’
PRODUCING HIGH QUALITY PROGRAMMES

Providing children and young people with the means to produce their own programmes does not mean making a compromise on quality. In a world where audiences are constantly bombarded with media messages, youth programmes need to stand their own ground. High quality youth media programmes are not only possible, but essential. Adult media professionals have an important role to play in supporting top quality media made for and with children.

• In West Africa, thousands of children aged six to eighteen have participated in an award-winning radio project, ‘Kids waves’, since 1995. The project extends to Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. A 30-minute show is produced each week and broadcast in a dozen different languages. The name of the show varies from country to country, but always evolves around a theme linked to children’s rights. The show is recorded in a different village each week, involving the community children. Children have the option to form a Children’s Club, with Plan’s support, after the programme to work on the issues they have uncovered during their radio show.

• In the Philippines, youth have been working in partnership with a local radio station since 1999 on the media programme ‘Bidang bulilit’ (Children are the stars). The young people prepare, manage and produce the one-hour weekly shows about children’s rights.

The Communications Initiative - Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Stories Competition 2003, Canada
Finalist award to Plan West Africa’s regional radio project ‘I am a child but I have my rights too!’

UNICEF/One World Radio 2002, UK
Finalist award for outstanding children’s radio programmes given to Plan West Africa’s regional radio project ‘I am a child but I have my rights too!’

New York Festivals 2000, USA
Silver world medal in the Best Children/Young Adults Programmes category awarded to Plan West Africa’s regional radio project ‘I am a child but I have my rights too!’
AUTHENTIC VOICES: YOUNG PEOPLE TELL THEIR OWN STORIES

Media projects provide an essential platform for children and young people to speak out about their own circumstances and experiences, using their own words. They can be great messengers of how the violation of their rights affects their lives. There is a need to hear from the most vulnerable, who are seldom consulted by the adults around them. To address the needs of children and young people, it is vital to involve them and let them speak for themselves.

“I think that you reflect more when you hear a child talk on the radio.”
Boy, 15, Gaoua, Burkina Faso

• In India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, children and young people affected by the tsunami produced documentary film and photography to show how their lives and communities have changed after the event. In India, children conducted the social audit on Plan’s relief and rehabilitation. Conveyed through film and photographs, their views have been used to improve Plan’s intervention.

• In Brazil, adolescents from communities in the north-east of Brazil have made videos on themes like violence, health issues and teenage pregnancy, as part of the project ‘Câmera livre’ (Free camera). Working in partnership with the Joaquim Nabuco Institute, the project promotes respect for the rights of children and adolescents in their families and communities.

• In Egypt, Plan works in partnership with Alkarma for Edutainment, to produce and broadcast specialised television programmes prepared and presented by children. The project is implemented in conjunction with the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, the Egyptian Radio and Television Union and the American University in Cairo.
GENERATING CHANGE

When children and young people use media to express themselves, it can create awareness in their communities and influence decision-making. Rights-based media projects can change adults’ perceptions of children and create opportunities to confront difficult problems like abuse and exploitation. They can lead to more child-friendly communities, where positive role models lead to greater respect for children’s rights and opinions. In some instances, adults may choose to take action alongside young people on issues of shared concern.

“The importance of media for me: through the media, parents understand more about children issues. The media that we create can decrease the level of violence against children. In my village, parents often abuse their children and send them to work.”
Enny, 14, Indonesia

• In India, disadvantaged children were involved in making 36 short films as part of the project ‘Children have something to say’. The films cover issues ranging from child labour and tobacco addiction to child prostitution. Films on sensitive topics, like abuse and sexuality, have been used effectively at community level to springboard discussion with parents and children on issues that would normally be taboo.

• In Guatemala, youth groups used a wide range of techniques to investigate local issues and communicate their ideas through ‘Radio stories’. They produced dramas and radio spots on issues like gender inequality and access to clean water. Their broadcasts sparked adult interest in the issue of lake pollution in one region, and the need for better roads in another.

• In Kenya, a video magazine project ‘Sauti ya watoto wa dida’ (Give children a voice) is used to promote child rights and encourage child participation. Children take part in preparing and producing each film, both in front of the camera and behind. Each film focuses on an issue chosen by the children, for example child labour, early marriage and street children.
INCREASING POTENTIAL THROUGH PARTICIPATION

Taking part in a youth media project gives children and young people the chance to develop skills that will benefit them throughout their lives - skills such as problem-solving, communication, teamwork and negotiation. And using mass media to express and share their experiences can also help children and young people to heal and move forward after a traumatic event.

“Youth media programmes give courage to children.”

Girl, primary school, N’Zérékoré, Guinea

“ChildMedia has given me a perfect opportunity to realise my potential, to communicate and express myself freely... It has allowed me to improve communication with my family and the trust that my parents have in me.”

Child participant, Nicaragua

• In Vietnam, hundreds of children have joined ‘Young Media clubs’ since 1998 to acquire skills in journalism, as well as in radio and television broadcasting. With their articles and broadcasts, these young journalists have gained the admiration and affection of readers and listeners alike.

• In Senegal, the music project ‘Tundu Dior’ brought young artists and musicians together to create songs on children’s rights. A CD has been recorded, including some original singles by popular Senegalese artists. Video clips have been produced and are broadcast on TV. The youth artists and singers also present concerts all over the country.

• In Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Haiti, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic, some 2,000 children have been involved in producing radio programmes, videos and printed material promoting the rights of the child. Under the project name ‘Childmedia’, young people have used this platform since 1999 to generate opportunities for a better and more dignified life.

Youth recording songs for Bibir Radio, Burkina Faso
CHILDREN + INSPIRATION = ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Young people involved in media projects gain confidence in being part of a process, in which they exchange ideas, make decisions, take action and can see the tangible results of their efforts. This often encourages them to engage in other processes in society, and apply some of the teamwork and problem-solving skills they have acquired. As media producers and presenters, they may inspire other children and youth to get more involved in issues affecting them. Media work also creates opportunities for exchange between children and young people in different countries, building global networks maintained by children themselves.

“The media project helps us to share our feelings about world peace in this horrible time of war. Thanks to the mass media channels and songs on a peaceful world and a society full of love... we children feel that we are not lonely and we always have friends around the world, who care for us and help us to raise our voice confidently to call for peace, food, warmth, and happiness.”

Nam Phuong, 16, Vietnam

- **In Ecuador**, a production team of 40 children, supported by a network of 300 community reporters, prepare and edit reports on child rights issues for a weekly live radio programme ‘Aquí los chicos’ (the Kids are here). They interview a wide range of people, including local dignitaries, and field live telephone calls during the show.

- **In the Philippines**, a team of children between the ages of 10 and 17 produce and manage a website under the banner ‘Mindoro Brilliant Kids’. They convene monthly to update and publish their stories and artworks on the web and engage in intercultural exchange with their counterparts from other parts of the world. Navigate to their website from [www.kidland.org](http://www.kidland.org).
Walk the talk
what you can do

In spite of fantastic media work being done with children and young people across the globe, many challenges remain. More needs to be done to ensure that young peoples’ voices are heard and taken seriously. Media practitioners, educators, policy-makers, child rights activists, children and young people all have a role to play. Let’s do something about it!

“My expectations from adults working on youth media projects? I hope they can support these projects to change for the good the reality of millions of uninformed people.”
Davidson, 16, Brazil

Be ethical and child-aware when producing media for and with children

Children need to be protected from harmful treatment and exploitation through the media. For example, when cases of child abuse are profiled in the mainstream media, the children involved often suffer secondary abuse, especially if there is a chance of their identity being revealed. You have a duty to protect children you are profiling. Just like adult journalists, child journalists can sometimes fail to protect the other children that they are working with – if you are working with young journalists, make sure that they understand the importance of protection. And lastly, make sure that the information you broadcast or publish for children is sound, reliable and beneficial.

Hear what children really have to say

Mainstream media rarely reflects the opinions or circumstances of children and young people. Globally, the media provide very little scope for children to exercise their right to participate and to express their views on matters affecting them. The media tend to focus on ‘bad news’ when reporting about children, depicting them either as delinquents or as victims of abuse or poverty. Ensure positive coverage on youth issues.

Assist and put pressure on governments to honour children’s rights

All countries that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child have an obligation to uphold and make real all the rights it contains. Governments therefore have a duty to ensure that children can express their views freely, that they are protected from harmful treatment and have access to information from a diversity of sources. As citizens of different countries, and broadcasters and journalists, we all need to keep watch on governments’ progress in this regard and hold them to account when children’s rights are neglected or infringed upon.
Be rights-conscious and inclusive in all media work

Across all fields of media, there is a need to build greater awareness of children’s rights and of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Wherever possible, dedicated efforts should be made to include children and young people across age groups, gender and social backgrounds. Make sure you broadcast or publish children’s views and opinions in their own voices when covering topics that impact on children and young people.

Share your resources and skills

Resources are needed to ensure meaningful levels of child participation in the media and high quality programmes that reach a wide audience. Children often need media training to become aware of their right to free expression. Without training, children may be afraid to speak out or unable to express how they think and feel. Where you can, share your resources and skills with children and young people’s media projects. In particular, make an effort to work with illiterate children, disabled children and other marginalised children to exercise their rights.

In Latin America, Plan supports the regional network ANDI (Agencia de Noticias de los derechos de la infancia – Child rights news agency) to monitor the quantity and quality of news on children. The results are then made available to relevant actors, including child rights organisations and the media itself across 12 Latin American countries. ANDI also mobilises and trains journalists on children’s rights to enhance media coverage on children’s issues.

In Sweden, a group of high school students were trained on how to classify and analyse news articles. They found that children were generally under-represented in the newspapers, that news about children was often negative and that children tended to be stereotyped. Studies in other countries indicate similar problems of children not being given attention, heard, or respected.
Plan supports youth media projects in developing countries around the world. Using a rights-based, child-centred approach, these projects make a difference to children’s lives:

- They spread valuable information from children, to children and adults.
- They generate relevant, high quality programmes.
- They give insight into children’s experiences and views.
- They help to catalyse social change.
- They contribute to children’s development.
- They are springboards to active citizenship.

You can help turn up the volume on children’s participation in the media:

- Be ethical and child-aware when producing media for and with children.
- Hear what children really have to say.
- Put pressure on governments to honour child rights.
- Be rights-conscious and inclusive in all media work.
- Share your resources and skills.

Contact us

To find out more about Plan’s youth media programmes and other areas of work, visit our websites or contact Plan’s media office, based at our international headquarters in the UK.

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