

# PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Methodologies for Working with Children and Young People



SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES  
INTERNATIONAL



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## GLOSSARY

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**Child** The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes persons below 18 years as children.

**CRC** Convention on the Rights of the Child

**Evaluation** is closely related to monitoring but includes taking a more in-depth look at a point in time of the outcomes or impact of a piece of work (e.g. a project/strategy or specific initiative) and the extent to which the stated objectives have been achieved. It also includes analysing how changes in the external context should influence our work

**Impact** refers to lasting or significant changes (positive or negative, intended or not) brought about in people's lives by a given action or series of actions.

**Learning** involves reflecting on experiences to identify how a situation or future action could be improved and then using this knowledge to make actual improvements. This can be individual or group based.

**Monitoring** is about knowing the positive and negative aspects of our efforts. It is the regular and on-going collection and analysis of information on the progress of our work.

**Young person/people** The United Nations defines a young person as anyone within the 15 to 24 age group. However, in many countries a young person can be anyone up to age 30 or 35. For the purposes of this guide, young person and adolescent will have similar meaning. Thus those of age 15-18 can be referred to either as adolescent or young person.



## Introduction

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### Why this guide?

The labour of SOS Children's Villages is to assure that: Every child develops within a caring family environment to his/her full potential as a contributing member of society. As an organisation SOS Children's Villages needs to monitor and evaluate its work to assess the extent to which it is achieving this goal, and so it can continually improve on the quality of the services and support it provides.

In recognition of this, SOS Children's Villages has invested in strengthening its monitoring and evaluation systems. This includes the recent introduction and piloting of an organisation-wide database for monitoring and collecting quantitative data on SOS Children's Villages' services and standards. SOS Children's Villages International is also developing an organisation-wide Change Matrix and Theory of Change<sup>1</sup> which aims to: describe how the organisation sets out to achieve sustainable change for children in their target group; help promote the rights and participation of children and young people; and, strengthen planning, monitoring and evaluation. From that global Change Matrix, Latin America Region (LAAM) has developed a continental Logical Framework Matrix, which identifies the main objectives and indicators that the continent is aiming to. This continental Framework becomes the base for the development of the local logical framework matrices.

Based on these, global and continental mandatory indicators were developed for all NAs, so to assure a common ground of information.

However, whilst the organisation promotes the rights and participation of children and young people there is currently a lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation that directly involves children and young people. Staff from SOS LAAM has identified this as a key weakness. Particularly challenging is the lack of methodological tools and skills for involving children in these processes. Often the instances for carrying out participatory monitoring and evaluation is left to the expertise of external consultants.

This guide represents an effort to assist National Associations in LAAM to strengthen their monitoring and evaluation skills in this area, The aim is to support field staff in the region to develop the skills and confidence to facilitate the involvement of children and young people in reflecting on the performance and services of SOS Children's Villages and the changes that impact on their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Burgard, Esther (2011), Ready for Change. Take the Plunge. In: Forum 43, SOS Children's Villages' International.



## What this guide is and what it is not

This guide is a resource for staff wishing to carry out participatory monitoring and evaluation processes with children and young people in SOS Children's Villages both Family Strengthening and Family Based Care Programmes in the Latin American region. It is based on practical experiences from SOS Children's Villages staff in the region and worldwide and makes suggestions as to how you might adapt some of these ideas for your own requirements.

The guide offers a mixture of theory and practical ideas. It is designed to motivate co-workers to try new ideas and approaches that involve the target population in the process of monitoring and evaluation. It is intended that the partners / national and local can adapt the templates and ideas proposed to their own specific contexts and needs.

It is not a guide for tracking the development of individual children, which is a specialised field with its own set of standards, methodologies and skills required. At times these standardised tools or methods can be used in participatory ways such as the way in which staff at some SOS Children's Villages have used the Nelson Ortiz Scale, but this is beyond the scope of this toolkit which concentrates on the participatory monitoring and evaluation of SOS Children's Villages' programmes.

The guide is based on the belief that children have a right to participate in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives and that monitoring and evaluation is one vehicle for participation. However, the information in this guide is not designed to tell you everything about participatory monitoring and evaluation with children and young people. It is just an starting point.

## What the guide contains

Following the Convention on The Rights of the Child (CRC), this guide defines children as people between the ages of 0 and 18 years, although we recognise the reality and meaning of childhood throughout the world differs<sup>2</sup>. The extent of child participation should depend on the age, experience and maturity of the child. A baby cannot be expected to make logical decisions, while a child of seven years old should not be expected to take on the burdens and responsibilities of an adult. However, all children should be involved and consulted in some way on matters that affect their lives. This guide therefore explores a range of methods and approaches for involving children at different stages of their lives. We have used the SOS Children's Villages age categories of: 0-5, 6-12 and 13-18 years to guide us in our task.

This document is organised into four sections:

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<sup>2</sup> From UNICEF, Technical Notes, 2002



**Section 1: Key Concepts.** This section briefly introduces some of the key concepts regarding child participation and participatory monitoring and evaluation and the ethical and practical implications of participatory approaches with children and young people, including protection issues and tackling diversity sensitively. It also looks at how the learning from qualitative monitoring and evaluation approaches can be integrated into SOS Children's Villages' existing monitoring, decision-making and strategic and annual planning processes.

**Section 2: The Toolkit.** This section includes guidance on planning participatory processes including preparing both children and adults. It then goes on to suggest some practical methods and tools for involving children and young people in monitoring and evaluation processes. Each tool is presented in a summary form indicating what ages and purposes it might be used for.

**Section 3: Appendices:** This section includes:

- Sample Guides
- Some examples that staff from SOS Children's Villages in the Latin America region and SOS Children's Villages International shared with us. Many of these can be downloaded from the SOS Children's Villages International Intranet.
- A list of references and guides on children's participation from around the world.



## Section 1. Key Concepts

### 1.1 Child Participation according to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child

Participation is one of four guiding principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which has been ratified by all but two Member States<sup>3</sup>. Under international law children have the right to be consulted in all decisions concerning their lives.

See Box 1 below.

#### Box 1. Guidance from the Convention

The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides clear initial guidance for children's participation in programmes. All rights guaranteed by the convention must be available to all children without discrimination of any kind. Equity and non-discrimination are emphasised.

- The best interest of the child must be a major principle in all actions concerning children. This put the onus on researchers and evaluators who encourage children's participation to consider carefully how this supports the best interest of each child.
- Children's views must be considered and taken into account in all matters that affect them. Their views should not be used merely as data from subjects of investigation.

The four articles related to participation established further parameters:

- **Article 12** states that children who can form their own views should have the right to express those views and have them taken into account. However, the right to participate and freedom of expression are not equated with self-determination. Each child's views are their "reality", which must be considered, but also must be weighed against the best interests of the child in any decisions eventually taken.
- **Article 13** states that children have the right to freedom of expression, which includes seeking, receiving and giving information and ideas through speaking, writing or in print, through art or any other media of the child's choice. Their participation is not a mere formality; children must be fully informed and must understand the consequences and impact of expressing their opinions. The corollary is that children are free to not participate, and should not be pressured. Participation is a right, not an obligation.
- **Article 14** establishes that State parties must respect children's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as parents' or guardians' role in their exercising this right. Research and monitoring and evaluation activities seeking to involve children must clearly acknowledge and ideally seek to build on these respective roles.
- **Article 15** establishes that the States parties must recognise children's right to freedom of association and of peaceful assembly. As children's capacities evolve, they will increasingly participate and seek the representation of their perspectives in wider forms — at community, sub-national, national and global levels. Research and monitoring and evaluation activities can help this evolution along.

Extract from: Children Participating in Research, Monitoring and Evaluation. Evaluation Technical Notes, UNICEF Evaluation Office April 2002

<sup>3</sup> The United States and Somalia are the only nations that have not formally ratified CRC



## 1.2 SOS Children's Villages Programme Policy

The work of SOS Children's Villages is guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Principle N°4 in the Programme Policy *Putting the Child First*<sup>4</sup> states:

**"Children are involved in finding solutions to the challenges they face in their lives: We recognise that children have a role to play in addressing their own development needs and standing for their rights. Children are informed and consulted in decision-making processes affecting their lives, with due consideration being given to their expressed views, depending on their age, maturity and abilities. Children are given opportunities to express their views and to learn important life skills such as communication, cooperation and problem solving. Children are encouraged to take on responsibility and to respect the rights of others."**

The policy provides a solid framework for involving children in monitoring and evaluation to strengthen programmes approach and impact.

## 1.3 Rights-based approach programming

Over the last two decades a number of organizations working with children, including SOS Children's Villages, have adopted a rights-based approach to their programmes. This approaches also support a shift in the concept of participation from emphasising the involvement of 'beneficiaries' to approaches that stress people's rights to citizenship and good governance. The implications of this are that:

- Children should be recognised as active participants rather than passive recipients of development interventions. This is linked to the concept of child and young people agency – the idea that children and young people are agents of change and capable of playing leading roles in their lives and communities.
- Children are rights holders who have the right to a say in decisions about all matters affecting them: the family and other care provision, school, community and society.
- Parenting and learning methods for supporting and stimulate children's capacity to express themselves and to make decisions.
- Organisations such as SOS Children's Villages should support children's involvement in policy consultations, programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Children should be acknowledged as rights holders through supporting organizations that demand children's entitlements and freedoms.
- Children's issues should be connected to government's broader development agendas.

<sup>4</sup> SOS Children's Villages International (2009), From Putting the Child First – SOS Programme Policy.





## 1.4 Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

### What is participatory monitoring and evaluation?

Participatory monitoring and evaluation focuses on the active engagement of key stakeholders. It is a process through which stakeholders at various levels engage in monitoring or evaluating a particular project, programme or policy, share control over the content, the process and the results of the monitoring and evaluation activity and engage in taking or identifying corrective actions.

Experience has demonstrated that while participatory approaches may initially require additional time and resource investments in a programme, they generally lead to more sustainable results and greater efficiency in the long term.

### Why involving children and young people in these processes?

There are a number of reasons for involving children and young people in monitoring and evaluation<sup>5</sup> initiatives that are for their benefit. For a start they are particularly well placed to assess the extent to which they actually do benefit, and often have very different perspectives from adults. They can share ideas and opinions about their own lives, how problems affect them, how to solve the problems that arise in their communities and how they can contribute to programmes that help children improve their quality of life.

Furthermore involving children in monitoring and evaluation recognises that they are not passive recipients of experience, but active contributors to their own well-being and development. Involving children in monitoring and evaluation increases their sense of ownership, their desire for an initiative to be successful, and their efforts to make it so. At the same time, children can acquire many skills in the analysis and collection of information, decision-making, cooperation, problem-solving, as well as an appreciation of democratic principles, social justice, greater self-confidence new friendships and better relations with the adults involved in the evaluation<sup>6</sup>. Thus it can help develop the skills of the next generation of community leaders and members. The appropriate form and level of child participation will depend on the reasons for their participation.

Even at a very young age, children's views and opinions can be asked for and means can be found to involve them in activities. Participation processes need to be tailored to the appropriate context and stage of development, but children at different ages can and should participate if development efforts are to be effective.

There can also be some disadvantages in involving children. For a summary of advantages and disadvantages see Box 2.

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<sup>5</sup> This guide focuses on participation in monitoring and evaluation, though child participation in other stages of the programme cycle is also important.

<sup>6</sup> Bonati, Grazyna (2006), *Monitoring and Evaluating with Children*, A short guide, Plan International.



## Box 2: Advantages of and constraints on children's participation<sup>7</sup>

### Advantages

- Incorporating the views of children can make initiatives more efficient and effective.
- Children's participation can increase their social and communicational skills, self-esteem and self-confidence, due to having their opinions heard and taken seriously, new competences developed and recognised, developing new friendships and support mechanisms. In effect, it can be an empowering experience for the children participating.
- Children can learn a great deal, not only in terms of new knowledge, but also in terms of civic values, democratic principles, analytical and critical thinking, communication, cooperation, negotiation and problem-solving. Thus there is often considerable personal, mental and social development.
- Children's participation may improve children's status both within families and communities. Increased communication skills enable them to express their opinions in ways which encourage others to listen and respect their views. Their increased sense of responsibility is normally recognised and respected as well, making it more likely for their opinions to be sought and respected.
- Improved relationships with adults and other children, particularly with those involved in the participatory activities.
- All the above can help children protect themselves better.
- Adults learn a lot about the views, needs, priorities and abilities of children, as the children are given the opportunity to show adults (and themselves) what they are capable of doing.
- Benefits can spread far beyond the children involved to their families and communities. Communities often unite around the activities of the children, and these older active children become good role models for the younger children in their families and communities.

While all the above are true for children's participation in general, involving them in monitoring and evaluation activities can lead to several additional advantages:

- If they have participated in all the other stages, their participation in evaluation process means that they have participated throughout, ensuring a more complete participation and reducing the possibility of their participation being mere tokenism. They become primary stakeholders.
- The discussions involved clarifying the objectives and activities for the children but also other people involved in the project.
- Children can help identify signs of success (indicators), making these more locally relevant.
- It can provide the evaluation process with new information and insights from the children.
- The children's ideas and information from them are interpreted by themselves, rather than by adults, whose insights into the children's lives may be less accurate and reliable than they think. This can help organisations working on behalf of children become better informed of their needs, opinions and capabilities. Thus children can help ensure that their views are correctly represented by adults.
- Monitoring the project and identifying the signs of success increase the child's involvement in the project both in terms of recognising the successes and modifying the project to ensure greater success. This creates greater accountability for the project.
- Children can often get more precise information from other children, as communication is often better between peers, including the possibility of reaching more marginalised children where necessary.
- We are encouraged to find simpler and more direct methods for the evaluation, with quicker sharing of results. The children's and community's involvement mean that they would like to see the results quickly rather than have them taken away as often happens with outside evaluators.

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Bonati, Grazyna (2006), Monitoring and Evaluating with Children, A short guide, Plan International.



### Constraints

With so much in favour, it becomes easy to overlook the constraints but we need to consider them too:

- It takes more time and other resources as well as people capable of working with the children in an appropriate way for the monitoring and evaluation to work well.
- The children themselves may not have time to get involved in such activities, on account of their school or homework, or their parents may not approve. Participation must always be voluntary and the children should be clearly informed of the fact that they are free to participate or not and even to leave at any time. This can cause problems too, if children drop out during the process.
- If this is a new activity for the children, they will need some training, which will also take time, as well as enough discussion time to clarify the whole process and ensure that they understand what they are doing and why. It is important that they contribute their ideas and that their ideas are listened to, otherwise their participation risks being tokenism. They should not just be there to do the donkey work. Their participation throughout the whole process ensures their greater commitment and better research results.
- Some of the values taught or encouraged during a project may conflict with or not be acceptable in the cultural context. This calls for considerable sensitivity.
- There is always the risk that something might not work and this can be very upsetting and discouraging for the children, so it is important to make sure that things work as well as possible or if not that there is sufficient discussion of the reasons why to help the children overcome any disappointment.
- There is also the risk that painful memories may arise, especially for children that have gone through traumatic experiences. It is important to help the children involved deal with the situation and not just leave the issue unresolved.

Although in general the advantages far outweigh the constraints, it is important in deciding whether or not to involve children in evaluation, as in all activities, to assess whether or not it is in the children's interest in each particular case.

### Who else needs to be involved?

A participatory approach should involve all key stakeholders. So, for example, SOS mothers should be fully involved, and for family strengthening programmes children's main carers should be included, along with appropriate professionals such as social workers, psychologists and teachers. This toolkit however focuses on child participation.

### When is participation appropriate and when not?

Participation is only appropriate when it is meaningful i.e. when the participation has some possibility of influencing findings, conclusions or future decisions. Children and young people are very good at identifying when they are being manipulated and this will lead to resentment and disengagement. It is also only appropriate if the children will gain from being involved. If the children have little to gain from the experience, they should not be invited to participate. For example children should not be asked to express preferences on an issue when the decision has already been taken, or if there is no chance that their input will influence the decision made. Children should always be given honest feedback about how their opinions have been taken on board, and an explanation about why some of their ideas might be not taken forward.

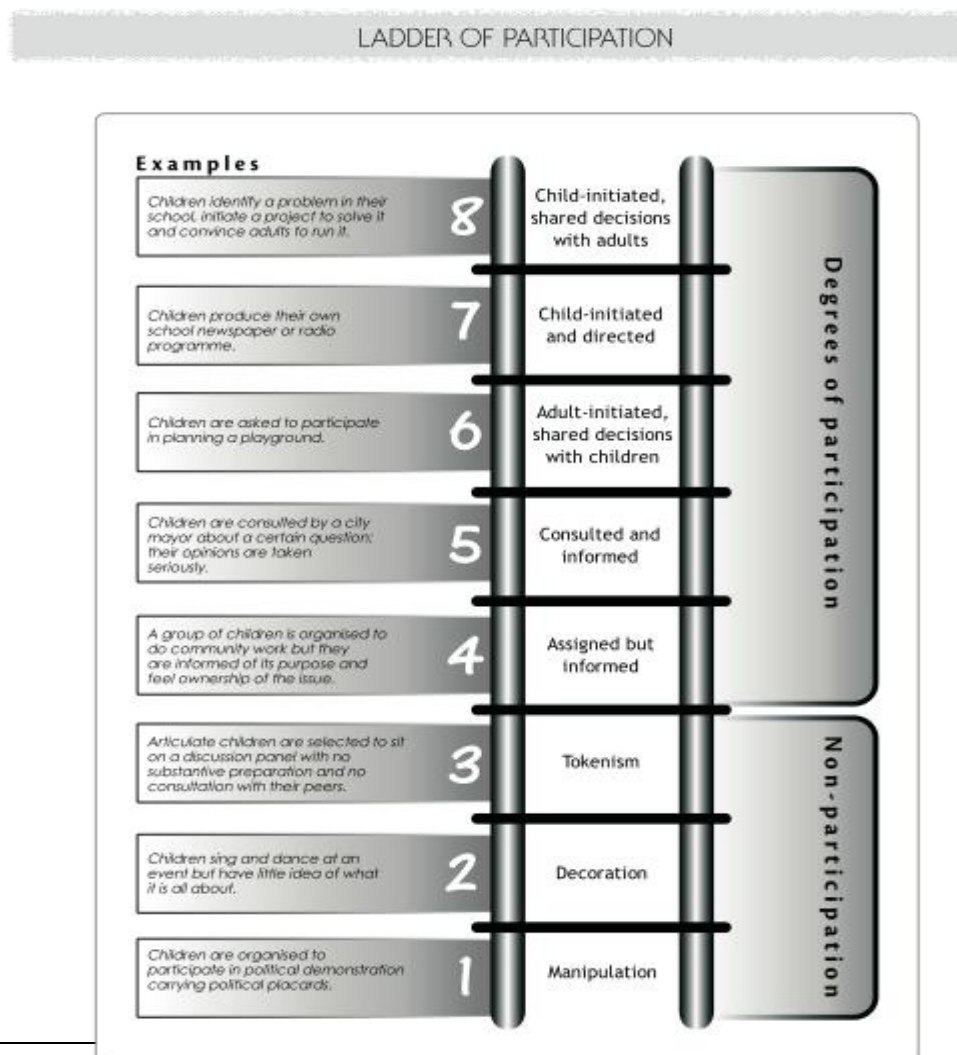


## 1.5 Levels of participation

There are many levels of participation ranging from manipulation, tokenism, to where children take a leading role. Whilst manipulation is unlikely to be ever appropriate (and usually classed as non-participation), different levels of participation may be appropriate at different times. At times consultation may be the most appropriate approach. It may take time for children to feel comfortable at higher levels of participation, and some may not want to take on this responsibility. It is recommended to start slowly and then to build up.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation does not just mean using participatory and fun methods, but involving children through as much of the process as they would like. Children can provide information as respondents as well as seek information from others. In participatory evaluations, they should in many cases do both, and may play a role in acting as evaluators themselves.

The ladder of participation below illustrates different levels of participation<sup>8</sup>.



<sup>8</sup> Flowers, Nancy (2009), Composito. Manual of Human Rights Education for Children. Council of Europe, Directorate of Youth and Sport.



## 1.6 Good Practices in Child Participation<sup>9</sup>

The importance of support from line management to children's participation cannot be understated. Managers must recognize the value of children's participation and give support to genuine opportunities for children's participation. Such support will include allocation of staff time and resources to processes which support the participation of girls and boys (of different ages and abilities). Factors that support or hinder child participation can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1: Factors that promote and hinder children's participation<sup>10</sup>**

Factors that promote children's participation	Factors that hinder children's participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of children's rights</li> <li>• Management support for children's participation</li> <li>• Implementation of child rights programming</li> <li>• Awareness that effective participation takes considerable time</li> <li>• Capacity building for programme staff.</li> <li>• Development of tools and child friendly materials in local language</li> <li>• Practical experiences demonstrating the benefits of children's participation</li> <li>• Gaining adult support within community and broader settings - adults informed on the benefits of children's participation</li> <li>• Capacity building for children</li> <li>• Recognition of the benefits of children's participation at Head Office level</li> <li>• Parents who participate in community organisations and are looking for changes and better conditions for their families and communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patriarchal power structures (and gender discrimination)</li> <li>• Negative attitudes from adults (which are reinforced by cultural values and traditions)</li> <li>• Lack of management support</li> <li>• Lack of capacity among staff to effectively facilitate and support children's participation</li> <li>• Time consuming process</li> <li>• Socio-political scenario (for example, conflict) can increase risks faced by children</li> <li>• Lack of effective tools and systems to effectively monitor and evaluate children's participation</li> <li>• Lack of budget for children's participation work</li> </ul>

Good practices would involve the following:

- **Ensuring clarity on the purpose and benefits of child participation:** For child participation to be meaningful, all stakeholders need to understand and accept its importance. If the purpose is not commonly accepted among senior management staff within SOS Children's Villages, child participation can easily be reduced to tokenism.
- **Building on supportive local knowledge and practice:** Strategies for child participation should incorporate and build on supportive local structures, traditions, knowledge and

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from Canadian International Development Agency (2003), RMB and Children's Participation: A guide to Incorporating Child Participation Results into CIDA Programs, Canadian International Development Agency. Policy Branch. Child Protection Unit.

<sup>10</sup> Adapted from Feinstein, C./ O'Kane, C. (2008), Participation is a Virtue that Must be Cultivated, An analysis of children's participation working methods and materials within Save the Children Sweden, Save the Children Sweden.



practice. For example if traditionally there are structures for community participation in decision making, similar structures could be considered for child participation.

- **Ensuring inclusion:** Children are not a homogeneous group. Boys and girls have varied interests, needs and priorities based on their age, gender, religions, socio-economic status and ethnicity. Special attention needs to be given to those children who are more vulnerable or at risk and those who tend to be excluded because of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or other issues. SOS Children's Villages have an Inclusion Policy which needs to guide any programme or particular approach with children and young people at all times.
- **Address power issues:** There are issues of power among children, as well as between children and adults. Extra work may be needed with children and adults on issues of diversity and discrimination to ensure that existing patterns of power and exclusion are challenged rather than strengthened in any participatory process. One approach may be to work with specific age, gender, ethnic or background groups separately first, before bringing the different groups together. This can help explore children's diverse experiences and allow them to emerge.
- **Support adult stakeholders:** Work with adults on how they can encourage children's participation is as important as the work with children themselves. Adults have a duty to listen and respond, and a duty to protect children's interests. Adults often need help in developing their capacities to support children, as participation processes are vulnerable to adult manipulation. It is important to explore the adult stakeholders' experience and attitudes toward child participation, and plan accordingly. Young adults can be an important resource in supporting the participation of children.
- **Avoid tokenism.** If children are invited to meetings where adults do not listen to their views, or where they present ideas but receive no response, they often become disillusioned and angry. Children and their views need to be treated with respect, but this does not mean they are always valid. All views need to be discussed and challenged where necessary, whether they come from children or adults, but this should be done in a respectful and positive manner. They should always be treated seriously.
- **Ethics and child protection** must be built into every aspect of the planning for a process involving children. Confidentiality and other ethical issues need to be respected by everyone. If traumatic issues are raised, it is important to help the children involved to deal with the situation and not just leave the issue unresolved. It is important that processes do not take up too much time, and that they don't cause children to miss too much school or leisure time. See Box 3 for further details, reference should also be made to SOS Children's Villages' Policy on Child Protection.
- **Participation should always be voluntary:** Children should be clearly informed at the



start what the exercise entails and what will happen to their input. They should be given the option of choosing not to participate in any process, or to stop participating at any time, without being expected to give their reasons. They should be encouraged to decide on the level of participation that they feel comfortable with.

### Box 3: Guidance on Principles and Ethics of participation from the SOS Children's Villages I Matter campaign.

#### Key principles for young people participation:

- **Be respectful:** Young people are treated with the same respect as adults. All the young people involved are treated equally.
- **Create a safe environment** where young people can exchange opinions.
- **Be appreciative and value participation:** Part of valuing young people involvement is to hold young people accountable for their responsibilities, just as one would with adults. The skills and commitment that adults bring to the partnership should also be valued.
- **Be aware of different communication styles:** Different styles of communication do not necessarily imply disrespect, disinterest, or different goals and expectations. Asking questions and communicating clearly can help diffuse conflicts that arise from different communication styles.
- **Be open:** Sometimes adults think they “know it all” and which activities would fit and be suitable for the campaign. Young people might open new ways of thinking, new perspectives on issues or on activities that can be done. Listen to them and be ready to adapt agendas, attitudes and outcomes.
- **Be clear on roles and responsibilities:** Be clear on which roles young people and adults have and ensure that everybody knows his/her role and responsibilities.
- **Be participatory:** Share decision-making power. If young people have no power to make decisions, their participation is not one of partnership.
- **Be inclusive:** Activities with young people should not reinforce existing patterns of discrimination. Make sure that the groups of “invisible children and young people” are also represented (young people with disabilities, with minority background...).
- **Respect the pace of every young person** and ensure that they do not feel obliged to do anything.
- **Be self-critical and flexible.**
- **Use Playful and fun methodologies that encourage child to actively participate**

#### Ethical considerations:

- **Young people participation is voluntary:** No young person should be forced to participate in this campaign.
- **Respect the other commitments and activities of young people:** The involvement of young people in the campaign should not interfere with their education and their work.
- **Make sure that young people feel and are safe** by considering child protection measures in planning the activities. See the Child Protection Policy from SOS Children's Villages<sup>11</sup>.
- **Respect young people's privacy:** Having care experience is the reason for being involved in the campaign but each individual young people's case/story should not be discussed.
- Young people will often become comfortable with their peers and co-workers and without realising disclose something personal to the group. A process should be in place for all young people to speak in confidence to a person of trust.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.sos-childrevillages.org/What-we-do/Childrens-Rights/Pages/default.aspx>,  
<http://www.sos-childrevillages.org/What-we-do/Childrens-Rights/Protect-Empower-Children/Pages/default.aspx>



### 1.7 Working with and including perspectives of very young children

It is important to engage with children from the earliest age to promote their participation and to build upon their evolving capacities. This starts on a daily basis at home through close communication with the newborn child, sensitivity for his or her needs and capacity to understand what the infant communicates without words. If children are encouraged to explore, to think, to talk, ask questions and listen, to solve problems, to be caring and responsible from the early years, these qualities will remain within them. Promoting the involvement of young children and furthering efforts which enable a participatory learning environment are therefore intended to enhance children's participation in later years.

When children are considered too young to participate on their own, you might consider having them participate with a caregiver who can help them understand and interpret their responses.

### 1.8 Using the data from participatory monitoring and evaluation with children within the SOS Children's Villages programme cycle

The main reason for carrying out participatory monitoring and evaluation is to provide information to improve programmes functioning and for organisational learning processes. To ensure that the qualitative data collected is used to improve work it needs to be linked into the programme cycle and on-going planning within SOS Children's Villages. Examples of where it can be useful include:

- To inform national strategic planning (NSP) and programme operational planning (POP);
- When making individual and family development plans;
- To strengthen accountability;
- Developing a better understanding of impact;
- For communication purposes.

Currently SOS Children's Villages collect a lot of quantitative data for their monitoring and evaluation database. The two sets of data need to be looked at together. For example the quantitative data may identify areas of concern to be investigated in more detail through qualitative approaches that may reveal why these trends are being seen.

Participation of course should not be restricted to monitoring and evaluation instances. If children have participated in monitoring and evaluation exercises, then ideally they should also be involved in the planning of the next phase of work that builds on this analysis. Many of the methods and tools shared in Section 2 can be adapted for use in participatory planning.





## Section 2. The Toolkit

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### 2.1 Introduction

This toolkit provides a number of creative ideas about how to involve children and young people in monitoring and evaluation processes or similar activities where children's views or inputs are being sought. You are advised to read Section 1 before considering using any of the methods in the Toolkit.

### 2.2 Planning participatory processes

#### Be clear on why you are doing participation

The first step in planning a participatory process is to be clear about why you are doing it. It is important to be clear about the purpose of child participation in this particular case, including the type of data and information you are hoping to capture through the process and what you are going to use it for. Once you are clear about the purpose you can then decide on who should be involved, the approach and tools that will be most appropriate, the time involved and resources needed and ethical implications, including any consent required.

#### Design around the children to be involved

Knowing children well, understanding their capacities, motivations and interests will be your first step in developing processes that are appropriate for everyone's participation. Children knows what works for them and should be closely involved in determining how, where and when they shall participate. Questions to consider include:

- What forms should meetings take?
- Are there alternatives to direct verbal communication?
- How can information be presented in accessible ways?
- Where should children meet where they will feel most comfortable?
- When are the most appropriate times for children to participate given their other commitments?
- Do girls and boys of different ages have different needs and, if so, how will you accommodate them?

Focus on identifying the type of support that will allow children to participate meaningfully. Children themselves can and should provide crucial insight into the kind of support they need from adults.

Once again we should take into account when designing around the children involved it is



important to remember that they are not a homogeneous group. Boys and girls have varied interests; needs and priorities based on their age, gender, religions, socio-economic status and ethnicity, and different approaches may be required for different groups. Special attention needs to be given to those children who are more vulnerable or at risk and those who tend to be excluded because of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or other issues.

#### **Box 4: Including children with disabilities**

Disabled children and young people often have strong views about the society they live in, how they are treated, services they receive, their education, health and leisure. Like other children, they want to be respected and to have a say in things that affect them. Listening to young disabled children effectively, particularly if their needs are complex, may sometimes involve learning new communication techniques, but more often than not it is a question of acknowledging and 'fine tuning' the skills that effective practitioners already use every day, including sensitivity, creativity and intuition.

Given appropriate tools and support, all children, including those considered to have severe or profound disabilities or challenging behaviour, are able to express their views, wishes and feelings and get their views across to a wider number of people.

When planning a participatory process involving children with disabilities or learning needs you may first want to find out:

- How each person prefers communicating
- How each make choices
- How they indicate 'Yes' and 'No' (and, ideally, 'don't know' and 'maybe')
- How they ask for basic needs to be met
- How they attract attention
- How they ask for something that's not there
- How they indicate that they don't want something/have had enough/want a change
- How they share experiences of interest to them
- How they express opinions and/or show their feelings
- How many people in his/her life are competent in communicating with him/her
- How they socialise with their peers.
- Are there access needs including seating or mobility needs,

In some cases an occupational therapist's assessment may be required to address these barriers.

You are likely to need a longer time scale to work with groups of disabled children and you may need to use a number of mediums within the same group. You may need to adopt a range of strategies to ensure that the person or group feels comfortable and is not disadvantaged in the consultation process. All the thought and preparation needed to communicate very clearly and effectively will be of benefit to the whole group.

Adapted from Morris, J. (2002), A Lot to Say! A guide for social workers, personal advisors and others working with disabled children and young people with communication impairments, London: Scope. (<http://www.communicationpassports.org.uk/Home/>)

See also SOS Children's Villages International (2008), Valuing Diversity – Valuing Differing ability, Policy on the inclusion of Children with Disabilities.



### Ensure your plans are culturally appropriate and fun

It is helpful to incorporate and build on culturally appropriate processes, local traditions, knowledge and practice as this enables both children and adults to relate to the process more easily. This may mean building on local traditions of story-telling, art, or decision-making processes. It may also mean paying attention to locally accepted norms of language, personal space or body contact.

Sessions with children should be as active as possible. They usually prefer active methods such as drawing or group work to large discussion or listening for long periods. Organise the sessions to include games and play as well as work. This will help child participants relax and feel more comfortable in the group, while building a sense of community and making the sessions more enjoyable. The length of the session should vary depending on the age of the child. For very young children it is important to keep the sessions very short.

### Feedback and dissemination

After any participatory process, ensure that you thank the children for their input and tell them what to expect in terms of feedback so that children know what is going to happen with their input and ideas. Efforts need to be made to create child friendly feedback and dissemination mechanisms that are accessible to children of different ages and background.

#### Ensuring quality feedback and follow up– some tips

- At the end of the participatory process, share with the children and young people the results of the work that they have done. If applicable, share with them how their work fits into the larger picture.
- Ensure all children participating in the process have access to information about what happens next.
- Be clear from the beginning whether or not children and young people will be able to be involved in any additional follow up action related to the consultation or whether this is a one-off event. If follow up action is possible, build into the consultative process the space to discuss and develop next steps and ensure that children and young people are aware that a longer-term commitment is an option.
- Provide assistance to other key players (e.g. care givers) in order to encourage and enable them to involve children in follow up actions.
- Ensure the children receive meeting reports and other documents

Adapted from: Save the Children (2003 ), *So you want to consult with children, a toolkit of good practice.*

It is important that data and information collected through participatory monitoring and evaluation processes with children is clearly presented and accurately reflects the children and young people's views. To do this you may want to use a combination of methods and/or involve young people in the process (e.g. design, making a presentation etc.) Some of the methods you may want to consider include:

- Short reports
- Graphs and summary tables
- Posters
- Presentations
- Computer websites



- PowerPoint presentations
- Video
- Audio-tape
- Newsletter formats
- Visual forms e.g. art or photography
- Visual diagrams and summaries
- Exhibitions (actings, musicals)

### 2.3 Preparing children, adolescents and young people

Before starting any participatory exercise with children it is important that they are fully informed about:

- Why the exercise is taking place.
- What their involvement would involve in terms of time and input.
- Their absolute right to choose whether or not to be involved, and to withdraw their involvement at any time if they wish to.
- What is going to happen to any information collected
- What to expect as a result – it is important to manage any unrealistic expectations of change.
- Issues of child protection and confidentiality.

Participation requires children to share their ideas, opinions and feelings openly and honestly. We need to create an environment in which they feel safe and confident to do this. This will depend on developing positive and trusting relationships between the children and the facilitator and between different children who are participating. During the early stages of any participatory exercise it is important to discuss and set ground rules about:

- Acceptable forms of behaviour to others who are participating, both between children and between children and adults.
- How to ensure everyone feels comfortable and able to contribute
- Issues of confidentiality for ideas and opinions expressed within the exercise: it is important that children also recognise when they need to respect their peers' confidentiality.

### 2.4 Preparing adult stakeholders

It is important to also prepare adults as their attitudes towards children and young people expressing their opinions can be key in creating an environment in which children feel able to speak. It is normal for adults in positions of responsibility over children to have some fears about giving them increased opportunity, responsibility and influence.

Work with adults to explore and address these fears is as important as the work with children themselves. It is particularly important to prepare any adults who are going to help facilitate the process. Adults often need help in developing their capacities to support children, as participation processes are vulnerable to adult manipulation. It is important to explore the adult stakeholders' experience and attitudes toward child participation, and plan accordingly. Young adults can be an important resource in supporting the participation of children.



Elements of adult preparation might include:

- Orientation on Child Rights and the provisions of the International Convention.
- Discussion on the importance of ensuring the views of all children are respected and seen as valid, in particular girls, disabled children and younger children.
- Open discussion of what is being planned and why.
- Discussion of any fears and concerns about child participation and during which you should address any negative attitudes to children that may affect what adults expect of them.
- Clarification of their role as an adult in the exercise.
- Explaining how child protection will be assured.
- Getting permission to involve any children in their care.

#### **Box 5: Key competencies required for facilitating child participation<sup>12</sup>**

Facilitators who want to ensure that children and young people are active in the development process need to have the following key competencies:

- Ability to discuss issues with children in ways that they can easily understand.
- Ability to identify when some children are not able to follow the discussion or understand what is being said.
- Resourcefulness to utilize a variety of creative participatory methods to uncover the children ideas - particularly methods that allow marginalized children (children excluded from school, ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, etc.) to express themselves.
- Sensitivity to probe more deeply into issues that children allude to but don't describe in detail.
- Ability to allow children to lead a discussion and to record ideas as they are stated/performed/described/ drawn.
- Flexibility to change the direction of the discussion if children are clearly more interested in discussing a topic that is unexpected but still contributes to the goal of the activity.
- Ability to recognize power differences amongst children due to differences in age, ethnicity, economic status, gender, disability, HIV status etc. and to facilitate the activity to ensure balance among those who hold more and less power.

## **2.5 How to use the toolkit**

### **Familiarise yourself with the tools.**

We suggest you read through the whole toolkit to get a sense of the various tools and activities, what they are about and how they might be used. Don't be put off by the age criteria; these are intended only as an approximate guide; you will be in the best position to judge what will work best with the children you know well.

### **Adapt and develop the tools to suit your own purposes**

Most of the tools and activities can be used in a variety of different situations and age categories. It is particularly important to note that when working with disabled children there is likely to be a range of needs and abilities therefore the tools will need to be adapted to suit

<sup>12</sup> O'Kane C./ Dolan, T (2008), We've got something to say! Promoting Child and Youth Agency, A Facilitator's Manual Christian Children's Fund International Programs.



the individual not the groups as a whole. We encourage field staff from SOS Children's Villages to adapt and develop the tools for their own purposes and to add their own tools and resources to this document.

## 2.6 Selecting a method and tool

The methods and tools suggested can be used to cover the following topics for monitoring and evaluation<sup>13</sup>:

- Children's perceptions about SOS Children's Villages' programmes and activities.
- Understanding better the needs, priorities and desires of children and young people.
- Assessing the impact of implemented strategies.
- Gathering suggestions and proposals for solutions, future actions.
- Assessing the situation of young adults who grew up in SOS Children's Village families (two years follow up).
- Gathering perceptions about issues that impact on children's lives including issues around discrimination and exclusion, drugs, sexuality etc.
- Gathering children's perceptions about their relations with their carers, siblings and other family members, community and external environment.

We use the term **methods** to describe broad approaches to participation. The table below summarises the type of methods that are used to involve children and young people in monitoring and evaluation processes.

**Table 2: Broad methods of involving children and young people**

Input at the individual level	
<b>Interviews and conversations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suitable for obtaining qualitative information from an individual child about a specific topic or aspects of change</li> <li>• Exploring girls and boys experiences of living in SOS Children's Villages and SOS services or how they are perceived and treated by others.</li> </ul> <p>Suitable for all ages of child who are able to communicate, though for younger children the sessions should be kept very short and may be supported by pictures or objects.</p>
<b>Surveys, questionnaires or polls</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To get feedback on a specific activity and/or area of intervention.</li> </ul> <p>Suitable from age 6 upwards, if applied to children under 10, they should be carried out together with an adult.</p>
<b>Systems for on-going feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These can be user initiated such as comment boxes or graffiti walls, or both reactive and proactive such as child/peer counsellors who both look to identify problems such as children that are upset or not playing with others, or whom children are encouraged to approach with issues.</li> <li>• Suitable for identifying problems or grievances or new ideas.</li> </ul>

<sup>13</sup> These are the areas suggested by SOS Latin America staff in response to the survey questionnaire about participatory monitoring and evaluation with children.



	Suitable for ages 5 upwards, though older child counsellors can support, get feedback from, and identify issues among younger children.
<b>Working with groups of children or young people</b>	
<b>Focus Groups</b>	<p>Focus groups are facilitated discussions of a small group of participants on a particular topic or issue. Appropriate length will depend on the participants' age, but normally will range from 30 minutes to 2 hours. Suitable for ages 5 upwards. They are particularly useful to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain specific qualitative information from a small sample of your target group</li> <li>• Gain a range of insights on specific issues, topics, or interventions</li> </ul> <p><i>Focus group discussion can be combined with other methods such as games, using puppets, toys and other visual aids.</i></p>
<b>Workshops</b>	<p>Here we include other group processes that bring together larger number of children, possibly for longer periods of time. These may combine a variety of participatory methods, and may involve splitting the children into smaller groups for part of the time. These are particularly useful for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participatory annual reviews</li> <li>• Consultations</li> </ul> <p>These can be suitable for ages 5 upwards, but again the length and design of the workshop will need to be age appropriate. Younger children will need a higher ratio of facilitators to participants.</p>
<b>Observation</b>	
<b>Direct Observation</b>	There may be times when observation is the most appropriate approach, for example with very young children who cannot communicate. Observation can also be combined with other approaches.
<b>Children as observers</b>	Children can also act as observers to e.g. to monitor what facilities in a SOS Children's Village are used most and at what times.

**Tools** are specific ways of involving children and young people, and allowing them to share or develop information and data within the broader methods. Most can be adapted for use within either group or individual processes. If used well participatory tools can be creative and fun ways to illustrate young people's views and can support discussions on specific topics, issues and aspects of change. Creative methods are particularly helpful when children cannot read or write. As different children may prefer to communicate in different ways (e.g. orally, through pictures, through plays), it is normally preferable to choose a variety of tools to allow for this. We provide summaries of tools in Section 2.8, and some example guides and templates in Appendixes 1 and 2.

## 2.7 Descriptions of methods



## Interviews and conversations

An interview is where a person asks a child questions to collect information and to learn about their ideas, beliefs and views. They can be formal (where you use an interview guide to structure the discussion) or more informal conversations where just a few questions are being asked. Interviews and conversations are valuable sources of information and if trust is established with the child or young person you are talking with, they can give you information that you will not be able to collect in any other way. You can choose to do one single interview or a series of interviews with the same child/young person. Interviews and conversations can be recorded by written notes, videotaped or audio-taped and transcribed; what is appropriate will depend on the sensitivity of the issues being discussed. In some circumstances children can also be trained in interview techniques as peer-to-peer interviewers. Peer-to-peer interviews and involving young people as researchers can potentially be empowering for young people especially when they are involved in the design of the interview questions and analysis of the findings. In some circumstances young people may feel more comfortable talking about issues with their peer group; they may share similar experiences, use similar language etc. Peer interviewers might uncover new issues that might not be picked up through other methods. However you should not underestimate the amount of time needed to train young people in interview skills. They will also need to understand ethical and child protection issues, as well as the importance of confidentiality, and to be aware of power issues in relation to peer-led evaluations.

### **Ideal for**

Consultation processes with a sample of SOS Children's Villages target groups either as part of a monitoring instance or as part of a more in depth evaluation or review of a specific programme or intervention.

### **Other considerations**

For very young children, language may still be developing, but even for those children with good verbal skills 'talking' may not be their favoured method of communication, particularly in response to questions from adults. Even older children may find talking hard when adults are asking questions that might evoke difficult or sensitive issues. One approach is to ask the child to point to a choice of pictures in response to each question; alternatively play and other participatory tools can be useful.

### **Check list**

- Create interview questions
- Select people to interview
- Conduct interviews
- Remember to ask follow-up questions whenever you don't understand the answer
- Record responses
- Review and discuss answers





### Case study: Interview questions from working in Mexico with young children

Melel Xojobal, is an NGO working with urban indigenous children and families in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico. In 2004, they carried out interviews with children participating in their “Calles” project where staff members go to public spaces such as squares and markets, to teach reading and writing skills, and to promote cultural reflection among children who work in the streets. The interviews focused on children’s experiences with the programme and staff. The questions included:

- What have you learned?
- What do you like best about what we do?
- What don’t you like about what we do together?
- Are there days when you can’t come to Calles? Why?
- Is it better for us to speak in Spanish, in Tsotsil, or in both languages?
- How do the other children behave during activities?
- Has anything bad ever happened while we were working together?
- What can we change about the programme to make it better?

They recorded the interviews and found that this was a key learning experience for staff. ‘*Hearing the children’s responses – the pauses, the rise and fall in voices, the tones and emotions – made for a more immediate, provocative, and revealing experience than the same material presented on paper*’.

Source: Waters Kate (2004) (*Early Childhood Matters: Mexico Pay attention to me!* Documentation and child participation, Bernard van Leer Foundation)

### Case study. Children conducting interviews in Bangladesh

A group of young people was involved in planning and carrying out a piece of research that aimed to identify issues of local importance to young children. At a preliminary four day meeting, children decided what they wanted to do; they identified a series of issues, and decided who they wanted to interview, and to whom they wanted to communicate their views, and arranged to carry out the interviews. The core group of 16 children conducted 42 interviews with 9-16 year olds. There were also four adult team members. Regular assessment and planning meetings were held by the team to help them to reflect on the process they were undertaking. As a result of the interviews the children identified a long list of issues and prioritised them into a top five of education, good behaviour (including that of teachers, parent/carers, doctors, boys and girls, food and health and play. One of the aims of the research was to for the adults to produce a book. This was then taken back to the children for their approval and revised with their comments. The children were also involved in designing how they wanted to communicate the findings.

Source: West Andy (2000), *Some examples of Participation work with Children and examples from Bangladesh*, in Children and Participation, Briefing Paper

## Questionnaires and surveys and polls



Questionnaires and survey are useful tools for gathering comparable information and data from a wide range of children and young people. They can be administered either face to face, by email or online, by post or by telephone interview or simply asking children to vote on a specific issue or topic during a participatory session. Questionnaires can be designed, administered and analysed by children and young people to ask questions to their peer groups. The results allow for statistical analysis and can be summarized in the form of graphs and percentages. If the preparation material and presentations are of good quality children and young people can make an informed choice.

#### **Ideal for**

- Gathering baseline data or feedback on specific SOS Children's Villages' services/interventions. The data gathered and analysed from surveys can help to identify emerging trends or issues that can then be looked at in more depth through either one to one sessions or focus group discussions.
- Comparing opinions, views and attitudes over time. The outcomes and data can be presented graphically and statistically.

#### **Other considerations**

- Consider how you will analyse the data before administering the questionnaire/survey or poll
- Keep them short
- Keep the language child friendly
- Use illustrations for younger groups (e.g. happy/sad faces, cartoons, photographs)
- Ensure information generated is confidential

#### **Case study: Tracking Footprints Survey**

Between 2006-2009 SOS Children's Villages International conducted a large scale study with 1137 former SOS Children's Villages from 41 national associations in 20 participating countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. The aim of the study was to better understand respondents' experiences when living at the SOS Children's Villages, the major events in their lives, their current situation, and what kind of values were important to them. The study involved a mix of interviews and survey questionnaires. The findings of the study had an impact on the organisation's strategic direction and programming. (SOS Children's Villages International (2010) *Tracking Footprints*, Global Report)

## Systems for ongoing feedback



Most participatory methodologies are designed to gather information on certain issues or topics at a time decided by those running the process. Children's concerns and ideas may not fit neatly within these processes and they may have valuable input to make at different times. Systems for on-going feedback allow children and young people to express their views on the services that SOS Children's Villages provides on an on-going basis at a time and on an issue decided by themselves. At their most simple they can be a comment or complaint box, located in a central, accessible place, but where comments can be made anonymously and confidentially. Other approaches can include comment or graffiti walls, or internet based message boards or forums, where children and young people are encouraged to make points, complaints or recommendations about services or issues that concern them.

Child or peer counsellors can be useful approach where certain children, selected by their peers, are selected for training in peer counselling. Other children know that there is a trusted and sensitive person they can share their concerns with, who can then pass these concerns to those in authority, whilst maintaining confidentiality of the child raising the issue or idea if they so prefer. Older children can play this role for younger children, and can actively seek out conversations with children who appear to be upset or depressed to support them and know their issues. It can help for the peer counsellors to have regular 'surgery times' when they will be in a known place and available for confidential discussions on any topic.

#### **Ideal for**

- Complaints about services
- Identifying child protection issues and ensuring child welfare
- New ideas from children about what they would like to do, or services they would like

Web based forums can support participation and consultation with a large or small number of children and young people based in different locations

#### **Other considerations**

- There should be systems set up to provide regular feedback to comments. This can be as simple as a weekly management or staff response on a board next to the comment box or graffiti board.
- Ground rules need to be clear about the kind of comment or remark that can be left on a graffiti or comment board. These should be constructive comments about SOS Children's Villages' services or programmes. In particular personal remarks about others, particularly other children, should be forbidden, as should anything of a racist or sexist nature.
- Peer counsellors need to be clearly orientated about child rights and what they should do if a child reports abuse to them.

### Focus Group Discussions

Focus groups are an excellent tool for collecting qualitative data from small numbers of children or young people. A facilitator usually follows an interview guide to direct a discussion amongst a small group of participants. The purpose is to collect in-depth qualitative information about a group's perceptions, attitudes, and experiences on a defined topic. They can highlight shared or common experiences, identify different views, and act as a trigger for wide ranging debate and generation of ideas.



**Ideal for**

- Obtaining specific qualitative information from a sample of your target group
- Gaining a range of insights on specific issues (feelings, knowledge, perceptions about SOS Children's Villages services etc.)
- To generate data on change, perceptions about services and children's lives as part of an annual review process or for a more in-depth evaluation about a specific SOS Children's Villages intervention or activity.
- Focus groups can be used to add breath to or shed light on the findings of other data that SOS Children's Villages staff is collecting including quantitative data or survey data.

**Other considerations**

Focus groups are good for exploring issues in depth and supporting participants to share opinions. They are relatively flexible and can be used alone or combined with other methods. Discussions should be supported by capturing ideas or quotations on flip chart paper or coloured cards using marker pens.

They do however require good facilitation, or there is a danger that discussions can be dominated by one or two participants. It is important to notice who does not participate and seek out their views. It can also be difficult to generalise about children's views from the results. They are not necessarily the best environment for children to discuss sensitive issues.

The concentration levels and interest of children will vary depending on the children involved, age factors, the group dynamic and environment in which the focus group discussion takes place. The length and structure of the sessions and materials used should take this into account. For children the size of the group should ideally no more than ten and no less than four.

It's important to group children and young people by gender (boys and girls separately) and narrow age groups (e.g. 5-8 yrs.; 9-12 yrs., 13-15 yrs., 16-18 yrs.) in order to ensure that meaningful age appropriate discussion takes place. You need to consider issues of representation e.g. children with disabilities.

**Case study: Focus group discussion – special needs**

Save the Children UK identified disabled Bhutanese children as being one of the most vulnerable groups living in Nepalese refugee camps and requiring special attention. Focus group discussions were held with the children to highlight the particular needs that they faced. Each group consisted of 5-6 children aged 6-14 with physical disabilities and their respective carers. Before discussions took place the children were introduced to each other through a variety of games and puppetry. Pre-determined issues were selected and asked in turn to the children and their carers. These included perceptions on the causes of disability, effects of disabilities, workload of family members, isolation and the need for support. The groups were also asked if they had any issues of concern they wanted to raise. The outcome was a series of policy recommendations for the project.

Source: Giri, Gauri (1995) Focus Group Discussion – Special Needs, SC UK Nepal. In: Children and Participation, Briefing Paper Save the Children(2000), p 23

## Workshops



Workshop usually involves a larger number of people than focus groups coming together to discuss a specific topic or topics. Workshops can also be used to feedback evaluation findings to young children. Workshops can be useful in generating discussions that allow participants to share and explore their opinions. They work well with young people because, while children and young people may often be shy during interviews, they usually enjoy getting involved in discussions and activities with their peers. There are many different types of group processes for collecting data from groups of children and young people. These may combine a variety of participatory methods, and may involve splitting the children into smaller groups for part of the time.

**Ideal for**

- Participatory annual review meetings which look more broadly at key changes, achievements and challenges over a specific period.
- Feedback and dissemination of evaluation and review findings
- Workshops or consultation meetings on a specific topic or issue.

These can be suitable for ages five upwards, but again the length and design of the workshop will need to be age appropriate. Younger children will need a higher ratio of facilitators to participants. In some cases children can be trained to facilitate and run sessions.

**Other considerations**

Children and young people should be invited to contribute to the agenda in advance. You may also want to consider asking children to be part of an organizing team and/or participate in facilitating some of the sessions.

[See also Focus Group Discussions above].



### Case study: Children's Workshop in Abuja, Nigeria

A two day workshop in March 2011, held in Abuja, Nigeria brought together orphans of vulnerable young people receiving services to share their ideas about quality, what their needs are, and what service providers can do better to meet these needs. The participants, totalling 28 young people aged 12 – 17 came from different areas of Nigeria and each arrived with a Minder to watch over their well-being over the two days and to ensure the children's comfort, but in order to ensure the children were uninhibited to share openly and honestly during the workshop, the Minders were asked to remain outside, which all of them agreed to. In total there were two lead facilitators and four co-facilitators; one facilitator sat at each table in order to help the children understand the activities and to translate from English, should the children need it in order to have a solid understanding of the discussion.

After fun introductory activities, activities on the first day included:

- discussing the definition of quality,
- creating a drawing of who the children were, leading to a discussion of who played a key role in their lives and what they needed to grow into a responsible adult
- a discussion of what services they received and what made these to be of quality or not
- their dreams for the future

The second day went on to discuss further the services the children needed and to rank them in order of importance. At the end of the workshop all children were given a certificate of attendance and publically thanked for their input.

From *The Report on Children's Workshop, Abuja, Nigeria, March 18 – 19, 2011*, Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Nigeria

A full report of activities and the workshop can be found at

[http://www.hciproject.org/sites/default/files/Nigeria%20Children's%20Workshop%20Report\\_2011.pdf](http://www.hciproject.org/sites/default/files/Nigeria%20Children's%20Workshop%20Report_2011.pdf)

### Observations: Direct Observation & Children as Observers

Where it is not possible for children to participate in other ways, for example if they are too young, then at times observation may be the most appropriate way of gathering data to observe and record any particular likes/dislikes of a child or group of children or to observe and record how different children react and respond in different situations. Observation of babies and very young children may take place in their home environment, or may focus on their interactions with caregiver, siblings, at play, school etc.

Observation may involve observing play and using other participatory tools such as drawings to support children to express their feeling and thoughts. Observing children's play and engaging young children to engage in imaginary play roles can be insightful. Children can themselves act as observers to identify patterns of how and when facilities are used, whether certain groups are left out of activities etc.



### **Ideal for**

- Observations of babies and very young children in their home, at play and in other situations can provide information about children's preferences, needs and behaviour.
- Data collected through observations supplements data obtained from families, care providers and other professionals (teachers, social workers, and psychologists).
- It can shed light on the wider context and other things which otherwise might not be reported.
- Observation can be a useful way of gathering information on the interaction between child and family members, care provider etc.

### **Other considerations**

- Data collected over time can contribute to building evidence and lessons regarding early intervention support, however formal observation methods to assess child development usually require specialised training for recording data on carefully designed forms and for analysing and interpreting the data.
- There are ethical concerns on whether observations are conducted overtly or covertly.
- Though an observation may aim to be factual and unbiased various interpretations are sometimes made.
- Can be time consuming if applied to a large sample of individual babies, young children.
- When conducting an observation the field worker needs to be particularly alert for any indication that a child is uncomfortable with the process including behaviours that appear to make observation difficult; this should be taken as a tacit refusal of permission to be observed
- Information collected about individual children must be kept confidential, but can be used to illustrate issues or examples of change without revealing names or revealing information about a specific child/family or carer.

### **Example: Consulting 3-4 year children in the UK**

In UK a pilot study was carried out to involve children under five years-old in the decision-making process around changes to an outdoor play space. An approach was used with 28 three and four year olds (and with adults – practitioners and parents) which combined observation and interviewing with participatory methods, including the use of cameras, map making and child-led tours. One of the areas for change highlighted by children's photographs was 'the security fence'. The children's photographs and maps emphasized how the security fence dominated the outdoor space. Close observation revealed another dimension. The gaps in the security fence were wide enough for the children to see through. Any new play space needed to retain these gaps, so the people spotting and dog watching that the children enjoyed could continue.

## **2.8 Asking Questions**

Most participatory processes at some point include the use of questions. What questions we ask, and how we ask them can make an enormous difference to the quality of a participatory process. Good questioning and listening can build an environment in which children and young people feel encouraged to contribute, whilst also supporting them to think more deeply, and create knowledge by building on what they already know. This can be empowering since this new knowledge stays with the child or group of children answering the question. It can lead the group to think in new creative ways and help overcome challenges and obstacles. And it can generate energy and buy-in.

Conversely bad questioning can make children feel nervous, incapable or embarrassed and undermine a shared spirit of investigation. Non-verbal behaviour plays an enormous role in creating a group atmosphere for questioning. In working with a group, it's helpful to pay attention to where people are looking from, whether they respect rather than cut off the person answering, whether they choose to



ignore some questions and focus on others and work to ensure all are included.

It is important that the facilitator or leaders do not monopolise the right to ask questions; children and young people should also be encouraged to ask questions of themselves and each other. However it is important that questioning doesn't become the private reserve of the few - those that are older, more confident in public debate, can think faster etc.

One key distinction in the way questions are asked is the difference between closed and open questions:

- **Closed questions** are specific and can be answered “yes” or “no” or with a brief statement with no further elaboration required. They are useful when you are trying to bring a discussion to a close or to ensure all participants are briefed on a topic. But if used in the middle of a discussion they can stop the conversation bring it prematurely to a close. Closed questions can keep the power of controlling the conversation with the questioner.

- **Open questions** do not invite any particular answer, but open up discussion and are usually the most effective to prompt participation. They ask people to think and reflect, to express opinions and feelings and hand over control of the conversation to the participants.

*'What?'* or *'how?'* questions are usually best to get people thinking. *'Why?'* questions are good for getting information and for analysing external events, but if directed towards the actions or decisions of particular children can make them feel defensive so they need to be used with care. A useful variation is *'Why not?'* Asking questions that involve plural answers like *'what kinds of things can we do to address this problem?'* open up alternatives allow multiple responses and encourage more thought.

However, it is important to note that the ability to ask good questions depends on your ability to **listen**. Good questions come from really listening to what the children and young people are saying. Part of the challenge is really paying attention and really hearing what is being said whilst also paying attention to body language (i.e. what is not being said). Difficulties also arise from the different frames of reference held by the child participant and the adult facilitator. If we do not allow for this it is all too easy to assume a level of understanding which is not real. To open ourselves to another's point of view, we have to be prepared for the possibility of letting our own ideas shift. We need to be prepared to suspend our own opinions and judgment at least until we really understand their point of view.

#### **Box 6: Case study on listening during the consultation process**

During a consultation in West Africa, young people were developing a community resource map and were asked to place happy or sad faces on various locations in the community depending on whether or not they felt that these places were good or bad for young people. There was a lot of emphasis on completing the map, but less emphasis on understanding why young people were placing happy or sad faces on the map.

At the end of the exercise, the map was taken back to the Federation Office as part of the consultation documentation. Staff and Federation members looked at it and discussed their findings. They noted that there was a sad face drawn on the mosque. The facilitators remembered that the children drew the sad face but were not sure why the young people felt that the mosque was not a good place for children. Fortunately, the staff members were able to follow up with the children later and were told that the children are often hit with sticks or yelled at by adults in the mosque and don't consider it a good place to go. Adults found it useful to know whom the young people find 'friendly' and with whom they do not feel comfortable.






It was also helpful to find out which adults in the community would benefit from learning how to relate better with children. This experience taught staff and facilitators that it is important to record what the children say during participatory exercises and to ask questions during the process in order to fully understand what they are trying to express.

Source: O’Kane, C./Dolan, T. (2008) We’ve got something to say!

## 2.9 Example tools and activities

A summary of the tools and activities is described below. More detailed guides for some of the tools can be found in Appendixes 1 and 2. However you do not need to limit yourself to these, there are many more ideas set out in the resource documents cited.

**Table 3: Example Tools and Activities**

Activity	Age ranges	Useful to explore	Summary of the activity
Happy/Sad faces	3-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To get feedback on positive or negative aspects about a child’s environment or a specific activity or service</li> <li>• Children’s happy or sad experiences</li> </ul>	 <p>Print out a sample of faces (see above). In conversation with very young children ask them to pick a face that responds to how they feel about (for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their family/siblings</li> <li>• Their school</li> <li>• Their community</li> </ul> <p>Etc.</p> <p>You can then prompt what makes them happy what makes them sad etc.</p> <p>When working with very young children make sure the children understand the expressions on the cards.</p> <p>It is important that you document the findings – to do this ensure you take a note of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The purpose of the exercise</li> <li>• Number of girls/boys involved in the discussion (and whether there are any children with special needs)</li> <li>• Relevant key quotes and highlights from the discussion.</li> </ul> <p>See also example. Encuesta de Satisfacción - Niños Y Niñas Fortalecimiento Familiar Infantiles SOS Colombia in Appendix 2.</p>



<p><b>Express cards</b></p>	<p>4-8 years</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To support very young children to express their views on a specific topic or SOS Children's Village service</li> </ul>	<p>Express cards can be useful when consulting with younger children. They are a set of cards with short open statements on each card that children can use to express their views. The responses on the cards can be in different forms depending on the age of the child (e.g. words, pictures, symbols or models). If children use pictures or symbols make sure you understand exactly what they mean for recording purposes.</p> <p>Express cards can be useful when consulting with very young children. It can also be useful to use express cards if you have a very mixed age group at a meeting and younger children are interested in expressing their views but cannot write as quickly as older children or adults.</p> <p>A list of short open statements you might find on Express Cards include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I like...</li> <li>• I dislike...</li> <li>• A change I would like to see.. is</li> <li>• It would be great if</li> <li>• I would not like to see</li> <li>• I need</li> <li>• I want</li> <li>• My hope is....</li> </ul> <p>Etc.</p> <p>Express cards could be used during a consultation workshop and collected in a 'comment box'. If this is done it needs to be made clear why their views are being collected and what will happen with the ideas.</p> <p>Adapted from: Madden, S. (2001), Re:action Consultation Toolkit.</p>
<p><b>Good/Bad</b></p>	<p>8-18</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To discuss norms and practices in the community which are harmful to children (e.g. discrimination)</li> </ul>	<p>This is a game that supports children to discuss norms and practices in their community which are harmful to children and also to identify who is responsible for these practices.</p> <p>Source: SOS Children's Villages International – See detailed guide in Appendix 2</p>



<p><b>Mapping my community</b></p>	<p>8-18</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children's experience of their community (family/SOS Children's Village, school, friends and wider community)</li> <li>• To explore risks and protection issues affecting girls and boys in the community</li> </ul>	<p>On large sheets of paper ask children to draw their community– highlighting all the important places in it. Ask the children to mark on the map things they like and places where they feel safe (e.g. a child could put a happy face by the places they like/feel safe). Enable a group discussion on the issues raised.</p> <p>Then ask the children to highlight the places they dislike/or they feel are dangerous/places where accidents happen, or make them feel scared etc. Enable a group discussion on the issues raised.</p> <p>Ask the children to indicate 3 things in their community that they would most like to change (e.g. Each child could place a star by 3 things they would like to change). Enable group discussion on the issues raised. Explore children's ideas about what makes a child friendly community/what makes them feel safe etc.</p> <p>Make sure you note key discussion points and issues raised including any action points or recommendations arising from the discussion. You may want to write these down as points on a flip chart so that children are clear that you have understood the points made. At the end of the session explain how you will use the information and ideas generated. A short record of the group discussion should be written up and any follow up actions or implications communicated to those who took part.</p> <p>Adapted from: O'Kane, C./Dolan, T. (2008) We've got something to say!</p>
<p><b>Body Mapping</b></p>	<p>8-18</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To identify health needs for young people</li> <li>• To assess the impact of drugs, alcohol, stress etc.</li> </ul>	<p>Have a large sheet of paper on the floor (e.g. pieces of flip chart paper stuck together in advance). Ask the group to draw round someone in the group using a marker pen (take care to use washable pens or warn the children not to mark clothes). Then give the group a set of different coloured marker pens and ask them to draw the effects of alcohol on the body, the effects of stress on the body, the effects of drugs on the body. Or You can ask children to draw the main health problems for children their own age. You can then discuss which health facilities/services they use or have access etc.</p> <p>This technique works well with any age group including younger children.</p> <p>Adapted from: Madden, S. (2001) Re:action Consultation Toolkit.</p>



<p><b>Who matters?</b></p>	<p>5-18 years</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explore social networks and the quality of key relationships</li> </ul>	<p>On large sheets of paper ask young people to draw a chart with themselves at the centre and other important people in a circle around them. This can be used as a basis for discussion. For example the facilitator might ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who do you like to be with?</li> <li>• Who makes you feel happy?</li> <li>• Who gives you advice when there's something you need to know?</li> <li>• Who helps you when you're in trouble?</li> <li>• Who do you tell your secrets to?</li> <li>• If you've had an argument, who would help you sort it out? Etc.</li> </ul> <p>Adapted from: Save the Children (2003), So you want to consult with children.</p>
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<p><b>Body Map Before/After and stories of change</b></p>	<p>8-18</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explore changes in children's lives (knowledge, values, skills, relationships)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give children a sheet of paper with the shape of a body outline on it. (If time each child could ask another group member to draw round them).</li> <li>• Each child should think about any changes in them – any differences before and after their involvement in a specific SOS Children's Villages' intervention, project or initiative in terms of their skills, knowledge, attitudes etc.</li> <li>• They should make a note of such changes either through words, images or a combination of both. You might get them to note the Before on the left side of the body and After on the right side of the body. (Allow for positive and negative experiences).</li> <li>• Children and young people are encouraged to think about 'stories of change' that illustrate some of the changes they have recorded on their body map.</li> <li>• Once the children have made their individual body maps divide them into small groups – for example a girls group, a boys group etc. In their groups they share their stories and their body maps.</li> <li>• After this get all the children to sit in a circle and share what they discovered and learnt.</li> <li>• It is important that you note down key changes and issues raised during the discussion. You may wish to take photographs of the body maps to illustrate the stories of change shared. You can use these as case studies to illustrate achievements, lessons and challenges in annual reports and other SOS Children's Villages communications. However if you intend to do this you should ensure that the children give their permission to use the stories/illustrations.</li> </ul> <p>Adapted from: O'Kane C./ Dolan, T (2008), We've got something to say!</p>
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<b>Trees</b>	8-18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring root causes and impact of an issue or problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw a tree – write the issue/problem to be explored in the trunk.</li> <li>• Draw the roots and ask children to identify and list the root causes of the problem.</li> <li>• Draw the branches and leaves – ask children to identify and list the impact of the problem on girls, boys, families and communities.</li> <li>• Discuss the findings and explore how they think the root causes can be addressed</li> <li>• You could build on this tree by giving girls and boys 3 stickers each (e.g. red for girls/blue for boys) and encouraging them to place a sticker by each of the root causes they think are the most significant. The root causes with the most stickers can be discussed further to determine priorities among girls and boys. After the discussion document the results and ensure this information continues to be carried into next steps e.g. annual plans.</li> </ul> <p>Adapted from: O’Kane, C./Dolan, T. (2008), We’ve got something to say!</p>
<b>Fishes and Boulders</b>	8-18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To illustrate significant milestones, successes and challenges over a time period</li> </ul>	<p>This is a diagrammatic way of discussing the history of a programme, project or issue.</p> <p>See detailed Guide in Appendix 1</p>
<b>Reflection Balloons</b>	5-11 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How children have engaged in a specific project or activity, what they have learnt</li> </ul>	<p>This uses simple visual diagrams to support group assessment.</p> <p>See detailed Guide in Appendix 1</p>
<b>‘H’ Assessment</b>	13-18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To assess strengths and weaknesses of services provided by SOS Children’s Villages</li> </ul>	<p>This uses a simple diagram to explore and discuss SOS Children’s Villages services and projects</p> <p>See detailed Guide in Appendix 1</p>
<b>Talking Mats</b>	5-18 ages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explore issues that are important to children</li> </ul>	<p>This is designed for children with communication difficulties and uses pictures or symbols to structure a discussion around a relevant topic.</p> <p>See detailed Guide and example case study from SCF in Appendix 1</p>





<p>Transect Walk</p>	<p>5-11 years</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•To identify issues and changes that are important to children</li></ul>	<p>Children can teach adults a lot about their community by taking them for a walk around it. Children can point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•What is important to them and why</li><li>•What they are afraid of and why</li><li>•What they would like to change</li><li>•What they like and do not like about the community</li><li>•Who in the community are good at helping children? Who are they and what do they do?</li></ul> <p>You could either video or take a photo record of the places that children point out during their walk. These can be referred to in subsequent review processes to see what if anything has changed. Ensure you also capture in writing any key points and issues as you go. At the end of the session you may want to summarise and consolidate what has been learnt. This gives children an opportunity to further refine their thoughts and feelings.</p> <p>Adapted from: Stephenson P. et al (2004), Child participation.</p>
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<p>Exploring inclusion or discrimination</p>	<p>11-16</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To explore concepts e.g. 'inclusion' or 'discrimination', and their experiences of being included or discriminated</li></ul>	<p>Divide children into groups. Give each group a large piece of flip chart paper and coloured pens. Ask each group to draw what their idea of 'inclusion' is and what it involves. No words are allowed in the drawing. When each group has finished they then present their representation to the larger group. This exercise encourages children to think visually and enables everyone to explore and question different meanings behind the term and their own experiences and feelings about the issue. One facilitator commented:</p> <p><i>"When I was first told about this technique I thought, 'That will never work and it's silly', but now I have tried it I use it a lot. It really encourages people to think about the meaning of a concept or issue. It also helps people to identify what the concept or issue is not about which can be very useful"</i></p> <p>Write down the key points from the discussion. Try and reflect/illustrate how different group members experience inclusion or understand inclusion and whether there are any trends that can be observed for example between children of different gender, abilities, age etc.</p> <p>This exercise can also be done with different concepts or issues.</p> <p>Adapted from: Madden, S. (2001) Re:action Consultation Toolkit.</p>
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<p>Photography</p>	<p>8-18 years</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To allow children to express their views and priorities</li> <li>• Can have significant impact when communicating ideas to decision/ policy makers</li> <li>• To stimulate discussion with children and young people with disabilities</li> </ul>	<p>If a camera is available photography can be used to create a storyboard or photodrama to illustrate key impacts of SOS Children's Villages services and other issues that impact on children's lives e.g. drugs, violence.</p> <p>Provide cameras to children and ask them to photograph the things that express their views, key issues and priorities regarding family, work/school, play, their community etc.</p> <p>Ask them to put the pictures together in the form of a story-board, cartoon or PowerPoint. They might want to add captions to the photographs.</p> <p>Or ask children to take pictures of things that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make them happy/give them pride</li> <li>• Make them sad/disappointed</li> <li>• Make them angry/upset</li> </ul> <p>Give children a week to take the pictures. Group activity can involve first children in small groups sharing and talking about their pictures and then share and discuss their findings with the whole group.</p> <p>You may need to train children first in the use of cameras.</p> <p>Ask permission to use any of the story pictures for SOS Children's Villages communication/reporting purposes.</p>
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<p><b>Puppets</b></p>	<p>2– 5 years</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•To consult with very young children on what they like or dislike</li> <li>•To support observations and conversations with very young children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Ask children to sit in a circle. The facilitator introduces the puppet to the children.</li> <li>•The facilitator asks the puppet questions such as:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you like our nursery/school?</li> <li>○ Do you like the food?</li> <li>○ Do you like the games that we play?</li> <li>○ Do you like the books we have in our library etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>•The puppet will respond by shaking its head.</li> <li>•The children are encouraged to get involved and ask the puppet questions and at the same time the facilitator asks the same question back to the child.</li> </ul> <p>Adapted from: NDNA (s/f) Promoting Positive Behaviour.</p> <p><b>Activity suitable for 5+ years</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Introduce a girl and boy child puppets to the children.</li> <li>•Ask the girls and boys to share their views about what things make this girl or boy puppet happy/sad/worried. List the issues raised.</li> <li>•Break the children into small groups and ask them if they can develop a small drama or puppet show to illustrate some of the issues that make them sad. Encourage discussion on the puppet shows/dramas on the issues raised.</li> </ul> <p>Adapted from O’Kane C./ Dolan, T (2008), We’ve got something to say!</p>
<p><b>Drama</b></p>	<p>5-18</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•To explore issues that are important to children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Identify important issues with a group of children. Select the issue that the children want to concentrate on. Ask the children to get into groups and develop a drama based on the issue.</li> <li>•Each group performs their drama regarding the issue and practical solutions they might want to include in the drama. Encourage discussions on the issues raised by the drama.</li> </ul> <p>See detailed Guide in Appendix 1</p>
<p><b>Graffiti Wall in workshop</b></p>	<p>5-18</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•To gather feedback on SOS Children’s Villages’ services and projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•A graffiti wall is a quick way to get feedback and comments on SOS Children’s Villages’ services and projects. An easy method is put up large sheet of paper (e.g. 4 x flip charts stuck together) in a corner of a room where a workshop/consultation or focus group discussion is taking place. Children are free to add comments and/or pictures about specific topics or questions onto the graffiti chart. It helps to have some simple questions.</li> </ul> <p>See Appendix 1 for an example.</p>

