

**PROMOTING  
CHILDREN'S  
MEANINGFUL AND ETHICAL  
PARTICIPATION**

**in the UN Global Study on Violence against Children**

A short guide for members of the NGO Advisory Panel and others  
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## The UN Global Study on Violence against Children

Following the growing recognition that violence is an all-too common experience in the daily lives of many boys and girls around the world, the UN General Assembly requested the Secretary General in 2002 to conduct an in-depth global study on this issue. The goals of this Study are:

- To raise international visibility of all forms of violence against children
- To better understand the causes of violence and its impact on children, adults and societies
- To assess existing mechanisms to address violence against children
- To identify an international action plan to effectively end these abuses

Save the Children believes that children can be meaningfully involved in all aspects of the Study as, for example:

- Active participants in the planning, analysis and dissemination stages of the Study
- Part of research teams investigating particular aspects of the problem
- Equal participants in national, sub-regional and regional events or consultations connected to the Study that may bring together key actors such as researchers, practitioners, representatives from governments, UN agencies, national and international organisations and children and young people themselves
- Advisors to the UN Study Secretariat, interested agencies and other bodies such as the NGO Advisory Panel to the Study.

## Why is children's participation so important to the Study?

The participation of children is crucial to the quality and credibility of the UN Global Study on Violence Against Children. Children's involvement must be at the very heart of the Study if it is to better understand the extent and nature of violence against children and to help design more effective responses that provide children with improved protection against such violence.

### Children's Participation Matters!

- **It is a key right of children in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).** The adoption of the UNCRC has been fundamental to the recognition and realisation of children's rights, including the right to protection from violence. Participation has been identified as one of the fundamental principles essential to achieving the rights set out in the Convention. \*
- **When children are asked about what matters to them they will often highlight issues that adults do not necessarily prioritise or see as a major concern.** Listening to children so often uncovers the priority they give to violence and their desire that something be done about it.
- **“Participation is a means [for children] to advocate for their own cause and transform their situations.”\*\*.** Children themselves are already part of the response to the violence they experience and should be valued for the contribution they bring.
- **Children are the key stakeholders in the UN Study and need to be actively involved in it - not just the objects of discussion by well-meaning adults.**

\* For more information see page 7

\*\* Reddy, N. and Ratna, K. *A Journey in Children's Participation. The Concerned for Working Children*, 2002

Children's involvement will bring numerous benefits to the Study - including new insights, improved understanding and more appropriate recommendations. It does this by bringing us closer to their daily lives and the violence that so often blights it. Over the longer term, the research community, policy makers and organisations challenging violence against children will all find their work enhanced. Children's participation will also create the opportunity for children themselves to become active partners in helping to implement the recommendations of the Study - building on their growing involvement in challenging violence against them.

*“As adult researchers and respondents learn to work together with children, they may become more aware of children’s strengths and competencies, and their skills become apparent in clear and tangible ways. These experiences help to create a more favourable environment for dialogue and understanding on a wide range of issues. ... When children’s participation in research takes place in an environment of mutual respect, it can lead to a change of attitudes about the roles and capabilities of children. This change can lead to greater creativity, new ideas and deeper understanding not only to the issues under investigation, but to important issues in their community”.*  
From Mann, G. *Toolkit on Involving Children in Secondary Research*. Save the Children (Forthcoming).

## **Violence is a key issue for children**

Consulting with and listening to children often uncovers the fact that violence is a key issue in their lives and their urgent desire that something be done about it. In recent years, as our ability to listen to children has improved, violence has been identified over and over again, in every region of the world, as one of children's priority concerns. Involving children in issues of relevance, concern or interest to them helps to better equip society to protect children, to support their resilience and to enable them to better protect themselves against abuse, violations and injustice.

*“There are victims of bullying that nobody knows about because they are so tough they can hide their emotions. They act like they’re happy, but they cry inside”.* From Young people about bullying and exclusion by Marit Sanner in *Toolkit for Involving Children in Primary Research*. Save the Children (Forthcoming).

## **The value and benefits of children’s involvement**

### ***It will provide new perspectives on how children experience violence.***

Children’s participation in the Study will enable them to give a voice to the violence they have experienced, their own efforts to challenge it and the impact of adult efforts to help them. It will ensure that the views and concerns of those most directly affected are heard.

### ***It will help to challenge one of the key barriers that children face in countering violence against them.***

Living under the reality or threat of violence has significant consequences for a child’s everyday life. But most boys and girls are not used to talking about violence they receive from adults and peers. Girls, disabled children and other groups facing discrimination may find it even more difficult to break out of their silence. Younger children may find it difficult even to recognise violence as they may be socialised not to question the behaviour of adults towards them and others. Some types of violence may be taboo to discuss or carry heavy stigmas. Children’s involvement in the Study will help explore these issues and make participation a key tool in the struggle to eradicate violence against children.

### ***It will ensure that the measures we design to counter violence against children are more appropriate, relevant and sustainable – and therefore more likely to succeed.***

Children’s participation in the Study will help provide a better understanding of the extent and characteristics of violence affecting them and will aid the development of programmes that more effectively respond to children’s needs and which they can trust.

***It can help to heal the past.***

Boys and girls affected by violence have indicated that they welcome participation in the research and interventions designed to meet their needs. For many of them, the process of involvement, which must be undertaken in a supportive and understanding environment, can help children to explore past experiences and regain confidence for the future. At its best, participation can be an important tool out of victimisation, passivity and silence.

***It can enhance child protection.***

Participation provides children with the possibility to protect themselves and challenge abuses of their rights, either directly or through informing a responsible adult. Children are often most vulnerable in situations where they have the least opportunity to voice their views. Having the opportunity to participate helps children to share their experiences and gain more control of their lives, lessens the risk of exploitation and lessens the fear that can prevail in living a situation where trauma is silenced and strict rules of behaviour are observed. Experience shows that when children have had easy and safe access to adults prepared to take their views seriously, hidden or ignored instances of violence have surfaced. Children who have access to information about complaints procedures or reporting mechanisms are more likely to seek help to protect themselves.

***It enhances self-confidence and self esteem.***

Children benefit from participation by acquiring and expanding their skills, by meeting other children and understanding that others share the same or similar experiences – that they are not alone. Participation gives children a sense of purpose and competence in their own lives and a belief that they can make a positive impact on their own lives and influence and change the lives of others – their peers, family and community. Children who have been able to participate in school panels, village committees or youth clubs have used these opportunities to proactively seek ways to voice, prevent and stop violence against themselves, their peer group and the wider community.

**Child Participation should be meaningful**

In the past, children's participation has all too often been neglected or tokenistic. Save the Children supports meaningful, good quality children's participation in the Study that gives children a genuine opportunity to express their views and to be involved in the research and interventions designed as a response to the Study's findings.

Save the Children believes that meaningful children's participation is characterised by approaches that are:

- **Ethical** – with a commitment to transparency, honesty and accountability that ensures respect for and guarantees the dignity of each child
- **Safe** - in which children's protection rights are properly safeguarded
- **Non-discriminatory** - ensuring that all children have an equal opportunity to be involved
- **'Child-friendly'** - enabling children to contribute to the best of their abilities

**What has to be done to ensure meaningful child participation?**

Establishing a safe and meaningful environment for the participation of children in the Study, and one which minimises the risk to children from their involvement, will not just happen by accident. It requires certain pre-conditions that help to create the right environment. These may include:

1. ***Ensuring an ethical approach*** that, among others, counters the inevitable imbalances in power and status between adults and children. This means ensuring that children are able to freely express their views and opinions, that they are listened to seriously and that their views and opinions are taken into account. All those involved, especially the children, need to be clear about the purpose of their participation – what it involves and what impact it may have. Children should be provided with, and have access to, relevant information regarding their involvement. Children should have time to consider their involvement and be able to give their personal informed consent to it. The adults involved should be sensitised to working with children and be responsive to the context in which these children live.
2. ***Ensuring that children's participation is relevant and voluntary.*** This means that children have the choice as to whether to participate or not and that they should be able to do so on their own terms and for lengths of time chosen by them. Children should be involved in ways, at levels and at a pace appropriate to their capacities and interests. Ways of working should be child-centred and the methods of involvement should incorporate and build on supportive local structures and knowledge.
3. ***Ensuring a 'child friendly' enabling environment.*** This means that child-centred ways of working should build the self esteem and self confidence of children. Sufficient time and resources should be made available for quality participation. Child friendly spaces need to be identified or created where children feel comfortable. Accessible information should be shared with children in good time, in child friendly formats and in languages that they understand.
4. ***Ensuring that participation promotes the safety and protection of children*** and that everything is done to minimise the risk to children of abuse and exploitation or other negative consequences of their participation. This means ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of children and respecting their boundaries, especially that children have the right to decide what they choose to disclose of their lives. It means ensuring that participation in the Study does not increase the child's exposure to violence and ensuring that child friendly psychosocial support is available if children's participation risks them reliving the trauma of violence or experiencing strong emotions.
5. ***Ensuring that the selection of child participants or representatives is based on principles of democracy and non-discrimination.*** This means that in cases where the process of involvement requires representation from among a wider group of children, that children themselves are involved in setting the criteria for selection and representation and that, wherever possible, children should be able to select from among their peers those who will represent them in any of the Study's initiatives.
6. ***Ensuring follow up and evaluation.*** This means committing from the beginning of the process to provide feedback, and where appropriate, follow up and to evaluate together with the children the quality and impact of their participation. Child friendly versions of reports should be made available in local languages so that children can access the outcomes of the Study and their participation in it.

## Participation and Children's Rights

Participation – the right of a child to express views in all matters affecting him or her – is an essential characteristic of the child as an active subject of rights. For this reason, it is seen as a general principle of ***fundamental importance*** to implementation of all aspects of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Boys and girls are seen as active holders of rights and individuals whose views and opinions should be given serious consideration.

Children's participation rights are set out in Articles 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These cover:

- The right to express views freely in all matters affecting him or her (with those views given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity)
- The right to freedom of expression
- The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- The right to freedom of association
- The right to information

Article 5 of the Convention is also important because of its reference to parent's role in providing direction and guidance while at the same time respecting boy's and girl's evolving capacity to make their own decisions and form their own views.

Recognition of children's right to participation is also important in Articles 9, 16 and 29 of the Convention which cover such key areas as children's rights to make their views known about any decision to separate them from their families.

Save the Children fights for children's rights and sees children's participation as both a key means of helping to fulfil all children's rights *and* as a set of rights to be fulfilled as such.

## How Save the Children is contributing to the UN Global Study on Violence against Children

Save the Children is committed to ensuring the ethical and meaningful participation of children in the UN Global Study on Violence against Children. As part of its contribution to this process Save the Children has produced this short guide specifically for members of the NGO Advisory Panel to the Study.

The following publications are also being produced by Save the Children and are intended to inspire and be of practical help to those involving children in research and practical events relating to the Study. These publications are intended to inform researchers, NGOs and other interested individuals about what children's participation in the Study might involve and some of the relevant issues for consideration.

- A series of Toolkits on children's participation
  - *Toolkit on Involving Children in Primary Research*. (Forthcoming – English only).
  - *Toolkit on Involving Children in Secondary Research*. (Forthcoming – English only).

- \*\* *So you want to dialogue or consult with children? A Toolkit of good practice.* (Forthcoming – English only).
- \*\* *Promoting Children's Meaningful and Ethical Participation in the UN Global Study on Violence against Children.* (Forthcoming – different languages). This pamphlet will be designed for anyone who has contact with the Study and wishes to know more about child participation.
- \*\* *Save the Children's position on Children's Participation.* (Forthcoming – different languages).
- \*\* *Practice Standards in Child Participation.* (Forthcoming – different languages).

The starred items (\*\*) can be obtained by contacting Save the Children's Participation Coordinator at Suite 300, 4141 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario, M2P 2A8, Canada. Tel: + 1 416 221 5501 ext. 229. Fax : + 1 416 221 8214. Email: [sstevenson@savethechildren.ca](mailto:sstevenson@savethechildren.ca)

The remaining items can be obtained from Save the Children Sweden at Torsgatan 4, S-10788, Stockholm, Sweden Tel +46 8 698 90 00 Fax+46 8 698 90 10. All documents will be posted as available in a pdf file on <http://www.rb.se>.