



Save the Children

THE NINE BASIC REQUIREMENTS

For Meaningful and Ethical
Children's Participation



FOREWORD

The expansion of children's rights at the global level is unprecedented. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is an instrument for the protection of human rights with an almost universal level of acceptance within the United Nations, except for a single State that has decided not to incorporate it into its legal system.

This level of recognition is an indicator of a new sensitivity that the international community embodied 31 years ago with the first legal instrument on human rights for children.

But the challenges children face are still too many for our societies to recognize them as subjects of rights. Within these challenges, participation is one of the central issues.

Listening to children is still being neglected by adults and institutions. During these times of pandemic, we have witnessed how the voices of children have been practically absent in decision-making.

Children were seldom consulted about their feelings, fears, expectations and proposals, which is an indicator of how much progress still remains to be done.

Forms and formats, usually developed by adult logic and perspective, must be re-thought so that girls and boys can be active protagonists of our societies. Language that is adapted to their age and level of development and child-friendly formats are central for them to be able to get involved in social processes.

For us to achieve this, we must learn and free ourselves from preconceptions that currently block the presence and participation of children in our societies.

These 9 steps for children's participation is a good text which guides our actions, the processes aimed at children and helps us to create environments that promote children's participation.

I invite you to read it and to put it into practice in our daily lives, as we also need to learn. I am convinced, and boys and girls are showing us, that with their participation, our societies will benefit from their new, unprecedented and free of preconceptions views.

Luis Pedernera

Chair of the Committee
on the Rights of the Child



Save the Children

INTRODUCTION

Children's participation is an "...ongoing process, which includes information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes."¹



Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – the child's right to be heard – is the fundamental tenet for children's participation (ChP). As one of the four guiding principles of the CRC, Article 12 is both connected *to* and indivisible *from* all other rights enshrined in the Convention. There are additional articles that specifically intersect with Article 12 and directly help to define the meaningful participation of children. These civil rights have been broadly conceptualized under the term "participation" and include the right to freedom of expression, thought, conscience, religion, association, peaceful assembly, protection of privacy and access to information (Articles 13 – 17 of the CRC). Furthermore, Article 23 emphasizes the importance of creating conditions that facilitate the active participation of children with disabilities in the community, and Article 29 encourages education that prepares the child for responsible life in a free society promoting peace, tolerance and equality.

Save the Children believes children's participation is not solely an activity or an event, but rather a core principle that informs our organisational behaviour. Children's participation is a crosscutting theme that permeates all aspects of the organisation and is central in our aim of strengthening the position of children and inspiring breakthroughs in the way the world treats children. It is a set of civil rights to be fulfilled, a principle to be applied and a means to fulfil other rights. Crucially, to promote and support children's participation is to meet human rights obligations and to respect children and their rights.

Between 2000-2006, Save the Children supported children's participation during two important processes: the UN Special Session on Children and the UN Study on Violence against Children. At community, national, regional and international levels, children participated and shared their experiences and recommendations. It was through these processes that we saw a child address the UN General Assembly for the first time in history as well as the establishment of national, regional and international mechanisms to end violence against children (*with children*) that still exist today. It was also during these processes that Save the Children invested time and resources into evaluating our efforts to support children's participation. Working together with children, key lessons were learned and in 2005 Save the Children developed the seven *Practice Standards in Children's Participation*. In 2009, building on our seven standards, the General Comment on Article 12 of the UNCRC (CRC/C/GC/12) included nine *basic requirements for the implementation of the right of the child to be heard*.

The Nine Basic Requirements for Meaningful and Ethical Children's Participation serve to ensure quality child participation in 'all processes in which a child or children are heard and participate'.² They help us improve quality across our global programmes, advocacy and campaigns. Further, they help ensure children's voices are heard and respected and they hold us to account as the world's leading independent organisation for children.

¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.12, The Right of the Child to be Heard, CRC/C/GC/12, July 2009, *para* 3.

² *Ibid*, *para* 134.

1

TRANSPARENT AND INFORMATIVE



Brief description

The first requirement means that children clearly understand their right to express their views and that they will be heard and valued. Children know why they are involved in a given project/programme/activity, what their participation will help to achieve and the types of decisions and plans that their participation will influence. Children have access to useful information and resources to help them understand the project, programme, organisation(s), key terminology and the processes/activities with which they will be involved. Specifically, children understand what they are being asked to do, what will happen with the information they share and who will have access to the information. Children understand they can freely ask questions, seek clarification, raise concerns and/or express ideas and recommendations.

In practice this means:

- ✓ Opportunities and limitations are clearly defined with children
- ✓ Children's roles and responsibilities are clearly defined
- ✓ Children understand how they/their community/their projects/their peers might benefit from the activity
- ✓ Child-friendly information is provided in appropriate and accessible languages/formats
- ✓ Child-friendly information is provided in a timely manner
- ✓ Children clearly understand the relevant policies and procedures to ensure their meaningful participation
- ✓ Children's views will influence, shape and inform decisions/plans in a timely manner
- ✓ Facilitators are honest and open with children
- ✓ Facilitators do not steer or manipulate children
- ✓ Children are free to ask questions and know how to get more information, if they wish
- ✓ Facilitators adapt and respond to unexpected changes/challenges and explore options together with children
- ✓ Problem solving is undertaken together with children



2

VOLUNTARY



Brief description

Children have received sufficient information to understand the choices available to them, what they mean and how to engage – or not, as the case may be – with the process. Children clearly understand the implications of their choices and are free to make decisions to participate or not to participate accordingly. Staff have the competencies necessary to encourage children, particularly those who are marginalised, to participate and to ensure that children are never forced to participate. Children are aware that they can opt out of the participatory process at any time and know how to go about doing so. A culture that respects children’s choice must be fostered throughout the participatory process.

In practice this means:

- ✓ Children have *not* been pressured (directly or indirectly) into participating
- ✓ Facilitators have addressed adult/child power imbalances to ensure a truly voluntary process
- ✓ Children have provided informed consent/assent and they are aware of how their contributions will be shared
- ✓ Children understand the principles of child participation (e.g. these Nine Basic Requirements)
- ✓ Children know they *can* withdraw at any time and they know *how* to withdraw from a process
- ✓ Children are provided with sufficient and appropriate information and time to make informed choices
- ✓ Children understand what their choices mean
- ✓ Children have adequate amount of knowledge about the purpose and nature of the project/programme/activity and their role in it to help them make choices on a continuous basis
- ✓ Facilitators have a clear policy on participation, including consent and confidentiality
- ✓ Facilitators are aware that permission given under pressure is not consent
- ✓ Children, facilitators and adult caretakers have information about challenges/risks and mitigation procedures related to online platforms



3

RESPECTFUL



Brief description

Children's views are treated with respect by adults and by other children. Staff have created an organisational culture that enables children to initiate ideas themselves and express their views without feeling they must first seek permission from an adult. Children's views are heard and valued. Children are able to express their views without fear of discrimination; respect ensures a culture that does not undermine children or their views and is considerate of their backgrounds, experiences, concerns, vulnerabilities and existing commitments. Likewise, respect ensures that children will not be humiliated or exposed to harm. Respect creates a welcoming environment and fosters a caring and considerate attitude towards children.

In practice this means:

- ✓ Children are able to freely express their views
- ✓ Children can confidently share their opinions, ideas and insights
- ✓ Effective facilitation ensures children are not humiliated, frightened to speak out or discriminated against
- ✓ Effective facilitation ensures that the ways of working are culture and gender sensitive
- ✓ Children's other commitments/rights (e.g., school/work/play) are taken into account
- ✓ Facilitators are polite and considerate
- ✓ Facilitators have effective listening skills (including in person and online interactions)
- ✓ Facilitators do not dominate the dialogue or impose their values and opinions on children
- ✓ Key adults (e.g., parents, teachers) are supportive
- ✓ Facilitators have a solid understanding of the socio-economic, environmental and cultural context of the children they are working with and define their support accordingly
- ✓ Documents, data and products developed by the children are appropriately stored
- ✓ Children are never used or manipulated by adults to advance the latter's agenda
- ✓ Children are supported to communicate respectfully and inclusively with their peers/other children
- ✓ Children understand the importance of respecting the privacy and personal limits of other children



4



RELEVANT

Brief description

Children are able to contribute their expertise and draw upon their experiences, knowledge and capabilities to express their views on issues of relevance and importance to their lives. Relevant information is provided and accessible to children. Children understand why the issue is of relevance to them and why their views and expertise are being sought. Children fully appreciate how their contribution to the discussion/research/consultation/meeting will inform plans to deal with the particular issues. Children's expectations are managed effectively and they understand both the relevance *and* the limitations of their participation. Children are given the opportunity to identify issues that they themselves believe to be relevant and important.

In practice this means:

- ✓ Topics/opportunities are of real relevance to the children involved
- ✓ Children are encouraged to identify/highlight the issues that they themselves regard as relevant
- ✓ Children clearly understand why they are participating in a given discussion/research/consultation/process
- ✓ Children understand how their input will add value to the process
- ✓ Effective facilitation enables all children to engage with the process and activities
- ✓ Cultural factors are carefully considered during the planning process
- ✓ Children are involved in ways that suit their age, ability, capacity and circumstances
- ✓ Language considerations are taken into account and actions to resolve communication barriers are adopted
- ✓ Children are clear on what they can and cannot influence; their expectations are effectively managed
- ✓ Any unexpected changes to a program/process are communicated to children with sensitivity
- ✓ Children have access to good, child friendly information so they can effectively define how they want to participate and the issues that matter most to them
- ✓ Methods of engagement and options related to information sharing/remote participation are explored together with children and are revisited/adapted as needed



5

CHILD FRIENDLY



Brief description

Children feel welcomed. Staff are approachable and responsive to the children. Working methods do not discriminate children but take into account their evolving capacities, age, diversity and capabilities. Children are free to ask questions and raise concerns. The methods used promote children's confidence in speaking out, sharing and expressing their views. Sufficient time, information and materials are provided and communicated effectively to the children to help facilitate their meaningful participation. Children feel that their contributions will be valued and used for the intended purpose(s).

In practice this means:

- ✓ The methods/approaches are child friendly
- ✓ Meeting places and times for meeting are child friendly and accessible by children
- ✓ Relevant and child friendly information is provided to children and their parent/caregiver in advance
- ✓ Consent is received prior to the event, meeting or activity taking place
- ✓ Children develop or co-develop child friendly information and communication materials and methods
- ✓ Facilitators have the competencies to make children feel relaxed and build their self-esteem and confidence
- ✓ Facilitators are effective and familiar with a diverse range of child-friendly and inclusive methods
- ✓ Facilitators are adaptive and flexible in their approach
- ✓ Sufficient time is allotted for the proposed activities
- ✓ All possible efforts are taken to make spaces/platforms accessible to all children, including the most marginalised
- ✓ Children receive easy to follow instructions for access/using remote/online platforms
- ✓ Children help define the setting/platform that will work best for them
- ✓ Children and facilitators continuously evaluate how settings/platforms are working and make adaptations as required



6

INCLUSIVE



Brief description

Recognizing that children do not all belong to one homogenous group, participation promotes inclusiveness and treats each child as an individual. No child is discriminated against during the participation process. The participation process takes into consideration existing patterns of discrimination, power imbalances and cultural sensitivities. The process ensures that the methods, approaches, languages and arrangements do not exclude the most marginalised children. The process does not discriminate against children based on their capabilities; it does not humiliate children on any grounds. The participation process makes sure each child knows they are valued, respected and important.

In practice this means:

- ✓ Children are not discriminated against by reason of age, gender, race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status
- ✓ Children of all genders, ages, backgrounds and abilities are engaged
- ✓ A safe space is provided for different groups of children to explore issues relevant to them (e.g., girls working separately from boys, if needed)
- ✓ The process ensures that children most impacted by discrimination and inequality have equal access and that their voices are heard and valued
- ✓ Participation is flexible enough to respond to the needs, expectations and situations of individual children
- ✓ Participation challenges and responds to existing patterns of discrimination
- ✓ Methods and facilitation techniques do not discriminate against children, are accessible and promote equal access
- ✓ Direct efforts are made to meet in environments and times accessible to children, especially the most marginalised, taking into account specific requirements (e.g., disability friendly transportation and venues)
- ✓ Children are included in problem solving and exploring creative options to ensure inclusive participation
- ✓ Partnerships are explored/formed with persons with disabilities and their representative groups to define a good participation strategy
- ✓ Child friendly information is accessible and includes audio, large print, pictures and sign language
- ✓ All efforts to consult with children should reach the most marginalised, including children with disabilities, minority groups, girls, etc.



7

SUPPORTED BY TRAINING



Brief description

All facilitators working with children have been trained and equipped to work effectively with children. Specifically, facilitators working with children possess excellent communication skills, facilitation skills and analytical skills. Children have access to training on child rights, advocating, communicating with the media, holding decision makers to account, engaging in meetings, facilitation and designing and delivering training.

In practice this means:

- ✓ All facilitators interacting with children possess the confidence, skills and support to facilitate meaningful children's participation processes
- ✓ All facilitators interacting with children understand these nine basic requirements and understand why participation is important
- ✓ Learning and development plans are in place to support the continuous improvement of quality child participation
- ✓ A diverse range of formal and informal opportunities exist to facilitate learning, knowledge and technical skills development
- ✓ Facilitators have dedicated time and access to key documents and relevant resources
- ✓ Children have access to appropriate and relevant training
- ✓ Children co-facilitate training (when appropriate/possible)
- ✓ Children have access to relevant information, resources and personnel to advance their knowledge and expertise
- ✓ Facilitators know what manipulation of children looks like and are taking preventive measures to guard against it
- ✓ Relations between facilitators/support persons are positive and they treat each other with respect and honesty
- ✓ Facilitators can effectively navigate remote/online platforms to ensure their interactions with children are respectful, friendly and inclusive
- ✓ Learning and evaluation plans are in place to support the continuous quality improvement in child participation spaces/platforms
- ✓ Facilitators are able to identify and mitigate risks related to participation (including remote/online platforms) together with children



8



SAFE AND SENSITIVE TO RISK

Brief description

Children know that all considerations in relation to their safety and protection from harm have been taken into account. Staff have a responsibility towards the children with whom they work. Staff must take every precaution to minimise the risk to children of abuse and exploitation or any other negative consequence of children's participation. It is necessary to ensure that potential risks have been identified in advance. Clear 'risk management' plans are in place to ensure the safe participation of children. Relevant organisational policies and procedures are understood by staff and implemented effectively. Participation expectations are managed and communicated effectively between staff and the communities, parents/caregivers and children. These expectations clearly define the benefits, limits and potential risks associated with participation.

In practice this means:

- ✓ Children are aware of their rights and know how to seek help and support when needed
- ✓ The principles of 'do no harm' and 'best interests of the child' have been applied
- ✓ Conflict sensitivity and risk assessments have been undertaken
- ✓ Children involved in participatory processes are aware of their right to be safe from abuse and know where to go for help if needed
- ✓ Child safeguarding plans are in place to minimise risks, prevent abuse and remove barriers that some children face when obtaining help
- ✓ Referrals for psychosocial support (or other urgent support) for children have been established if required
- ✓ Children are involved in identifying risks and creating solutions; children feel safe when they participate
- ✓ Facilitators recognise their legal and ethical responsibilities in line with codes of conduct, child safeguarding policies and procedures
- ✓ A procedure is set up to allow children involved in participatory activities to give feedback in confidence
- ✓ Consent is obtained for the use of all information provided by children and information identified as confidential is safeguarded at all times
- ✓ No photographs, videos or digital images of a child can be taken or published without the child and parent/caregiver's explicit consent for a specific use
- ✓ Responsibilities relating to liability, safety, travel and medical insurance are clearly delegated and effectively planned for
- ✓ Ground rules are established with children on safe and respectful ways to interact (including online interactions and peer-to-peer interactions)
- ✓ There is agreement on how personal information, videos and photos will (or will not) be shared to protect everyone's safety and privacy
- ✓ Children and parents/caregivers have information related to online safety



9

ACCOUNTABLE



Brief description

Children receive feedback on how their contribution has advised, informed or influenced developments to date. Participation is not a singular event and accountability processes are integrated throughout our efforts to ensure children's views and concerns: challenge actions, influence recommendations and ensure continuous quality improvement. Children have access to key stakeholders and have the opportunity to ask questions and to provide feedback on their participation. Lessons learned are systematically documented and applied to ensure quality improvement. Appropriate feedback is provided to children in a timely and accessible manner. Children have adequate time, support and information to share any feedback with their peers, particularly when nominated by their peers and/or communities to represent their views.

In practice this means:

- ✓ Rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes with children have been developed
- ✓ Communication and follow up mechanisms with children have been defined
- ✓ Children see the results of their participation
- ✓ Programming/policies/decisions have been influenced by children and learning processes
- ✓ Children's participation is supported within accountability mechanisms
- ✓ All children have a range of opportunities and processes to deliver their feedback (not only those children who take part in consultations and events)
- ✓ Children receive appropriate, honest and transparent responses to their inquiries, concerns and questions
- ✓ Child friendly versions of any final report/evaluation are developed – children explore how the information can be used to support their own actions/follow up processes
- ✓ Feedback mechanisms are incorporated into any process (including online/remote platforms)
- ✓ Any interaction with children respects their right to access information and to take action; we are never only extracting information from children



QUICK REFERENCE PLANNING & EVALUATION CHART

9 Basic Requirements – Ensuring Quality

Requirement	Has the Requirement been met?
<p>1) Participation is transparent and informative</p> <p><i>Demonstrated efforts to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide child-friendly information in appropriate and accessible languages/formats • define roles and responsibilities, opportunities and limitations 	<p>Notes and reflections:</p>
<p>2) Participation is voluntary</p> <p><i>Demonstrated efforts to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure children have time to make an informed decision about their involvement • ensure children can withdraw at any time • address adult/child power imbalances to ensure a truly voluntary process 	<p>Notes and reflections:</p>
<p>3) Participation is respectful</p> <p><i>Demonstrated efforts to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take into account children’s other commitments/rights (e.g. school/ work/play) • ensure ways of working are culture and gender sensitive • key adults (parents, teachers, etc.) are supportive and informed 	<p>Notes and reflections:</p>
<p>4) Participation is relevant</p> <p><i>Demonstrated efforts to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure the issues are of real relevance to the children • support child defined initiatives and topics • ensure adults have not pressured children 	<p>Notes and reflections:</p>



9 Basic Requirements – Ensuring Quality

Requirement	Has the Requirement been met?
<p>5) Participation is child-friendly</p> <p><i>Demonstrated efforts to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• use child friendly methods and approaches• ensure meeting places are child friendly and accessible	<p>Notes and reflections:</p>
<p>6) Participation is inclusive</p> <p><i>Demonstrated efforts to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• engage children of different genders, ages, backgrounds and abilities• provide safe space for different groups of children to explore issues relevant to them (e.g. girls working separately from boys, if needed)• ensure the process is non-discriminatory and inclusive• ensure those most impacted by discrimination and inequality have equal access• ensure methods and tools are accessible and promote equal access	<p>Notes and reflections:</p>
<p>7) Participation is supported by training</p> <p><i>Demonstrated efforts to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ensure staff and partners have the confidence and skills to facilitate ChP processes	<p>Notes and reflections:</p>
<p>8) Participation is safe and sensitive to risk</p> <p><i>Demonstrated efforts to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• undertake conflict sensitivity and risk assessments• develop a child safeguarding plan• ensure all children know where to go for help if needed	<p>Notes and reflections:</p>



9 Basic Requirements – Ensuring Quality

Requirement	Has the Requirement been met?
<p>9) Participation is accountable</p> <p><i>Demonstrated efforts to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• develop a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy• engage children in M&E processes• define communication and follow up mechanisms with children• ensure children see the results of their participation	<p>Notes and reflections:</p>

Notes, Recommendations and Conclusions:



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REFERENCES

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