

CONTENTS

With a foreword by Kofi A. Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations

Chapters **1** **2** **3** **4**

**CHILDREN MUST
BE HEARD**

Page 1



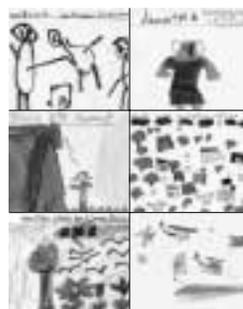
**WHY
PARTICIPATION,
WHY NOW?**

Page 9



**ENGAGING
LIFE**

Page 19



**ACTIVE
LEARNING**

Page 27



Panels	1. What children see, they show	6
	2. Child participation: Myth and reality	16
	3. A child's 'right' to participate	24
	4. Girls win big!	32
	5. Building nations.....	40
	6. We asked them to speak.....	50
	7. Children and the media	58
	8. We are the world's children	66
Text figures	1. Children's participation	3
	2. The world is becoming more democratic	10
	3. Decline in voter turnout in G7 countries.....	12
References	70

5

THE SHARPEST EDGE

Page 35



6

LISTENING TO CHILDREN

Page 43



7

SPACES FOR PARTICIPATION

Page 53



8

AT THE UN SPECIAL SESSION ON CHILDREN

Page 61



9

MOVING FORWARD

Page 69



Maps

.....	73
1 What the children think	74
2 What the children want: Health, education, healthy environment	76
3 What the children want: Protection	78
General notes	80

Tables

.....	81
1 Basic indicators.....	84
2 Nutrition.....	88
3 Health.....	92
4 Education.....	96
5 Demographic indicators	100
6 Economic indicators	104
7 Women	108
8 HIV/AIDS and malaria	112
9 The rate of progress	116

Index

.....	120
-------	-----

Glossary

.....	123
-------	-----

“They brought us
their ideas, hopes
and dreams.”

Kofi A. Annan

FOREWORD



The focus of this year's *The State of the World's Children* – child participation – is intended to remind adults of their obligation to elicit and consider the views of children and young people when decisions are being made that affect their lives.

The report's theme is true to the spirit of the historic General Assembly Special Session on Children, held in May 2002. For the first time, the General Assembly met to discuss exclusively children's issues; and for the first time, large numbers of children were included as official members of delegations, representing governments and non-governmental organizations.

The children's presence transformed the atmosphere of the United Nations. Into our usually measured and diplomatic discussions, they introduced their passions, questions, fears, challenges, enthusiasm and optimism. They brought us their ideas, hopes and dreams. They gave life to the values of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. And they contributed something only they could know: the experience of being young in the 21st century – in a time when HIV/AIDS continues to grow at a devastating rate; in a time when unprecedented wealth coexists with extreme poverty; in a time when the rights of children, while almost universally recognized, are abused systematically and daily throughout the world.

In the outcome document of the Special Session, Governments declared their commitment to changing the world for and **with** children – to build a world fit for children in the 21st century. We will achieve this only if Governments fulfil their promise that the voices of children and young people will be heard loud and clear; if we ensure the full participation of children in the work to build a better future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Annan'.

Kofi A. Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations



1

CHILDREN MUST BE HEARD

“Adults miss the point. When is a child considered skilful enough to contribute and participate actively? If you do not give them the opportunity to participate, they will not acquire the skills. Give us the chance early and see how we fly.”

17-year-old Khairul Azri, a Malaysian delegate to the UN Special Session on Children

When 10-year-old Mingyu Liao from China addressed the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002, she was one of three representatives from the International Children’s Conference of the United Nations Environment Programme that had drawn more than 400 children from over 80 countries three months earlier. “We all had plenty to say,” the young girl reported, “but the number one thing that all delegates were concerned about is that most leaders don’t listen.”

Mingyu Liao shared the podium with four other children, Justin Friesen from Canada, Analiz Vergara from Ecuador and Julius Ndlovena and Tiyiselani Manganyi both from the host country, South Africa, as they delivered their challenge.

“We are not asking too much! You said this Summit is about taking action! We need more than your applause and comments of ‘well done’ or ‘good speech’. We need ACTION.”

The young activists were not to be denied. With their vision for the future, and their passion, they inspired delegates as others had done at the UN Special Session on Children in May 2002. “Think about the children,” they pleaded. “What kind of world do you want for them?”

In the end, the children accomplished something that had not been possible through the usual process of adult negotiations around the Summit’s final declaration. World leaders acknowledged that they had a responsibility not only to each other but **to children** – as

“In immense space, what is in the eyes of these two little boys? How can we understand what they want to express? Maybe it is their aspiration about having a better future.” Nguyen Chau Thuy Trang

© Nguyen Chau Thuy Trang/Viet Nam/Street Vision/PhotoVoice

they pledged to free the world from poverty, environmental degradation and patterns of unsustainable development.¹

In rural villages in southern India, the NGO Myrada organized community children's groups around two issues of social justice: bonded labour, where children are forced into work and to endure frequently harmful working conditions for long periods in order to pay off their parent's debts, and child marriages, where girls as young as 11 years old are forced into marriage and marital roles harmful to their best interests.

Several children's clubs in different communities worked together in respectful dialogue with parents, other adults in the community and local authorities with two objectives: to convince some local landowners and factory owners to free children from servitude, and to convince some parents of girls due to be wedded to rescind their decision to marry off their young daughters. They succeeded at both.

In addition, the Myrada project created a 'community of support' around educational issues, with community leaders and local authorities, parents and elders, young people and children working together to monitor student absenteeism and drop-outs by approaching children and the parents of children who are not in school.

Within school parliaments, children took on tasks in and around school and the community. They elected an 'opposition party' whose responsibility was to monitor the plans, commitments, promises and actions of those students already in office. Through the practice of leadership, children learned that they are accountable and responsible to those who

elected them, and that assuming an elected position requires commitment and fulfilment of promises and responsibilities.²

These are but two of many examples from different contexts and different cultures that demonstrate that changes can be effected that may not be accomplished otherwise when children and young people are provided with the opportunity to contribute.

Competencies for life

Each generation is faced with new challenges – listening for and to the views of children is one of ours. This year, *The State of the World's Children* focuses on the responsibility of adults to seek out the perspectives and opinions of children and to take them seriously; and on the responsibility of adults to help children and adolescents develop their competencies for authentic and meaningful participation in the world.

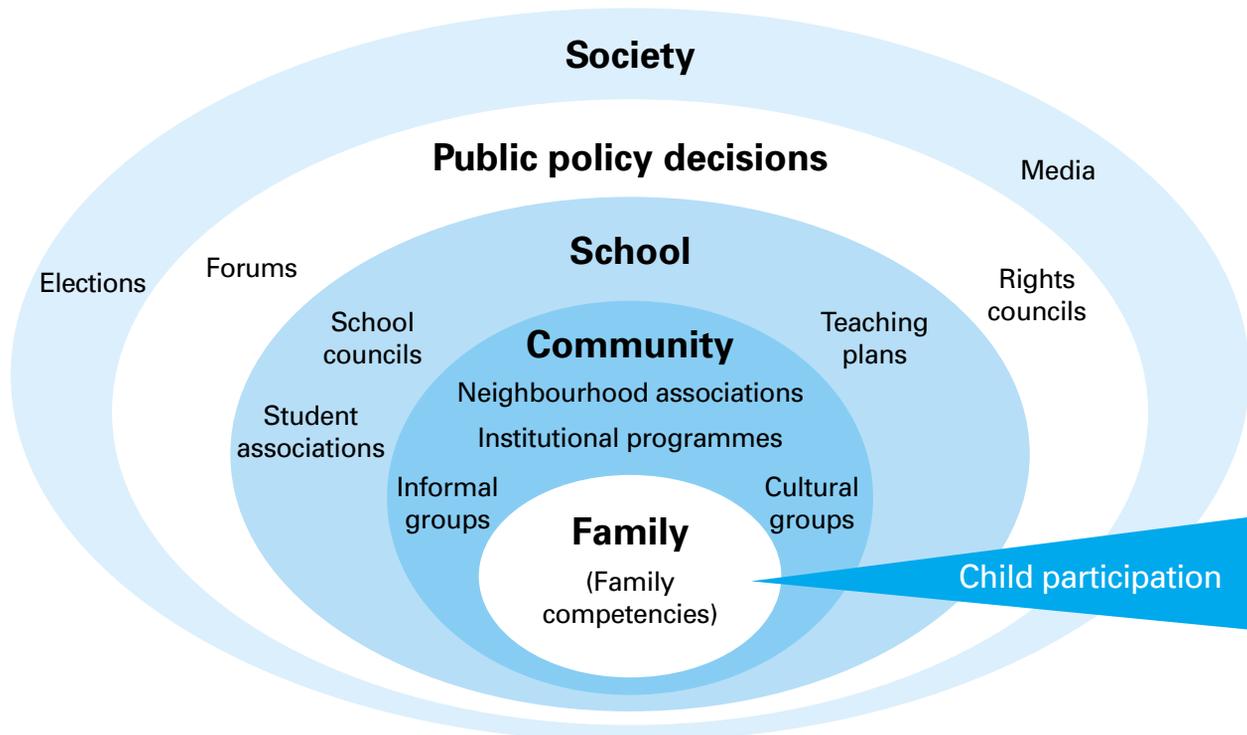
In order to do this, adults must develop new competencies of their own. We must learn how to effectively elicit the views of children and young people and to recognize their multiple voices, the various ways children and young people express themselves, and how to interpret their messages – both verbal and non-verbal. What's more, we must ensure that there is opportunity, time and a safe place for the opinions of children and young people to be heard and given due weight. And we must develop our own capabilities to respond appropriately to the messages and opinions of children and young people.

UNICEF's goals with this report are to:

- Draw public attention to the importance, reason, value and feasibility of young

FIGURE 1 CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

As children grow and develop, their opportunities for participation expand from private to public spaces, from local to global influence.



Adapted from R. Nimi's powerpoint presentation at UNICEF's Global Lifeskills Workshop in Salvador (Bahia), Brazil, June 2002.

people's active participation in family, school, community and national life;

- Encourage States, civil society organizations and the private sector to promote children's authentic involvement in decisions that affect their lives;
- Present examples of how the lives of children, families and communities have been changed when children have opportunities to contribute on matters that affect them; and
- Spark action that includes children and young people to meet the goals of 'A World

Fit for Children' and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As the work on the MDGs moves ahead, improving the lives of children and young people will necessarily be at the heart of every effort; the participation of children and young people will be at the centre of every success.

Participation defined

Participation is a subject with a broad definition and multiple interpretations (*see Panel 2, 'Child participation: Myth and reality', page 16*). In truth, children have always participated in life: in the home, in school, in work, in communities, in wars. Sometimes voluntarily and heroically,

sometimes forcibly and exploitatively. Every culture has a child hero in its historical pantheon and fairy tales that tell of children who have made a difference in their worlds.

What has happened is that childhood as a social construct has evolved with changing societies and changing values, and children as a group are gradually coming into their own as people with rights and social actors. But because marginalization is still a fact of life for the vast majority of the world's children, structured efforts to ensure their participation and protect them from exploitation have become essential.

Participation is frequently defined as “the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured.”³

Acknowledged as a multifaceted phenomenon, participation may include a wide range of activities that differ in form and style when children are at different ages: seeking information, expressing the desire to learn even at a very young age, forming views, expressing ideas; taking part in activities and processes; being informed and consulted in decision-making; initiating ideas, processes, proposals and projects; analysing situations and making choices; respecting others and being treated with dignity.⁴

The goal for children and young people is not simply to increase their participation but to optimize their opportunities for meaningful participation. It is important to note, however, that no matter how attractive an idea child

participation might seem, it is not a ‘free good’ as is most commonly assumed, nor does it necessarily bring more rationality to any project. It carries both direct and opportunity costs.

Nonetheless, the skills of participation must be learned and practised in light of the medium- and long-term costs to society of **not** facilitating participation: a world of young adults who do not know how to express themselves, negotiate differences, engage in constructive dialogue or assume responsibility for self, family, community and society.

Most importantly, however, child participation is a responsibility and an obligation of all those whose actions are guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Participation, in the context of the Convention, entails the act of encouraging and enabling children to make their views known on the issues that affect them.

Put into practice, participation involves adults listening to children – to all their multiple and varied ways of communicating, ensuring their freedom to express themselves and taking their views into account when coming to decisions that affect them.

The principle that children should be consulted about what affects them often meets with resistance from those who see it as undermining adult authority within the family and society. But listening to the opinions of children does not mean simply endorsing their views. Rather, engaging them in dialogue and exchange allows them to learn constructive ways of influencing the world around them. The social give and take of participation encourages children to assume increasing responsibilities as active, tolerant and democratic citizens in formation.

Authentic participation

Caution is in order as child participation can take various forms of involvement, engagement and commitment and not all child participation is active, social, purposeful, meaningful or constructive. Too often, the participation of children, even when designed by well-meaning adults, amounts to non-participation if children are manipulated, used as decoration or as tokens (see 'the ladder of participation').⁵ Too easily, child participation can drift into being 'adult-centric', can be imposed on unwilling children, or be designed in ways inappropriate for a child's age and capacities. In its worst manifestations, child participation can be repressive, exploitative or abusive.

In contrast, authentic child participation must start from children and young people themselves, on their own terms, within their own realities and in pursuit of their own visions, dreams, hopes and concerns. Children need information, support and favourable conditions in order to participate appropriately

and in a way that enhances their dignity and self-esteem.

Given the proper space, authentic participation is about valuing people – children – within a context of others and in relationship to others and the world.

Whether a child effectively participates in the world depends on several conditions including the child's evolving capabilities, the openness of parents and other adults to dialogue and to learn from children, and safe spaces in the family, community and society that allow such dialogue. It also depends on the given sociocultural, economic and political context.

Most of all, authentic and meaningful participation requires a radical shift in adult thinking and behaviour – from an exclusionary to an inclusionary approach to children and their capabilities – from a world defined solely by adults to one in which children contribute to building the kind of world they want to live in.

"If you think children can't make a difference, you are very wrong. Who else can describe all the world's harm if not children? Children should be heard, and their ideas and opinions should be listened to. Maybe then the leaders of the world would think about all the harm that they are doing to the world and maybe just try to help all the children in the world."

16-year-old Urska Korosec, Slovenia

Voices of Youth website

24 March 2002

PANEL
1

Most of the photographs and drawings in this issue of *The State of the World's Children* were created by children and are included as part of an ongoing commitment to learn about the lives of children by listening to their 'voices' – in whatever voice they are most comfortable using.

WHAT CHILDREN SEE, THEY SHOW

Not only do children see the world differently than adults do, their abilities to share their observations differ with age. Where words and phrases might come relatively easily for adults or older children (who, after all, have had years of practice), cameras or crayons are often the most expressive media for younger children. As explained by 17-year-old Nguyen Chau Thuy Trang from Viet Nam, "There are some things we cannot say with words, some emotions are better expressed through pictures."¹

In Rwanda, for example, where nearly 1 million people were murdered during the 1994 genocide, the 13 children at right (from top left) Frederick, Gasore, Bakunzi, Dusingizimana, Uwamahoro, Imanizabayo, Ingabire, Elizabeth, Twagira, Jacqueline, Umuhoza, Gadi and Musa, learn the art of chronicling their daily lives in a series of workshops that are conducted as part of 'Through the Eyes of Children'/The Rwanda Project. Photos like the one on the cover, at right, and on page 68, are all part of their growing portfolio as they tell us about the country they see.

Paintings and dreams

Drawing provides younger children the opportunity to 'speak', and in programmes throughout the world children are asked to tell what the world looks like to them. At the UN Special Session on Children, the voices of nearly 34,000 children from more than 125 countries were heard through their paintings. Prominently displayed just inside the doorways of the visitors' entrance at the UN Secretariat, the 'Amazed World' exhibit is a project sponsored by the Government of the Republic of Korea, UNICEF,

the Korea Foundation and the Korean Committee for UNICEF, which encouraged children to express their dreams and views through painting (see drawings, page 18).

Photos and reality

Through the process of learning photography, young people can develop and broaden their confidence and self-esteem as they acquire vocational skills and a new perspective on their lives. "When I take photographs I





hope to have happiness...when I pass through the city I have hope that maybe one day my country will look like this," says 15-year-old Onesmus, a refugee living in London.²

In various projects around the world, the voices of children and young people are being heard through their photos. More than 500 children and young people from 45 countries, for example, captured images of their lives on camera as part of 'Imagine – your photos will open my eyes', a joint youth photography project of the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and Philipp Abresch, a journalist in Berlin. Transcending language barriers, 'Imagine' builds bridges between children and adolescents and between generations and cultures. 'Imagine' also creates opportunities for children to communicate about the photographs and the issues they represent via worldwide Internet chat rooms, a catalogue, postcards and online exhibitions (see photos, pages 17, 26, 41, 42, 52).

Similarly, PhotoVoice, based in London, gives voice to marginalized groups within society, such as refugee children and children living on the streets. The organization raises awareness of their lives while helping the children generate an income through their newfound skills (see photo, Chapter 1). In Mound Bayou, a predominantly African-American town, and in the surrounding areas of the Mississippi Delta in the United States, photography is part of the Kemetic Institute's mission to help prepare children to become productive citizens. It does so by creating an environment that challenges, guides and motivates young

people to explore their talents (see photos, pages 25, 54). And in 'Right to Know', a joint initiative of the UN, UNICEF and NGOs designed to enable adolescents make informed decisions and take positive action for a healthy life, teenagers take pictures to communicate what is important in their lives to their peers and adults. The photos will be used in a global communications strategy to provide information about HIV/AIDS to adolescents in 13 pilot countries (see photos, pages 20, 51).

Carry on

Palestinian children have a unique opportunity to express themselves creatively and share their work with their peers around the world through Save the Children UK's 'Eye to Eye' project (see photo, page 8). The children's photos are shared online. Inspired by the photographs, 14-year-old Kim and 15-year-old Daventry from the United Kingdom wrote in an online message board, "We would like to say how touched we felt by looking at pictures of people our own age in totally different situations to us...but you still are able to be happy and positive and optimistic about your way of life. You have made us understand how lucky we really are. Keep busy by playing sport... FOOTBALL...WE LOVE FOOTBALL! Carry on smiling."

¹ *On the Record for Children*, 10 May 2002, see photo p. 1.

² From the PhotoVoice Exhibition, 'Transparency: Living without borders', London, 2002.



2

WHY PARTICIPATION, WHY NOW?

In a world in which so many adults are denied the opportunity to participate fully in society – women, for example – isn't encouraging participation for children a step too far? At a time when 150 million children in developing countries are still malnourished, when there are still 120 million primary-school-age children out of school, when 6,000 young people become infected with HIV each day, when children are suffering in war or working in hazardous conditions, why is it so vital to listen to the voices and opinions of children?

Because promoting meaningful and quality participation of children and adolescents is essential to ensuring their growth and development. A child whose active engagement with the world has been encouraged from the outset will be a child with the competencies to develop through early childhood, respond to educational opportunities and move into adolescence with confidence, assertiveness and the capacities to contribute to democratic dialogue and practices within the home, school, community and country.

"My name is Heba. I want to be a doctor ... God willing."

From photographs by young Palestinians showing parts of life in refugee camps in Lebanon and in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Courtesy of Save the Children UK, April 2001

Because children have proved that when they are involved, they can make a difference in the world around them. They have ideas, experience and insights that enrich adult understanding and make a positive contribution to adult actions.

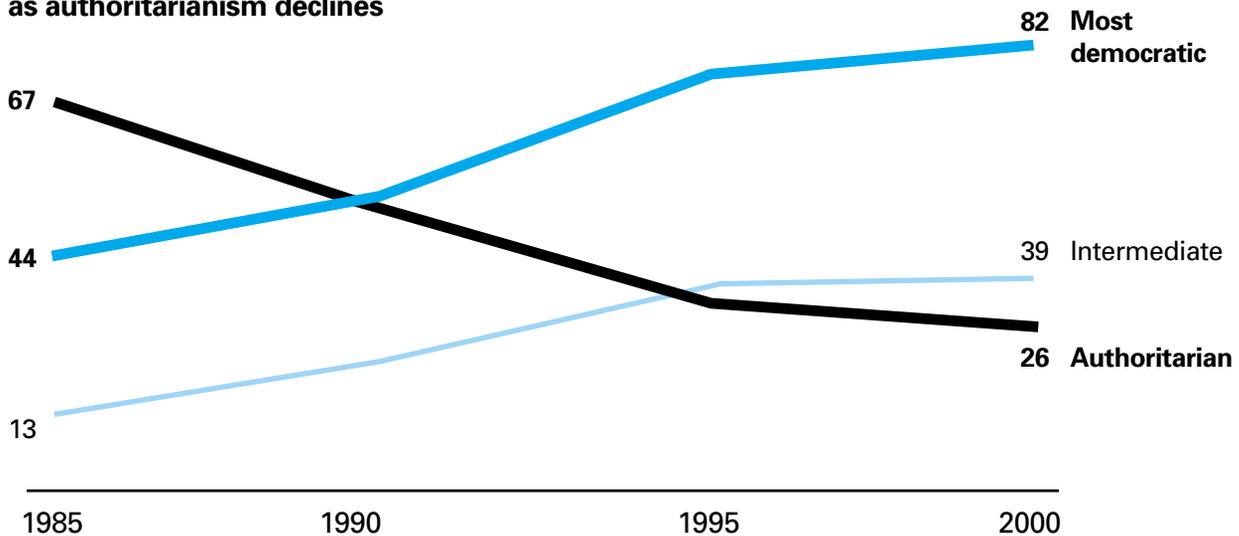
Because when, at the close of the Special Session on Children in May 2002, the United Nations General Assembly pledged to build "a world fit for children," world leaders declared their commitment to change the world not only **for** children, but **with** their participation.⁶

Because building democracy is an issue of great importance to international peace and development.⁷ The values of democracy, such as respect for the rights and dignity of all people, for their diversity and their right to participate in the decisions that affect them, are first and best learned in childhood. Authentic, meaningful participation prepares children for their stake in the future. With all the understanding it brings to the children involved, participation is a keystone for

FIGURE 2 THE WORLD IS BECOMING MORE DEMOCRATIC

Number of countries

**Democratic regimes on the rise
as authoritarianism declines**



Source: Polity IV 2002 as cited in UNDP's *Human Development Report 2002*.

cohesive societies, which, in turn, are the keystone for peace in the world.

Because we have no choice but to pay attention now. The drive to participate is innate in every human being, ready to be developed in every newborn baby, ready to be influenced in every one of the 2 billion children in the world today.

When the drive is neither respected nor nurtured, when children are excluded or ignored by adults, their potential to contribute to their communities is compromised. Such children are likely to act as they have been treated – i.e., as social outcasts – with their energies and creativity directed into subcultures and away from creating a cohesive society.

It is not **if** children participate, but **how** they participate, that is a critical issue now, when so

many millions of children are hungry, diseased or exploited. It is the quality of their interactions and the interactions of all children with their social environment that is ours to improve now.

A quiet revolution

Over the last two decades, adults, parents, teachers, leaders, decision makers, authorities, sectors of civil society and governments at all levels were called upon to assume their shared responsibility for the rights of children to survival, development, protection and participation. And much has been learned over the years: that work with families, parents, communities and local authorities can create the conditions and context for development; that it is those people affected by policies who should be involved in their design, implementation and evaluation; and that there are human costs

to discrimination and exclusion. Millions of dollars in development aid and thousands of projects worldwide have shown the need to listen to and learn from the voices and realities of people.

Until recently, these lessons have not been applied to working with children and young people. Adults and organizations have often failed to see children and young people as resources, subjects with rights and people with dignity who have the right to be heard and taken into account in decisions that affect them.

At the same time, another quiet and respectful revolution has been under way. Children and young people have shown their willingness, energy, insights and contributions in making the world more fit. Across diverse countries, cultural and religious traditions, political contexts, castes and classes, children who were given the space and opportunity to participate in appropriate ways, more often than not, acted responsibly and effectively.

Democracy begins with children

Faced with the spectre and reality of terrorism, with extreme and degrading levels of poverty throughout the world and a widespread sense of disenfranchisement, world leaders have acknowledged the need to 'deepen democracy' – to foster democracy that is more inclusive and responsive.⁸ This need and a commitment to do something about the democratic condition around the world were evident when the Member States of the United Nations declared in the Millennium Declaration that they would "... spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

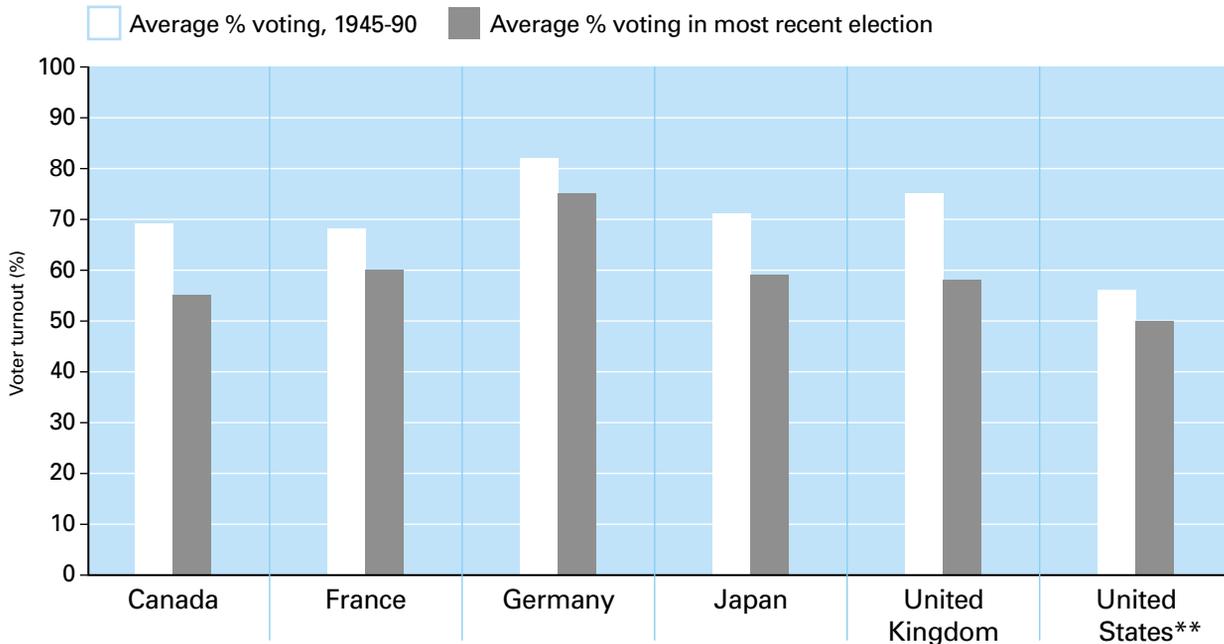
By 2015 United Nations Member States have pledged to:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION IN 'A WORLD FIT FOR CHILDREN'

1. Promoting healthy lives
2. Providing quality education
3. Protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence
4. Combating HIV/AIDS.

FIGURE 3 DECLINE IN VOTER TURNOUT IN G7 COUNTRIES*



*Excluding Italy where voting is compulsory.
 **Presidential elections; turnout in congressional elections is even lower.

Source: Compiled from election statistics assembled by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development.”⁹

As part of their development efforts, the UN Member States pledged to meet eight goals by the year 2015, six of which are directly related to children (see *‘Millennium Development Goals’*, page 11). These eight goals, in turn, are closely linked to the major commitments made at the Special Session on Children in 2002, i.e., that all governments would work to promote and protect the rights of every child; and that, through national actions and international cooperation, they would promote healthy lives, provide quality education, protect children against abuse, exploitation and violence, and combat HIV/AIDS (see *‘A World Fit for Children’*, page 11).

What’s evident is that if children’s rights and well-being are not addressed by governments, national agencies and their various international partners, development goals will never be met. And if neither the Millennium Development Goals nor the commitments made at the Special Session on Children are held to, poverty will surely persist and democracy will surely wither.

There are resources to meet the challenges of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the promises and goals embodied in the Millennium Declaration and ‘A World Fit for Children’ in the voices, insights, experiences, capacities and energy of children and young people themselves. This does not mean the adults, governments and civil society of the

world can abandon their responsibilities or pass the burden on to children. But it does mean a new partnership between adults and children and young people, seeking their opinions and taking them into account – in the family, in the community, in the school, in our organizations and in society.

The needs of democracy

Today, a far greater number of the world's countries are at least nominally democratic than was the case 20 years ago, and a majority of the world's people now have a vote that will contribute to the formation or influence of their national government. And currently 140 of the world's countries hold multi-party elections, more than at any time in history.¹⁰ But, the health of these democracies is a concern across both industrialized and developing countries.

First, young people's disenchantment with the democratic process causes perhaps the greatest concern of all. In some regions of the world, fewer than half of the children polled saw voting as an effective way to improve their country and as many as one third reported that they distrust their government (*see Panel 6, 'We asked them to speak', page 50*).

In this situation, the opinions of young people of the world seem remarkably similar to those of adults: the Gallup International Millennium Survey of 57,000 people in 60 countries showed that only 1 in 10 believed that their government responded to the people's will.¹¹ Even industrialized countries relatively secure in their perception of themselves as mature democracies are afflicted by the increasing disenchantment of voters with politicians and the political system as a whole. The percentage of

If children's rights and well-being are not addressed.... And if the MDGs are not met, poverty will surely persist and democracy surely wither.

people of voting age who actually cast their ballot has been steadily declining during the 1990s in most Western countries (*see Figure 3, page 12*).

And the disenchantment of people in developing countries with domestic politics and with the international political process causes even greater concern. "Increasingly, the leading global powers may recognize that a widespread sense of exclusion and powerlessness in developing countries can threaten economic growth and security in industrial countries as well as developing."¹²

The hope for democracy

Developing democracy is not simply a matter of holding multi-party elections. Promoting democratic citizenship and understanding, "... requires a deeper process of political development to embed democratic values and culture in all parts of society – a process never formally completed."¹³ It is a process that begins in early childhood and means "... expanding capabilities such as education, to enable people to play a more effective role in [democratic] politics, and fostering the development of civil-society groups and other informal institutions."¹⁴ Thus, the place to start to build democracy is with children – from what they learn in the process of their growth and development.

The exercise of agency and responsible citizenship is not something that is suddenly given at

18 years of age. Children, like adults, gain their self-esteem through positive and active engagement with the world. A sense of respect and responsibility for self and others is a value that is lived from the early moments of life and experienced constantly in interaction with the world.

The hope for democracy lies in the children who have been prepared to succeed in school throughout their early childhood and whose opinions and perspectives are valued in their families, school community and in society, who have learned about the diversity of human experience and the value of discussion, and who have had multiple opportunities to acquire and develop their competencies. Such children enhance civil society both in the present, as children, and in the future, as adults.

Democracy is something children learn as they develop from infancy through adolescence. When children, who are far more capable than is generally recognized, are provided the opportunities throughout their childhoods to develop the skills and competencies of participation, they also learn what they need to be effective members of a democratic society. A child whose active engagement with the world has been encouraged from the outset will be a child and citizen of the world who is more likely to value his or her own opinion and beliefs, and the opinions and beliefs of others.

Where we see instances of authentic child participation in the family, school, community and

society, we hear children and young people tell us that they are more confident in themselves, more aware of their community and its problems, more committed to serving and working with others and more optimistic about the future and their role in it.

We also hear parents tell us that their children are more responsible in the house, that they get up earlier, are better students, are more communicative and respectful, and more concerned about the world.

Teachers tell us that they are impressed by the way students are more attentive and serious about their studies and more eager to help other students in tutoring and improving their education.

Through participation and engagement at early ages in issues that concern them – far from promoting anarchy or disrespect for authority, or undermining parental authority – we see a generation of young people who are more respectful and concerned about their rights and the rights of others.

We see a generation much better prepared and capable of addressing the problems, inequities and injustices that they have inherited. We see children and young people ready to advance the democratic principles that world leaders have embraced.

“States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

“You can see a man repairing a bicycle...on the street, nearby my house,” Yu Pei, 10, of China says of his photograph. “The photograph is showing a very common possibility for work.”

PANEL 2

CHILD PARTICIPATION: MYTH AND REALITY

Myth: Child participation means choosing one child to represent children’s perspectives and opinions in an adult forum.

Reality: Children are not a homogeneous group, and no one child can be expected to represent the interests of their peers of different ages, races, ethnicities and gender. Children need forums of their own in which they can build skills, identify their priorities, communicate in their own way and learn from their peers. In this way, children are better able to make their own choices as to who should represent their interests and in which ways they would like their viewpoints presented.

Myth: Child participation involves adults handing over all their power to children who are not ready to handle it.

Reality: Participation does **not** mean that adults simply surrender all decision-making power to children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is clear that children should be given more responsibility – according to their “evolving capacities” as they develop. In many cases adults still make the final decision, based on the “best interests” of the child – but with the CRC in mind, it should be a decision informed by the views of the child. As children grow older, parents are to allow them more responsibility in making decisions that affect them – even those that may be controversial, such as custody matters following a divorce.

Myth: Children should be children, and not be forced to take on responsibilities that should be given to adults.

Reality: Children should certainly be allowed to be children, and to receive all the protection necessary to safeguard their healthy development. And no children should be forced to take on responsibilities for which they are not ready. But children’s healthy development also depends upon being allowed to engage with the world, making more independent decisions and assuming more responsibility as they become more capable. Children who encounter barriers to their participation may become frustrated or even apathetic; 18-year-olds without the experience of participation will be poorly equipped to deal with the responsibilities of democratic citizenship.

Myth: Child participation is merely a sham. A few children, usually from an elite group, are selected to speak to powerful adults who then proceed to ignore what the children have said while claiming credit for ‘listening’ to kids.

Reality: Children’s participation, in many instances, has proven to be very effective. Rather than setting up an ineffectual system, it is up to all of us to devise meaningful forms of children’s participation that benefit them and, in turn, society as a whole.



China: "Imagine – your photos will open my eyes" /GTZ/2002

Myth: Child participation actually only involves adolescents, who are on the verge of adulthood anyway.

Reality: The public, political face of children's participation is more likely to be that of an adolescent than a 6-year-old, but it is essential to consult children of all ages about the issues that affect them. This means participation within schools and families, when decisions about matters there are being discussed. At every age children are capable of more than they are routinely given credit for – and will usually rise to the challenges set before them if adults support their efforts.

Myth: No country in the world consults children on all the issues that affect them and no country is likely to do so soon.

Reality: That's partly true. However, all countries that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child have committed themselves to ensuring participation rights for children, e.g., the rights to freely express their views on matters that affect them and to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, association and peaceful assembly. And almost every country can now show significant advances in setting systems and policies in place to allow children to exercise these rights.

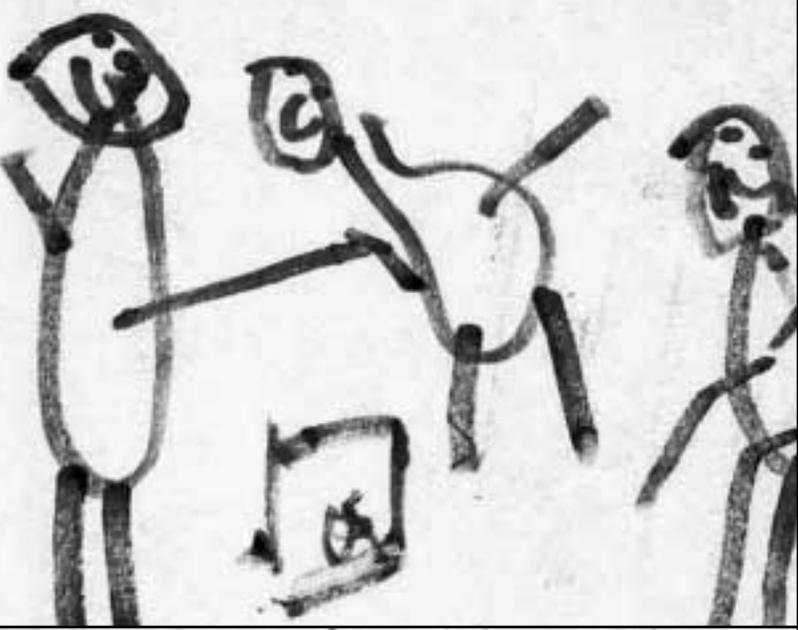
Myth: Children may be consulted as a matter of form but their views never change anything.

Reality: Where children's views are sensitively solicited and sincerely understood, they often change a great deal: they may reveal things that adults would never have grasped independently, they can profoundly change policies or programmes and in some cases protect children from future harm. The consultation of even very young children can produce remarkable results. The problem is that such careful consultation of children remains rare.

Myth: Children's refusal to participate negates their rights.

Reality: Actually, resistance itself can be an important part of participation. Whether in the give and take of the home, in the refusal to accept punishment at school, or in one's attitude towards civic engagement in the community, resistance can signal a child's or adolescent's opinion about an issue or feeling about the terms of their involvement. Adults should recognize resistance as a form of communication and respond to it through understanding, dialogue and negotiation, rather than by trying to prevent it through force or persuasion. In no situation should children be forced to participate.

Name VICTOR | age 4 | country ICELAND



Janou age 6 Netherlands
U.S.A.
Thailand



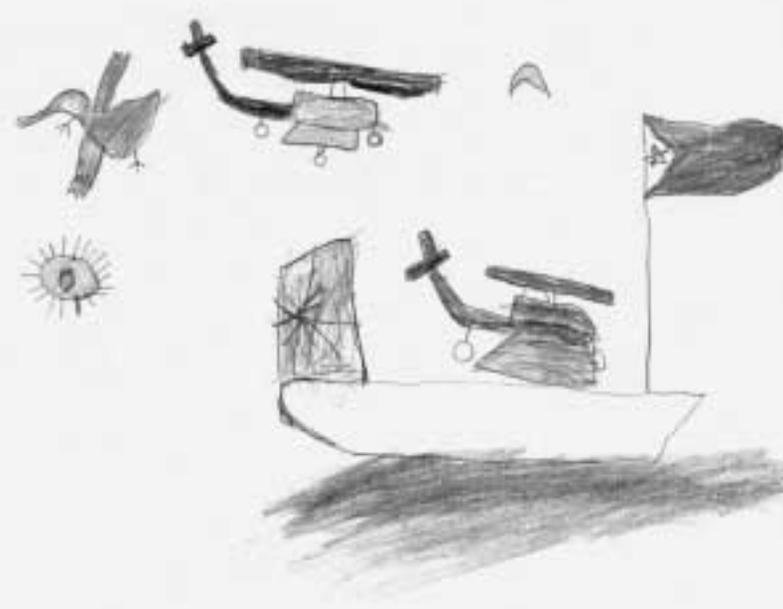
Shaha 5 1/3 Kuwait



59070 3005 edad Buñós MEXICO



Name ZAIN HAQUE | age 6 | country PAKISTA



3

ENGAGING LIFE

Participation not only looks different at different ages but is different. Encouraging child participation entails listening not just to the oldest, brightest and most articulate children, but to children of all ages and capacities. Children participate in life from the first and their competency to express their needs and frustrations, their dreams and aspirations, changes with age, growing more complex throughout childhood and into adulthood. Although the participation of the very youngest child differs dramatically from that of the young adult, there is a continuum of evolving capacities that can be traced from an infant's first movements to an adolescent's political actions.

Every child's development is unique. Their environment, including their social class and economic conditions, cultural norms as well as local or family traditions and expectations, influences how children grow and learn. A child's competency reflects the opportunities for participation – or the lack of them – that

they have had in earlier stages of life. In both a negative and positive sense, each phase of childhood builds on the one before.

The best possible start

Babies communicate through non-verbal movements and facial expressions. Not only can they make their wishes known, but they can also 'talk' to their caregivers by imitating their actions. In the last 20 years, researchers have reconsidered the once-dominant belief that babies in the earliest months of life are incapable of imitating: in controlled laboratory conditions newborn babies only a few hours old have reproduced a wide range of gestures.¹⁵ Each gesture is itself a cue to parents and other caregivers who, in responding, reinforce and broaden the child's repertoire.

In increasing numbers, parents are recognizing that interaction with their baby is a two-way street. A baby's smile is an instant cue eliciting

Drawings by children aged 4 to 8 featured in the 'Amazed World' exhibition by Ik-Joong Kang, except bottom right corner, which is by Julio da Silva, age 6, featured in 'Tuir Labarik Sira Nia Haree' or 'Through the Eyes of the Children', a UNICEF publication of drawings and reflections by children of Timor-Leste (East Timor).

a sympathetic response from an adult, but there are many additional opportunities for communication and engagement between adults and young infants. The single most important factor in a child's psychosocial development is to have at least one strong relationship with a caring adult.¹⁶ If parents and caregivers follow an infant's lead in the first year of life (as when establishing breastfeeding), the mutual exchange contributes to the child's healthy attachment.

The effectiveness of children's participation in life and society in later years depends upon the participation encouraged at the start. Children rely for their healthy growth and development on three key elements: health, good nutrition and care – with 'care' including protection and a loving, responsive and stimulating environment.¹⁷ The responsiveness of a parent or caregiver is important, for example, in the intellectual and language development of children. It can improve children's nutritional status: even when malnourished children are fed, those who have been given verbal and cognitive stimulation have higher growth rates than those who have not.¹⁸

The more interactive and participative the relationship between the young child and her

caregiver, the more sound the development of the child is likely to be – and the more productive the eventual outcomes for society as a whole. Because the majority of pre-school age children in both rich and poor societies are cared for within their own home and family, it is essential to reach out to parents, offering support where needed and information about the developmental needs of early childhood and how best to respond to them.

Of concern

When the process of developing healthy attachments is disrupted by abuse, neglect or by repeated changes in caregivers, the results can include, among other things, a child's lack of trust of adults in authority, an inability to give and receive affection and a failure to develop empathy, a conscience or compassion for others.¹⁹ These negative consequences are more likely to emerge in institutional settings: children who grew up in institutions are consistently overrepresented in both the penal system and the homeless population.²⁰

Such predictable negative results are behind the great concerns about the growing numbers of young children being orphaned by AIDS.



This concern is especially acute in 10 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, where more than 15 per cent of all children under 15 years are orphaned – Botswana, Burundi, Central African Republic, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The numbers of orphans are expected to increase and it is estimated that by 2010 over 20 per cent of all children under 15 in four countries – Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zimbabwe – will be orphans.²¹

Increasing a child's opportunities to participate

The responsibility to ensure children the best possible start in life by expanding and enhancing the ways they participate is shared by families, local governments, civil society and the private sector. National governments must provide the policy and institutional frameworks – and the leadership – that support local initiatives.

The Parent Effectiveness Service programme in the Philippines is one example of an approach that teaches families how to listen to and understand what their child is trying to communicate. Parents learn, for example, the importance of reading stories to their children or of watching an educational television programme with them. The programme has improved children's nutrition and reduced both child abuse and excessive punishment by parents. In Turkey, the Better Parenting Initiative, now in operation in all regions of the country, uses videos and group discussions to help parents better understand what children need and what they can do to improve their children's environment. Evaluations have demonstrated the effectiveness of these approaches in improving children's development and education.

In Latin America, as in many early learning centres around the world, children's participation is being recognized as a critical aspect of a good curriculum and necessary for a quality learning experience. In the past, children were viewed as passive learners, as recipients and as the object of education; but now they are increasingly seen as agents of their own learning, creators of their curriculum and developers of their possibilities.²²

The increased participation of children in their own learning has been shown to have impacts on their schooling performance. In Cuba, for example, UNICEF has worked successfully with the Government to support a national early childhood programme called *Educa a tu hijo* (Educate your child), which expands the young child's participation outside the family by providing community-based services to more than 600,000 children in the 0-6 age group, including more than 440,000 young girls and their families. With over 14,000 promoters and more than 60,000 volunteers, the programme reaches out to future mothers and fathers as well as to families with young children. Families receive information and counselling about healthy pregnancies and young children's developmental needs during visits with doctors and nurses or, after the child's birth, during regular home visits, group outings or classes and family discussions.

The programme makes a special effort to reach children from rural and remote areas and to engage families and communities in the responsibilities of early childhood. Cuba's long-standing national system of early childhood and pre-school education programmes had reached 98.3 per cent of 0- to 6-year-old children by the end of 2000. This system has had measurable success in increasing the developmen-

tal and educational achievements of Cuba's children. A recent study showed that Cuban children score significantly higher in mathematics and Spanish than their counterparts in other Latin American countries.²³

And in Nigeria, it took older children playing proactive roles within their community to ensure that thousands of infants were immunized, one of the conditions for ensuring the best possible start in life. In Afugiri, a densely populated peri-urban community in Umuahia, Abia state, where schoolchildren were involved in a baby tracking exercise, health workers and UNICEF staff were able to achieve and sustain a very high rate of immunization.

Before the project began in 2000, the Afugiri community, comprising an estimated 25,000 people, was barely using well-equipped and easily accessible primary health care facilities at the local centre. In one 11-month period, for instance, an average of only six to eight infants were being immunized every month out of a population of 1,000 children aged between 0 and 11 months. An average of five to seven women attended antenatal care services monthly and only six children were delivered there in eight months.

But then, the 10- to 16-year-old students of the child rights club at Williams Memorial Secondary School took it upon themselves to do something about the abysmal rates of immunization in their community and the entire Abia state. They organized health discussions on immunization, HIV/AIDS, oral rehydration therapy, exclusive breastfeeding and child rights issues. They mobilized women to bring their children for immunization and enthusiastically took up the challenge of tracking babies and tracing immunization defaulters, after

being trained in one and a half-day workshops conducted by UNICEF field officers and state health ministry officials.

These 10- to 16-year-old students went from house to house identifying eligible young children. Tracking slips were filled out and handed to parents and older children who were asked to bring the eligible children to the primary health care centre. The results were spectacular: an average of 328 infants were immunized in each of eight months compared with 8 children a month before the project began.

What's more, health workers engaged the mothers who brought their children in to be immunized in a range of maternal and child health activities. Mothers were educated on safe motherhood, prevention and home management of common illnesses with emphasis on diarrhoea; oral rehydration salts were distributed; children were weighed and charted on the growth monitoring cards; and exclusive breastfeeding was taught and demonstrated as was complementary feeding and diet diversification.

These additional services attracted even more women to the facility. Monthly attendance rose from less than 5 to 7 women before the project began to over 300 women. Deliveries at the centre rose from less than 6 a month to just under 15.

Not satisfied with merely making mothers bring their children to receive their first immunization, many schoolchildren followed up several cases, ensuring that children received three doses of the DPT vaccine. The extraordinary success achieved through the active participation of children in the mobilization exercise has sparked interest in several other states that now plan to copy it.²⁴

“You don’t
have to be old
to be wise.”

Yoruba proverb

Capturing the warmth of a family at home in the southern United States, 12-year-old Deidra Robinson gets two young children to pose for the camera.

PANEL
3

A CHILD'S 'RIGHT' TO PARTICIPATE

The Convention on the Rights of the Child does not explicitly set forth children's right to participate – except as a goal for children with disabilities (article 23). There is, however, a 'cluster of participation articles' that, when interpreted together, provide the argument for the child's right to participate.

Article 5. States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention.

Article 9. (2.) In any proceedings pursuant to paragraph 1 [which speaks to the separation of a child from their parents] of the present article, all interested parties shall be given an opportunity to participate in the proceedings and make their views known.

Article 12. (1.) States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

(2.) For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child,

either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Article 13. (1.) The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

Article 14. (1.) States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

(2.) States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.

Article 15. (1.) States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.

Article 16. (1.) No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.

(2.) The child has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.



Deidra Robinson/Kennetic Institute/United States/2002

Article 17. States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health....

Article 21. States Parties that recognize and/or permit the system of adoption shall ensure that the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration and they shall:

(a) Ensure that the adoption of a child is authorized only by competent authorities who determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures and on the basis of all pertinent and reliable information, that the adoption is permissible in view of the child's status concerning parents, relatives and legal guardians and that, if required, the persons concerned have given their informed consent to the adoption on the basis of such counselling as may be necessary.

Article 22. (1.) States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties.

Article 23. (1.) States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.

Article 29. (1.) States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment.



4

ACTIVE LEARNING

Schools are among the places where children learn key skills and gain knowledge about the world, and where they are 'socialized', made aware of society's future expectations of them as citizens. Often this has involved the enforcing of blind obedience and deference. But increasingly schools are places for socialization of a different kind, where children are enabled to think critically, where they learn about their rights and responsibilities and where they actively prepare for their role as citizens.

Children supporting girls' education

Development organizations of every size have long agreed about the cost-effectiveness of investing in girls' education and about the urgent necessity of doing so, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where there are more than 50 million primary-school-age girls out of school.²⁵

But when the Girls' Education Movement (GEM) was launched in Uganda in August 2001, it

differed from past efforts in that African children and adolescents themselves – boys as well as girls – took the lead, making use of the adults' expertise and advice whenever necessary and investing the movement with their own fervour and optimism.

Children's participation was educational in itself: the young Kenyans and Ugandans who were involved in GEM at the start, including some with disabilities, had been trained in creative facilitation methods. This enabled them to hold similar workshops in South Africa and Zambia to spread the word, in the lead-up to the Children and Young People's Parliament in Kampala. *"This conference was a turning point for so many young girls who could not say a word in the beginning,"* said Caroline, a Ugandan student volunteer. *"We were empowered with assertiveness and confidence and we began to think positively about our abilities."*²⁶

GEM is not unique in recruiting boys to the cause of girls' education. In the province of

A girl practising at a dance class in Kurgan, Russian Federation, caught the attention of Michail Garmasch, the 16-year-old photographer.

Russian Federation/"Imagine – your photos will open my eyes"/GTZ/2002

Baluchistan, Pakistan, where the female literacy rate is 2 per cent, the local UNICEF office had already worked with the highly motivated boy scout movement on campaigns on iodizing salt and immunizing against polio. But in 2000, extending this to the promotion of primary education for girls broke new ground: never before in the region had boys participated in promoting the rights of girls. The project was named Brothers Join Meena, referring to a well-established UNICEF cartoon character, Meena, the girl child.

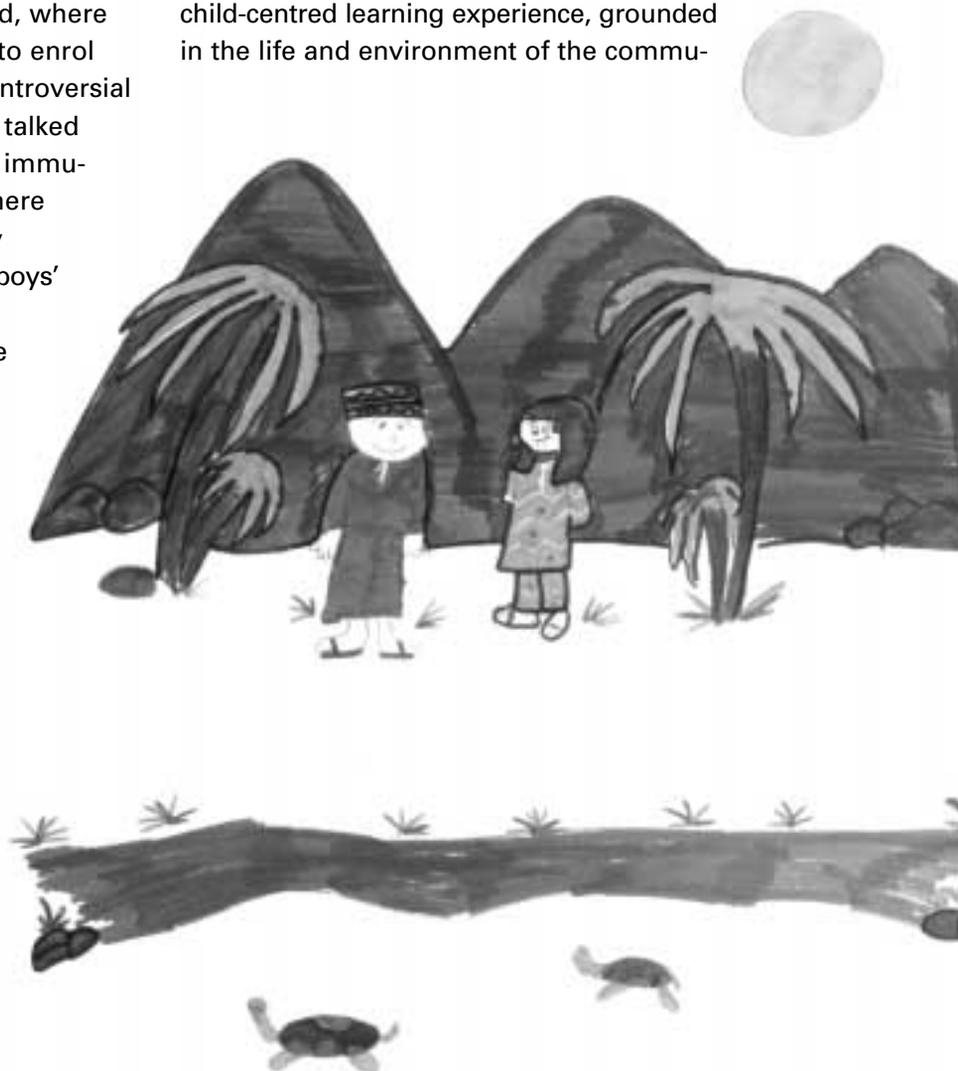
The scouts, including 12-year-old Jehanzeb Khan who took part in the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children as a spokesperson for the project, went door-to-door surveying girls' school attendance and, where necessary, trying to convince fathers to enrol their daughters. Partly to offset the controversial impact of the subject, the scouts also talked about other important issues such as immunization and constructing latrines. Where villages had no existing girls' primary school, the scouts would convince the boys' school to admit girls; where the long walk to school presented dangers, the scouts would offer to escort the girls.

The first year's results were encouraging: each targeted school enrolled 10 to 15 new girls, amounting to around 2,500 overall. In the village of Killi Abdul Rasaq, where the scouts were particularly strong, the results were even better: 80 new girls

joined the village school. "We used to say that educating a girl is like watering a neighbour's plants," admits Abdul Malam, the village *malik* or tribal leader. "But the boy scouts have changed our minds. Now we want our daughters to be teachers or doctors or anything else."²⁷

Schools and democratic ideals

Genuinely child-friendly schools, although promoted and increasingly implemented in some regions and countries of the world, are still relatively rare. UNICEF continues to campaign for classroom methods that maximize children's participation, which encourage active learning rather than the passive reception of facts and received wisdom. Experience indicates a child-centred learning experience, grounded in the life and environment of the commu-



*"We have the right to nature" by
Tohfa Mohammed Al-Wardy, age 9,
Tahjeez Al-Elmi Private School.*

*Children of Oman draw their rights/UNICEF Oman and Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor and Vocational Training, Oman.

nity, will also be one that encourages girls' enrolment and continuation in school.

The Escuela Nueva schools in Latin America, for example, are based on multi-age groups in which children's rights and democratic involvement are paramount. A recent study of 25 schools in two of the most violent areas in Colombia supports the argument that cooperation, coexistence and peaceful solution of conflict can be taught. Through interviews with parents, graduates, teachers and school principals, the study found that the 15 schools using the escuela nueva methodology had a direct and significant impact on the participation and democratic behaviour of its graduates within the community, and on the voting patterns of parents. What's more, the study identified the support of local organizations and civil society as factors in the success of the model, with a volunteer movement playing an important leadership role. The framework of the Escuela Nueva model is evolving continuously, the study concluded, due to the creativity of teachers, student governments, parents and communities that understand the potential of change.²⁸

The original Escuela Nueva model in rural Colombia has been so successful and so internationally applauded that it has now been adopted by other Latin American countries, such as Honduras. Guatemala has also adopted the model and the new school programme – Nueva Escuela Unitaria Bilingüe Intercultural – covered 210 schools and 23,000 students by the year 2000, just seven years after it began with only 12 schools.

One of the cornerstones of the approach in Guatemala is responding to the rights of children from the indigenous Mayan community which, despite forming half the population,

suffers from significant discrimination and marginalization. The teaching and learning are participatory, making full use of Mayan languages and culture. Play and study are creatively combined in 'learning corners', and every school has an elected student government with responsibilities for discipline, learning and cultural activities. Student governments have been responsible for painting school buildings and desks, for building perimeter walls and even for distributing food rations during a famine. The involvement of parents and the wider community is seen as vital.

The new schools' success can partly be measured by an attendance-and-completion rate which, at 93 per cent, is higher than the national average, and also in the high enrolment rate of girls, who actually outnumber boys. These schools also make a significant contribution to the promotion of a culture of peace and democracy in a country still deeply scarred by decades of civil conflict. The Government has recognized the importance of the new schools and plans to roll out the programme to a further 2,000 schools and 120,000 students.²⁹

Introduced in Guyana in 1998, the Escuela Nueva approach is already having a significant impact, not least through the operation of student governments in remote schools. Each student government has elected officers as well as committees responsible for discipline, health and sanitation, the library and the garden. On a day-to-day basis, children help during assemblies, clean the school compound, organize fund-raising activities and invite outside speakers. A recent survey by UNICEF indicated that children enjoy the level of participation and responsibility that the student governments allow them – as well as the skills they develop in leadership, public speaking and organization.³⁰

Learning through sports

Schools, of course, are not the only arena where a child can learn the values of peace and democracy. Of equal import to the child and to development and peace are play and recreational activities, both of which are a child's right and both of which have enormous potential for changing the lives of children for the better. Programmes in organized sports are assuming a greater role in the work of international organizations, members of the global movement for children, and local NGOs – and in programmes reaching out to girls as well as boys, and to children with disabilities as well as those without (*see Panel 4, 'Girls win big!', page 32*).

The value of sports for a child's physical and mental development has long been acknowledged. And much has been written about the values and social skills that are learned through team sports, for example, conflict resolution, collaboration, understanding one's opponents and how to win and lose with respect for others.

Sports provide youth with their own space, both physically and emotionally. This is especially important for girls who often have fewer opportunities than boys for social interactions outside the home and beyond family networks. In many countries, the kinds of public spaces that are seen as the only legitimate venues for girls and women, for example, markets and health clinics, are those related to their domestic roles as homemakers and mothers. In contrast, as girls begin to participate in sports and as female athletes gain public recognition, they acquire new community affiliations and access to new venues, find mentors for themselves and become mentors to others, and begin to more openly participate in community life. What's more, when the traditional male domain of sports opens up and allows girls and young

women to participate, stereotypes of girls and women as ornamental or as weaker than boys – whether physically or emotionally – are broken down.

Now, there is a growing belief that sports have the potential to contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and UN Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan has appointed a task force on Sports for Development, Health and Peace, charged to develop recommendations for using sports as a tool for development.

"We have seen examples of how sport can build self-esteem, leadership skills, community spirit, and bridges across ethnic or communal divides," said the Secretary-General at an Olympic Aid forum. "We have seen how it can channel energies away from aggression or self-destruction, and into learning and self-motivation."³¹

Sports are often used to engage a community in a common project. During the Kosovo crisis in 1999, for example, young people made important contributions to social reconstruction and peace-building through sports. In the six refugee camps near Kukes in Albania, Kosovar Youth Councils were formed, involving about 20,000 young people ranging in age from 15 to 25. With support from UNICEF and the local Albanian Youth Clubs, council members organized sports tournaments and concerts and took an active role in running the camps and keeping them clean and safe. They helped integrate newly arrived families and organized fund-raising for the poorest members of the camp community. Members assisted UN agencies and NGOs in distributing landmine-awareness information and materials on organized recreation and counselling for younger children. The experience of organizing and participating in the Council brought out new leadership and problem-solving skills and many of the members returned to Kosovo to help rebuild their communities.³²

“We were empowered
with assertiveness
and confidence and
we began to think
positively about
our abilities.”

Caroline, Ugandan GEM volunteer
Children and Young People's Parliament
Kampala

Looking powerful and strong – looking good – girls from the Mathare Youth Sports Association in Kenya compete on the field.

PANEL 4

GIRLS WIN BIG!

Commanding near universal appeal, football has become a common language for millions of people, and the FIFA World Cup is now the most-watched sporting event in history. For the first time ever, because of a strategic alliance between UNICEF and FIFA, the world football governing body, the 2002 World Cup was dedicated to children. June 19 and 20 were designated as 'Say Yes for Children World Football Days' to raise awareness of children's issues through football-related activities. At every game, children wearing UNICEF's 'Say Yes for Children' T-shirts led the players onto the field. Young people were featured in every World Cup event, and an online auction of football memorabilia held during the matches raised money for UNICEF. More than 1 billion people watched the games, putting children's rights front and centre.

Football's appeal is certainly not limited to adults. Even in the most dire circumstances, children around the world play wherever they can – in alleyways, refugee camps and war zones. Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes "the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities...." Yet far fewer girls than boys are to be found on the football fields – or on any sports field, for that matter.

Blazing a trail

The team kicking up the red dust on a grassless pitch in Mathare, Kenya, is not a group of boys emulating their superstar heroes but of girls, blazing a trail for female participation in the world's most popular sport. The Mathare shanty town is a collection of

ramshackle, mud-walled buildings that sprawls along the steep bank of a garbage-choked river, a few kilometres north-east of Nairobi. Paid work is in short supply – domestic labour in middle-income Nairobi homes, perhaps, or casual labour in the local quarries – and most people depend on selling food or other items on the street. Many women are forced to sell sex to survive. In conditions like these, organized leisure activities are few and far between.

In 1987, the only football played in Mathare was with balls cobbled together out of string and scavenged pieces of plastic. But that year, thanks to an initiative by Canadian development worker Bob Munro, real footballs started to appear as the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) was formed. From the outset MYSA linked sport with the environment – young people organized themselves not only into football teams and leagues but also into garbage clean-up squads.

MYSA's growth was tremendous, indicating how desperately the programme was needed. Today, MYSA sponsors hundreds of football teams. In addition, it offers educational scholarships, runs an extensive and much-needed HIV/AIDS education programme, a photography project, as well as numerous other community-service initiatives.

Winning the Cup

The first girls' football teams were introduced in 1992 after MYSA boys and managers witnessed girls' matches for the first time during a trip to Norway. Extending opportunities to girls was no simple matter,



however, requiring the organization to grapple with entrenched traditional attitudes towards gender roles. Gaining parental approval for the girls to participate was infinitely more difficult than it had been for the boys. Many parents felt strongly, for example, that football should not interfere with girls' numerous responsibilities in the home – and both food preparation and care of younger siblings are extremely time-consuming. They also insisted that their daughters be home before dark, aware that safety is a much more serious issue for girls than for boys.

Mothers' reactions to their daughters' participation have generally been positive, and the girls' opportunity to go on tour to Norway to play in the Youth Cup – where the under-14-year-olds won their age championship – has also helped overcome the determined objections of some fathers. "When I started playing for MYSA," says one 15-year-old girl, "my father would say that there is no football for girls and he would beat me up. So whenever I wanted to go and play, my mother would cover up for me by saying that she had sent me somewhere. Then when I went to Norway he started liking it."¹

Powerful and strong

The struggle to ensure girls their right to play and to enjoy the benefits of participating in team sports is being waged with varying degrees of success around the world. In the United States, the current world champions in women's soccer, the number of girls playing the game in high school increased by 112 per cent in the 1990s,² and a professional women's soccer league was established in 2000. US football superstar

Brandi Chastain is a role model for millions of girls worldwide. "Football gives girls the ability to be leaders and improves their self-esteem," she says. "They learn that they can be leaders, be powerful and strong and that those are perfectly fine qualities for a woman. They learn to explore themselves through football."

Girls who participate in sports tend to be healthier – emotionally and physically – and less likely to smoke or abuse drugs or alcohol. There may also be a link between decreased incidences of breast cancer and osteoporosis in women who have been physically active throughout their lives. In addition, adolescent girls who take part in sports tend to delay becoming sexually active until later in life.³ This may in part be because participation in sports encourages adolescent girls to develop a sense of ownership of and strength in their own bodies instead of seeing them simply as a sexual resource for men. "Before playing football I was fearful," said one girl, "now I am not because I am used to mixing with people and I know what is good and what is bad." Through football, offered another young Kenyan player, "I have learned how to have my own principles and not be blown and tossed around by the wind."⁴

1 Brady, Martha, and Arjmand Banu Khan, *Letting Girls Play: The Mathare Youth Sports Association's football program for girls*, Population Council, New York, 2002, p. 14.

2 Women's Sports Foundation, *Women's Sports & Fitness Facts & Statistics*, p. 11.

3 Sabo, Donald et al., *The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Sport and teen pregnancy*, New York, 1998.

4 Brady and Khan, op. cit.



5

THE SHARPEST EDGE

Adolescents inevitably find themselves at the sharpest edge of a tension between participation and protection that all children face. They are the world's most immediate heirs: the next age group to gain access to the advantages and opportunities of adulthood yet also the group most likely to find itself endangered by the ugliest failures of society.

Recent studies have confirmed what those who work with adolescents know from experience: that adolescents benefit from feeling a strong sense of connection to home and school; that they thrive when they have close relationships, are valued in their community and have opportunities to be useful to others; that they value positive relationships with adults, safe spaces and meaningful opportunities to contribute.³³

Discovering new competencies

Like millions of other girls around the world, girls between the ages of 11 and 17 in Pakistan, particularly those from low-income families, are

widely denied a chance to actively participate in society and in their own self-development. The Girl Child Project has, for the last decade, been tackling this issue by empowering girls within their own families and communities. The project is designed for 500 villages and cities within Pakistan.

Girls attend five-day orientation workshops that raise their social awareness while disseminating practical information about health, hygiene and nutrition of use to their whole family. Those who have received some formal education are given home-school kits, including a blackboard, chalk and wall posters. This enables many of them to set up mini-schools for uneducated girls, thereby not only enhancing their own self-esteem and sometimes generating a small income but also extending empowerment further into the community. Others choose to receive first-aid training or learn other income-generating skills. One of the most successful aspects of the programme is that girls discover their own capacities and new

'Xpression', a meeting organized by UNICEF, YMCA and the Island People in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, brought together these young people with NGOs from around the world to brainstorm on how to use music, graffiti, hip-hop, fashion and sport to provide young people with skills, services and a supportive environment.

possibilities in life, and become role models for others, beginning the long, arduous process of breaking down traditional barriers to female participation.³⁴

“I wasn’t quite like this a few years back,” says 20-year-old Sumera Zafar. “I was actually quite awkward and extremely shy.... But people trust my judgement now. Girls from all over the neighbourhood come to me with their various problems and ask me to help resolve serious domestic issues. The Girl Child Project really helped girls like me to believe in themselves. It enlightened us that being a woman wasn’t a curse or a bad thing. It taught us to love ourselves and to be proud of what we are. Now I actually feel that women are as good as men....”

She has her own message for the girls and women of Pakistan: *“Stop depending on others and believe in yourselves. Take a stand – since that is the only way your lives will ever improve and move forward.”*³⁵

Effecting social change

There are numerous examples throughout the world of adolescents trying to effect social change by influencing the behaviour of their peers. In Montenegro, Yugoslavia, UNICEF has supported seminars to train young Red Cross volunteers in peer-education methods. They use innovative role-play techniques to dramatize the issues teenagers may encounter, such as whether or not to have sex, how to say no to risky behaviour and how to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.³⁶

Teenage peer educators are also combating HIV/AIDS throughout Africa, for example, in youth-friendly clinics in Zambia where drama,

poetry, music and the electronic media convey key information on HIV/AIDS, other diseases and pregnancy.³⁷ Peer leaders are also at work in Cameroon, where they map out their neighbourhoods to indicate areas of potentially high-risk behaviour (bars, video rooms or military barracks) then identify existing youth groups and work with them to raise HIV/AIDS awareness.³⁸ In Namibia, meanwhile, young people have so far reached 100,000 of their peers both in and out of school with life-skills training aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy and preventing HIV/AIDS.³⁹

The idea of adolescents addressing the risky behaviour of other young people takes an intriguing form in some parts of the United States. In some areas adolescents take on responsibility of sentencing their peers in court. These ‘teen courts’ involve volunteers aged 8 to 18 – some of them former offenders – as attorneys, judges and juries trying their peers for non-violent crimes, traffic infractions or school-rule violations.⁴⁰ The model is also now being explored in Germany and Japan.

In Thailand, as part of a Youth Camp for Ending Violence against Children and Women, 60 young people were trained to become volunteers and catalysts to both monitor domestic violence in their community and campaign to stop it. As a result of the initiative, a national law on domestic violence is now under review.⁴¹

During adolescence, as in early childhood, people with disabilities are routinely excluded from the normal patterns of everyday life. In Belarus, UNICEF has supported programmes aimed at integrating young people with disabilities into society, training them for more independent living and equipping them with labour skills.⁴² In the Islamic Republic of Iran,

the inclusion of the opinions and views of children with disabilities in the UNICEF programme-design process was ensured through three seminars where 150 boys and girls from all over the country with speech, hearing, visual and motor impairment discussed their shared problems and identified helpful strategies and activities. In addition, a seminar to observe the annual anniversary of Iran's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was hosted by children with disabilities.⁴³

The problem: Children exploited by adults

Even in acknowledging the potential of adolescents and their positive achievements, it is vital to recognize that they are at high risk from the life-threatening effects of unconscionable adult behaviour: for example, trafficking children into forced labour and prostitution or forcibly recruiting them as soldiers.

- Child trafficking has become a billion-dollar-a-year business, with an estimated 1.2 million children falling victim annually.⁴⁴
- Trafficking of children for exploitation in agriculture and domestic service has recently emerged as a problem in sub-Saharan Africa.⁴⁵
- Trafficking of girls into prostitution has been a long-standing concern in South-East Asia, where a profitable network may involve police authorities, relatives and guards, each receiving their own slice of the profit.⁴⁶
- There has been a huge upsurge in the number of girls trafficked from the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine into western Europe via gangs based in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Kosovo, Yugoslavia.⁴⁷

- An estimated 300,000 children are thought to have been coerced into military service, whether as soldiers, porters, messengers, cooks or sex slaves, with 120,000 in Africa alone.⁴⁸

These are extreme cases, but in every society adolescents are the most likely age group to find themselves marginalized, abused, exploited and disregarded, and in perilous limbo, neither young enough to inspire adult protectiveness nor old enough to grasp the power and possibilities of adult society. Almost all countries have populations of adolescents scraping out a living on the streets of their urban centres. The latest estimates put the numbers of these children as high as 100 million.⁴⁹ Many of these are children who work the streets but return to a family home at night; others, however, are far from the protective, nurturing reach of a family. Many may have never experienced their family home as a safe haven, since child abuse is often a key factor in their decision to leave home and take to the streets.

In all countries, children who live or spend most of their lives on the street are more at risk on every count: from malnutrition or HIV infection to being dragged into the drug underworld. In some cities their very survival is at risk daily. Inevitably living on the margins of the law, they often find themselves in conflict with local authorities, and studies from many countries report that these children's most pervasive fear is of violent death.⁵⁰

A solution: Children organized for their own protection

In Brazil, the boys and girls who live on the city streets have found in the MNMMR (National Movement of Street Boys and Girls) a space for

participation that has permitted them to become aware of their rights, reorganize their perspective on life and fight for their rights. In 1985, educators from all over the country who were already working with street children founded the Movement after a national meeting attended by delegations of adolescents representing local groups. In 1986, some 600 children who live on the streets from all over the country and street educators met and defined the four main objectives of the Movement:

- to change laws that punish poor children for being poor
- to combat violence
- to support and expand the Movement to permit more boys and girls to participate and
- to train educators and activists to develop the necessary competencies and appropriate approach to working with these children.

With these objectives, the Movement was established to strengthen networking, mutual

support and education methods via two organizational levels: (1) the educators in local and state groups, and a national coordination; and (2) groups of girls and boys, in *Nucleos de Base*, who meet at municipal, state and national levels. The national meeting is organized every three years: in 2002 it brought more than 1,000 boys and girls to Brasilia, the country's capital.

The Movement has had a significant impact on the national legislation reform. In 1988, it introduced an article synthesizing the Convention on the Rights of the Child into the Brazilian Constitution that was being redrafted as the country came out of 25 years of military dictatorship. The Movement was also active in discussions leading to the country's 1990 Statute of the Child and the Adolescent; and, on another front, played a leading role in denouncing extermination groups.

By participating in the Movement, boys and girls who have spent time on the streets learn how to return to family and community life, attend school and take advantage of a space of their own where they can fight for their rights.

“Among the
partnerships we seek,
we turn especially to
children themselves.”

World Declaration on the Survival, Protection
and Development of Children
1990

Three youths in this Afghan family boldly face the camera for photographer, 11-year-old Sabina, while other family members concentrate on their meal.

PANEL
5

BUILDING NATIONS

All around the world, children are speaking up on legislative matters that affect them – and in many nations, governments are learning to listen.

Children's Jirga

In Afghanistan, a children's Jirga (assembly) is planned to address the difficulties faced by the millions of children in Afghanistan: those who have lost one or both parents, been displaced by conflict or maimed by landmines, or who suffer from malnutrition or die before the age of five. The Afghan Government has been asked to set up a national commission for children that will involve several departments, such as health and education, "so that," explains Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, "children become central in creating policies and in allocation of resources."

A young country

In Timor-Leste (East Timor), nine days before independence was celebrated on 20 May 2002, a Student Parliament was convened, holding its inaugural meeting at the parliamentary assembly. As the new nation moved toward independence,

The Timorese coconut palm is just beginning to send out new shoots. "In the future, we don't want it to become bent, we want it to grow into a straight tree that shares its shade around equally and doesn't lean or block out the light for other trees."
18-year-old Giles Soares

'Through the Eyes of the Children', UNICEF, Timor-Leste.

UNICEF and its partners had launched a vigorous campaign to educate young people about democracy. Under the banner 'Build a nation with children and young people', UNICEF encouraged young people to become involved in the political process. Out of this campaign, the Student Parliament was born.

The students debated a range of topics – from health care to education to HIV/AIDS – and adopted 22





Afghanistan/"Imagine – your photos will open my eyes"/GTZ/2002

resolutions. They called for the new Government to ratify human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to improve health and education in rural areas.

The Student Parliament was the first parliament in what was then East Timor, at the time governed by a Constituent Assembly, a body that advised Sergio Vieira de Mello, the UN Transitional Administrator. Xanana Gusmao, the President-elect, and the Council of Ministers took over from Mr. de Mello nine days after the Student Parliament. The report from the Student Parliament will be presented to the full Parliament during the 2002 parliamentary season, and UNICEF is coordinating with the Ministry of Education to establish student parliaments in selected high schools during the school year.

"Children are important for East Timor," said Germano da Costa, the Student Parliament President. "This is a young country, we are a young people. It is good that people can build their houses, grow their food, but we need to build the skills of our children. They are our guarantee for the future."

A chance to be involved

In another part of the world, the South African Law Commission (SALC) is involved in a comprehensive review of all legislation relating to children. The review began in the 1990s as a result of generalized dissatisfaction with child-care legislation that pre-dated the end of apartheid and the first democratic elections in 1994.

After some urgent amendments were passed in 1996 and 1999, a complete overhaul of the existing law is now under way. Children throughout the country have attended workshops and discussion groups, and their comments were taken into account when the Commission formulated preliminary recommendations in 2001. A draft Children's Bill has since been finalized, and it is now with the Department of Social Development. If approved, the draft Bill will be introduced in Parliament.

SALC consulted with children on impending changes to legislation that affected them directly, and it accorded children an equal footing to participate with adults in the law reform process. Their input received the same consideration as that of other stakeholders and their opinion was in some instances decisive. One such instance was the decision not to extend the prohibition on the employment of children under 16 years of age to all children under 18.

From an independent evaluation of the child participation process, it is clear that children valued the opportunity to participate in a law reform process and to have their voices heard. In the words of one child, "We had a say, feeling needed, important. We were also happy that we were given a chance to be involved, to give our ideas and be listened to and hope they will get something useful out of what we said."



6

LISTENING TO CHILDREN

“Sometimes I feel that the world wants me to grow up faster. I feel like people don’t respect the things I say or what I have to give just because of my age.”

Nikki Sanchez-Hood, 15, Canada

The journey from where we are today to a world where children’s opinions are routinely sought cannot be made overnight. Like all intellectual journeys, it is a process that depends on acquiring new knowledge, increasing understanding and overcoming fear and resistance. And as the necessary intellectual work is being done and new understandings are being put into practice, new skills will be needed by all those involved – children and adults, families, communities, cities and organizations.

Families

Because the family is the first place where children learn to participate, it is also the ideal forum where children can learn to express their views **while** respecting the perspectives of others. As the Committee on the Rights of the Child advised in one of its early sessions: “Traditionally, the child has been seen as a dependent, invisible and passive family

member. Only recently has he or she become ‘seen’ and...the movement is growing to give him or her space to be heard and respected.... The family becomes in turn the ideal framework for the first stage of the democratic experience for each and all of its individual members, including children.”⁵¹

But the task facing parents and an extended family is not an easy one as they balance their responsibilities both to support a child’s participation and to protect and guide the child. On a daily and often moment-to-moment basis, they put article 5 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into practice in the process of assessing their child’s ‘evolving capacities’ (although they usually don’t use those terms to describe their decisions). Recognizing the critical and vital role of families, many organizations have developed programmes and advocacy campaigns that support parents and families in their efforts. For example, UNICEF’s Regional

In Burkina Faso, 16-year-old Krifilité Da came upon these two camera-shy boys in the road.

Burkina Faso/“Imagine – your photos will open my eyes”/GTZ/2002

Office for Latin America and the Caribbean has developed a set of policy guidelines for working with adolescents that calls for public policies to strengthen families in a range of ways:

1. Economically and materially, particularly with respect to employment, income earning, housing, education and health;
2. With community programmes that allow the community to protect children in cases of risk or family need;
3. With student scholarship programmes so that families can send students to school and keep them there;
4. By encouraging parental responsibility, including legal acknowledgement of paternity on the part of men, the father's active involvement in raising and educating his children, and a more positive view of masculinity;
5. By encouraging cultural models and practices that are based on equality and shared responsibility rather than those that reinforce gender discrimination;
6. Through the application of laws and programmes that counter domestic violence, accompanied by training in women's and children's rights, violence prevention and how to resolve conflicts and differences peacefully;
7. Through the application of laws that eradicate social practices abusive to children and adolescents;
8. By providing programmes in parenting skills.⁵²

Organizations listening to children

Just as parents have traditionally been assumed to know what is best for their sons and daughters, so agencies and authorities working on behalf of children have tended to do so without considering what the beneficiaries of 'their' projects have to say. The results can be disastrous. In the United Kingdom, for example, the 1980s and 1990s saw a string of public inquiries documenting systematic physical and sexual abuse by staff in children's homes, institutions set up to protect children from harm in their own families. One of the key lessons of the inquiries was that this widespread abuse occurred because the children involved had no voice: when they complained, they were not believed and they became susceptible to further, punitive abuse.⁵³

The flipside of this coin is that when programmes and policies take children's perspectives into account from the outset, they can produce better results for everyone concerned. A case in Christchurch, New Zealand, illustrates this. The local authority proposed a 60-kilometre-per-hour speed limit at the point where a six-lane highway passed an elementary school and thought it had adequately consulted the local community. Christchurch is, however, an unusual city, having had its own Child Advocate since 1997, who pointed out that the children in the school had not been consulted. The children then made their own case that the new speed limit was too high and that a 40-kilometre-per-hour zone would be safer not only for them but also for senior citizens in the area. A trial of the slower speed was agreed to and, with the addition of flashing lights to indicate to motorists that they were approaching a school, proved so successful that this has since become a planning standard for the whole

country.⁵⁴ The New Zealand Government is currently attempting to put the interests of children at the heart of the national decision-making process. Its seven-point Agenda for Children includes increasing opportunities for taking children's opinions into account in government and community decision-making processes.⁵⁵

The experience of PLAN in Indonesia has also been transformed by consulting children. The organization felt it had done a good job in the village of Padi: it had talked to the village committee about what was needed, had built a road and latrines and had repaired the school building and the clinic. Community leaders professed themselves satisfied.

But doubts lingered as to whether the work had catered to the poorest of the poor who lived up the mountainside away from the roads and new water supply. So when it came to working with the nearby village of Kebonsari, they started differently – by consulting 150 school-age children and using a local group of artists. The children insisted that PLAN should begin by working with the neediest children – those whose parents had migrated to find work or who had no land. They complained about being hit and beaten in the home and at school. They started a petition to improve a dangerous bridge and got the district head's promise to improve it. They wanted water pumps installed so that girls have more time to study instead of walking long distances to fetch water.

The lessons applied in Kebonsari – that there is added value when children are involved from the start – form the basis of PLAN programmes in Indonesia. In a culture that expects children to defer to their elders, children's groups are, moreover, now involved in rural libraries, small income-earning projects, editing their own magazines, child-to-child health programmes and waste management.⁵⁶

Consultation with children will not be easy in cultures and contexts where they are still widely expected to be seen but not heard. But, as in the case of PLAN's work in Indonesia, one key reason why the practice is gaining ground is that when children's needs are genuinely taken into account, the results tend to bring improvements for the community as a whole. The safer streets and cleaner environments that children often

Christine Norton/UNICEF/2002



demand, for example, not only benefit them but also the vast majority of adults as well.

Consulting children as a group – on a regional, national or even international basis – can also be of immense service to policy makers and planners. In Bangladesh, the government ministry charged with developing a National Plan of Action against Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children began by consulting children who were affected, such as those involved in sex work, girls who were trafficked and those vulnerable to abuse. The children’s report implicated police, magistrates and other state officials in trafficking. Most of the children’s recommendations were included in the National Plan of 2002 and a ‘child task force’ is being established as part of the monitoring and implementation of the Plan.⁵⁷

Collective attempts to gather, evaluate and analyse efforts in child participation are emerging in countries and regions around the world, and increasingly at the international level. One such forum is the Children as Partners Alliance (CAPA), a coalition of international and national NGOs working with children, who recently met with representatives of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Canadian Government, youth from young people’s organizations and researchers. CAPA’s purposes are to learn from experiences in working in “partnership with young people throughout the world” and to create an accessible data-base of these experiences. Among its objectives are to establish standards of practice for programming, research, policy dialogue and advocacy, to engage in high-level advocacy to realize children’s right to participate in decisions affecting all aspects of their lives and to support the development of child-led organizations and of participatory research by children and young people.⁵⁸

Adults listening to children

These examples demonstrate not just that it is worth consulting children but also that a shift in thinking and approach is required from adults, to increase their capacity to listen to and understand children and adolescents and to include children and adolescents in ‘serious’ discussions.

Although most adults do not naturally think of working in collaboration with children, many have been convinced of the value of doing so, whether by public-education campaigns or more specific training. Those who live and work most closely with children – parents, teachers, playworkers – are often the first to change their mindset. But so are other adults who might traditionally have been thought to have little connection with children, such as health workers and town planners.

Increasingly, groups of adults are striving to ‘normalize’ their perceptions of and relationship with children and adolescents. Countries with such different backgrounds and traditions as Jamaica and Mongolia have been praised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child for the way in which, through training workshops, they have sought to improve the skills of parents and teachers, guidance counsellors and lawyers, in encouraging children’s right to self-expression.

In the United States, the Child Life Council brings together professionals working in health care who are committed to reducing the stress and trauma for children in clinics and hospitals. What is unique about the Council is that they have a rigorous system of testing and qualifying health professionals in order to better work with children. The philosophy and practice of the Council have an underlying meaning: relating and listening to children is not ‘child’s

play', but is an essential attribute for which practitioners should study and be qualified.⁵⁹

One example of how adults can be retrained is in Kolkata (Calcutta), India, where a Child-Friendly Police Initiative, in place since 1998, has so far engaged 42 city police stations. Police officers attend courses aimed at sensitizing them to the rights of deprived children and juvenile offenders and developing links with social welfare and protection services. The police, with support from Rotary International, host health clinics in their stations on Sunday mornings.⁶⁰ A similar UNICEF-supported initiative has been meeting with success in the southern city of Bangalore in India. Here police and street children are brought together in training sessions that look at child rights and at how to cope with difficult circumstances. So far, 1,700 officers have been trained and five police stations have been given a child-friendly award. "I try not to treat the child as a criminal," said one of the officers. "We have to understand what has brought the child into unlawful activities."⁶¹

In El Salvador, the project of the Defensorías de Derechos Humanos de la Niñez y la Adolescencia, begun in 1995 by UNICEF and supported by Rädga Barnen of Sweden and Save the Children UK, has taken as its objective the transformation of the 'no right' culture that pervaded family, interpersonal and institutional relations. As part of the Defensorías, a Network of Young People met with the Minister of Education for the first time in the history of El Salvador and elaborated a proposal for public policies for children and youth, including revoking the policy that pregnant girls must leave school. This proposal has been taken into account in the process of elaborating the National Policy on Children and Adolescents by the National Secretariat of the Family.

A CHILD-FRIENDLY MUNICIPAL STRATEGY

It involves all concerned, including children, NGOs and civil-society representatives and:

- Is rooted in the whole Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Enjoys high government priority
- Is integrated into other local and national plans
- Adopts a decentralized implementation process
- Includes priorities and time-bound measurable goals
- Covers all children
- Is widely disseminated
- Is regularly assessed and monitored.

Source: Riggio, E., 'Child Friendly Cities: Good governance in the best interest of the child', *Environment & Urbanization*, vol. 14, no. 2, October 2002.

As a result of the Defensorías, the concerns of young and adolescent children were presented in open town halls, and mayors have become involved in the issues of children and adolescents, prioritizing their rights when budget decisions were made. This prioritization has been seen in the construction of parks, fields, sports complexes, libraries, bridges, infrastructure repairs of educational centres, roads, the introduction of safe water, reforestation and protection of the environment, and greater police security, among others. In numerous instances, members of the National Civil Police have also modified their attitudes towards

adolescents in the community. What's more, parents and teachers have rethought their ways of correcting their children and students, and reports of mistreatment have declined.

Cities 'listening' to children

The Child-Friendly Cities initiative, an attempt by adults to create urban spaces that optimize child participation, is increasingly an idea whose time has come, with more local authorities and planners of the world's cities striving to implement child rights at the local level – where children live and can make a difference – and to make urban environments healthier for children⁶² (see box, 'A child-friendly municipal strategy', p.47). Around 1 billion children live in cities – close to half of all the children in the world – and at least 80 per cent of these live in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In developing countries it is common for between a third and a half of the urban population to have incomes below the poverty line, many of whom are housed in illegally built settlements with limited access to safe water and adequate sanitation.⁶³

The Mayors as Defenders of Children initiative was launched in 1992 as a way of involving municipal leaders in the pursuit of child rights. The initiative recognized the fact that decentralization is transferring ever more responsibility for basic services to local governments all over the world. This not only gives local authorities more power to make a difference in children's lives and environments, it also makes the participation and consultation of young people more feasible than it is at the national level. This has become even more vital since the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in 1996, which emphasized that the well-being of children is the ultimate indicator of a healthy society.

In Italy, the Ministry of the Environment coordinates the Child-Friendly Cities initiatives, and some 200 cities had joined the movement by 2001. New ideas are shared in annual meetings and prizes are awarded to the cities that have performed best in various categories, such as child-centred urban planning for one example.⁶⁴ In the Philippines, the movement also has a national dimension through a goals-oriented programme that aims to promote child-rights principles at every level, from the family through the *barangay* (neighbourhood) to the city or region.⁶⁵ Ukraine, meanwhile, has a strong 'mayors for child rights' movement that in 2000 saw the mayors of 35 of the country's cities undertake to involve children in the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of policy affecting their health, development and protection.⁶⁶

In Kolkata, India, a citywide programme of action brings together major agencies committed to protecting and providing basic services for deprived urban children – including those who are working or homeless. An ambitious project survey has identified every child who is out of school. Because there are not enough schools for all these children, the city is creating 700 primary education centres, which will be managed by NGOs and run by young people specially trained as 'barefoot teachers'.⁶⁷

Even in places of conflict, such as the Occupied Palestinian Territory, there are examples of Child-Friendly Cities initiatives. Fifteen Child Activity Centres have been set up to promote community participation in implementing child rights. The Centres focus on young children, particularly girls and those in need of special protection, but adolescents are also involved and receive training so that they can assist the Centres' work.⁶⁸

“Listen to children and ensure their participation: Children and adolescents are resourceful citizens capable of helping to build a better future for all. We must respect their right to express themselves and to participate in all matters affecting them, in accordance with their age and maturity.”

Declaration of 'A World Fit for Children'
2002

Young and reflective in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, a girl writes down her feelings about being a youth in that country while a young friend captures the moment on film.

PANEL

6

WE ASKED THEM TO SPEAK

Asking children and young people what they think can make for some uncomfortable moments. What if we don't like what they have to say? From that perspective, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan showed courageous leadership when he invited children to express their views at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in May 2002. "So far, adults have called the shots, but now it's time to build the world with children. Your voices will be heard, I promise," the Secretary-General said.

And the children spoke, in voices loud and clear. As they presented the results of the 'Say Yes for Children' campaign – nearly 95 million pledges – they told world leaders that 95 million people were expecting their leadership on behalf of children and 95 million people were ready to help them in their efforts to ensure the rights of every child.

They demanded a world free of poverty, war and violence in their statement to the General Assembly. They offered their knowledge and ingenuity to help find solutions to the problems that affect them. "We have the will, the knowledge, the sensitivity and the dedication," the children argued.

Throughout the Special Session, they were everywhere – or so it seemed. Children and young people chaired meetings, engaged world leaders in intense discussions at inter-generational dialogue sessions and talked to the media to explain their points of view and expectations. They raised issues, analysed situations and offered solutions with clear vision.

We polled and surveyed

In the year leading up to the Special Session, in one of the largest multi-country surveys of children ever carried out, nearly 40,000 children between the ages of 9 and 18 in 72 countries across East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean shared their opinions on such topics as school, violence in their lives and their expectations of government. In the surveys, conducted by UNICEF and its partners, the majority of children report good relationships with parents and teachers, feel happy most of the time and are deeply concerned about a range of economic, social and environmental issues.

But far too many children and young people spoke about harsh realities:

- the violence they experience in their homes, at school and in their neighbourhoods;
- discrimination in their countries against the poor, disabled and minority children;
- anxiety about unemployment and economic conditions;
- the lack of information about their rights, about drugs, HIV/AIDS and sexual relationships;
- the need for government to give greater priority to quality education;



Ivan Blacev/Right to Know Initiative/United Nations/2002

- the lack of opportunity to voice their opinions and participate in decisions affecting their lives;
- their disenchantment with traditional politics and politicians.

Such findings speak for themselves about the state of our societies and our value systems. Unheard or unattended, they bode ill for the future of our democracies.

Two out of three children in Latin America and the Caribbean have little or no trust in their government and related institutions. The children feel that they are of no importance to these institutions.

In Europe and Central Asia, only 4 out of 10 children see voting in elections as an effective way to improve things in their country. Just under a third trust their government, while another third distrust it. Asked to spontaneously identify famous people they admire, only 2 out of every 100 children chose a politician or political leader.

In East Asia and the Pacific, only 3 per cent of the children surveyed named a president or prime minister as the person they admired most. (Timor-Leste, formerly East Timor, was a major exception with 21 per cent.) In Latin America and the Caribbean, the picture is even more grim. Many of the children surveyed did not identify any leaders at all. A number of children believed that their country would be worse off in the future, partly because they view their government as unable to solve problems.

And among all children surveyed, trust of politicians and of police and teachers diminished with age and – presumably – experience.

And now?

Government officials from many countries acknowledged that the polls brought home the importance of listening to children's voices and of taking their views into account when making decisions that affect their lives. Twenty-one Latin American Heads of State, for example, meeting at the Xth Iberoamerican Summit, vowed to look deeper into the situation of their children and youth. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the largest regional security organization in the world, asked its field missions to use the survey results to inform and guide their programmes aimed at strengthening democratic citizenship, civic education, conflict prevention and security.

Where regional polls were not conducted, leaders learned what the concerns of their children and youth are from country surveys, consultations and youth conferences. In Amman, for instance, adolescents from 16 countries who gathered at a regional youth forum proposed initiatives on some of their key issues, among them jobs and education, and the vast number of young smokers and of youth in conflict situations.

At this juncture, the turn is ours. We asked children what they thought and what they hoped for. They told us. "Now," said Carol Bellamy at the close of the Special Session, "is time for action."



7

SPACES FOR PARTICIPATION

Optimizing children's participation involves a redrawing of the adult world. It entails adults listening to and making space for what children suggest. It means children being encouraged to develop and refine their competencies and put democratic values into practice. It depends on adults sharing control, power, decision-making and information.

But what likelihood is there that the adult world is ready to embrace the ideal of child participation and further take into account the views of children? Better than it was – but not as good as it needs to be.

Children suffer from discrimination simply because they are children. Proof of this is found in the fact that in many countries it remains legal to hit children. The belief that 'smacking' is an integral, even essential, part of parental discipline of children remains widespread. A UNICEF opinion survey in 35 countries of Europe and Central Asia reported that 6 out of 10 children face violent or aggressive behaviour within their families.⁶⁹

This discrimination is seen in many other instances as well, for example, in children's lack of access to influencing the media (*see Panel 7, 'Children and the media', page 58*); and their lack of access to information that is vital to their development and their abilities to successfully participate in the world.

Access to information

If children are to have a voice, they need access to information that is both timely and understandable to their particular intellectual stage of development. Children seek information from the moment that they are born.⁷⁰ The purpose of early stimulation is to encourage a child's mind to build the mechanisms for integrating signals received from birth and to help 'hard wire' the ability to learn into the brain at an early age. Furthermore, the educational process aims to provide the child with the information to understand, manipulate and participate in his or her environment.

Asiata Baâlla, a 12-year-old Moroccan, took this photo of two young children.

Morocco/"Imagine – your photos will open my eyes"/GTZ/2002

Access to information is a matter of survival in many situations, most urgently today in the midst of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Misconceptions and ignorance about the disease are widespread among young people. The misconceptions vary from one culture to another, and particular rumours gain currency in some populations both on how HIV is spread (by mosquito bites or witchcraft, for example) and how it can be avoided (by eating a certain fish, for example). Surveys from 40 countries indicated that more than 50 per cent of young people aged 15 to 24 harbour serious misconceptions about how HIV/AIDS is transmitted.

In the midst of this pandemic, a basic education of good quality for all children – one that offers sound information about sexuality and HIV, builds self-esteem and decision-making skills and gives children the information they need to protect themselves – is essential to save lives endangered by the ignorance and fear that surround the disease.

Perhaps the most important aspect of access to information is how it empowers those who have it. Access to information informs the entire developmental process protected by the Convention and is a critical factor in both the personal development of a child into adulthood, as well as for the social development of that child into full membership in his or her community.

Jonathan Bronner, 12 years old, poses for a self-portrait in his home in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, United States.

Jonathan Bronner/Kemetic Institute/United States/2002

Children's parliaments

Children and young people are virtually invisible in terms of public policy and of voices expressed on the national stage. Even in the healthiest democratic societies run in the service of voters' interests, children tend to be marginalized – on the assumption that their parents will speak for them. Former President of the European Parliament Nicole Fontaine has concluded: "The relative invisibility of children's own unique experience and understanding from all the key legislative and policy-making forums has served to produce policies which discriminate against children. Nowhere is this more evident than in the field



of economic policy where the lack of active consideration of the situation of children has produced an unacceptable growth in child poverty across the European Union.”⁷¹

One solution is the number of children’s parliaments, which is mushrooming, representing a positive response to the need to both listen to young voices and to foster democratic citizenship. Perhaps for the latter reason there is particular and encouraging enthusiasm for the parliaments in newly democratic nations such as Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Slovenia – and Timor-Leste, where a student parliament met just days before independence in May 2002 so that it could present its recommendations to the new Government (*see Panel 5, ‘Building nations’, page 40*).

In Albania, regional youth parliaments began as pilot projects in the prefectures of Shkodër and Gjirokastër in 2000, spread to four other areas in 2001 and by the end of 2002 will cover 80 per cent of Albania. The parliaments are elected every two years and meet once a fortnight. All the regional assemblies gather in the capital, Tirana, for an annual session, where they raise key concerns with national adult parliamentarians. Among their recent initiatives has been a campaign against the search for oil in the environmentally valuable Nartes wetland.⁷²

Inevitably there are wide differences in the ways in which children’s parliaments are organized. None have law-making power that would take them beyond being a consultative process providing input to governments. None are directly elected by all children, though delegates sometimes emerge from the public-school system and may have been elected by fellow students. In other examples young people come together for a single day to

discuss current issues without any preparation, training or follow-up.

But other children’s parliaments are more carefully established and organized. In Thailand, for example, more than 200 youth representatives, including children with disabilities, from schools in all 76 provinces, were brought together for three days to take part in the National Youth Parliament 2002. Through democratic and participatory processes, several issues were identified, shared and debated through passionate and active participation. When their report was presented to the Cabinet meeting on January 22, youth participation was adopted as a government policy.⁷³

In Ireland, the *Dáil na nÓg* – which met for the first time in September 2001 – was specifically requested by young people during consultations leading up to the new National Children’s Strategy. One of the main goals of the Strategy is that “children will have a voice.” The Government has backed its words with money: in March 2002, it announced funding of 2,500 euros for each city and county in Ireland towards the cost of creating a children’s council. Each of these councils will discuss local issues and will elect members of the national Parliament. The Minister for Children, Mary Hanafin, has promised that this will be no empty exercise: “*Dáil na nÓg* isn’t a day out in Dublin’s Mansion house where children complain and politicians pretend to listen. We have given a clear commitment that the ideas and views expressed at each *Dáil na nÓg* will be taken into consideration in government policy. With the local children’s councils around the country, the same will apply.”⁷⁴

In Jordan, where the election process for the Children’s Parliament is particularly rigorous,

students elect representatives – some 3,500 of them – who take part in 18 separate conferences at the governorate level on issues affecting their lives. These in turn elect 350 children to attend a national conference, which develops a workplan for the children’s parliament, then elects its 120 members. The elected members, like adult parliamentarians, hold their seats for several years.⁷⁵

There is one thread that weaves throughout youth parliaments, despite the differences across them and the varying extents to which they influence the politics of the moment: they all enhance child participation and introduce young people to the workings of a democratic government.

In Georgia, for example, while the young people who took part in the Children and Youth Parliament were successful in launching an anti-corruption movement and a series of television discussion programmes about the issues facing young Georgians, the most significant impact of the Parliament was on individual participants. According to one young parliamentarian, Badri Papava, “Nobody knows what the future will bring, maybe some will proceed with the politics, others will choose a different sphere of work, but these young people will use the experience gained during these two years.”

Parliament Vice-speaker, Tamar Janikashvili, explained, “Georgia has educated children who want to participate in the management of the country and who care about what happens in Georgia.”⁷⁶

Risks with children’s participation

Positive examples notwithstanding, there are some risks attached to young people’s participation, and children as well as adults need

to be aware of them. In public meetings, children may be treated as window dressing, tokens of child participation; they may be treated as though they are representative of their peers when they are not; adolescents may be considered to speak for young children when they are in fact closer to adulthood. They may become part of a new elite through frequent participation in international meetings and lose the confidence of the groups that nominated them.

There are other, graver dangers. While political activism for adolescents in relatively stable countries might be a desirable step in learning the practices of democracy, in some social and political contexts encouraging children and adolescents to speak out may put them at increased risk of harm.⁷⁷ Children should not be expected to play leading roles in confronting repressive public authorities; in societies where it is hazardous for their parents to speak their minds, children should not be tossed into the breach.

In some conflict situations children’s participation becomes increasingly important. Thinking of children as helpless victims dependent on adults in situations such as armed conflict is not necessarily the best way to help them to cope. Clearly some children are deeply traumatized by their experiences and need specialist care. But it is important to recognize that children can usually contribute significantly to their own protection. In addition, children do not always experience adversity in the way that adults do – so that if their views are not actively sought and taken into account, well-intentioned actions can be inappropriate or even harmful.⁷⁸

Listening to children about peace

In long-standing conflicts children often have a great deal to offer in terms of building bridges

and developing peace. Amid the apparently intractable conflict in southern Sudan, for example, UNICEF's programming has been influenced by the opinion of children. In November 1999, 37 children and adolescents, drawn from different ethnic groups all over southern Sudan, gathered for a conference in which they outlined a way forward based on achieving peace through education. Their vision has significantly influenced the subsequent development of the UNICEF programme in southern Sudan.⁷⁹

Similarly, when a conference was held in July 2000 about child soldiers in southern Sudan, children and young people played a major part, along with parents, teachers, traditional chiefs, priests and spiritual leaders, NGOs, civil authorities and the military, in developing action plans for the future. Former child soldiers, for example, said they would not rejoin the army but would continue their education. School-children said they would like to stay in school and asked that games and sports be introduced into their extra-curricular activities.⁸⁰

In Sri Lanka, the work of Save the Children (Norway), together with its local partner, the Eastern Self-Reliant and Community Awakening Organization (ESCO), has also demonstrated that children's participation in conflict zones can actually help protect them. Children from the Tamil village of Sivanthivu, for example, lived in a 'grey' area controlled neither by government forces nor by the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) forces. One of the first actions of their new Children's Club was to address the decision of the local Sri Lankan army commander to block the road to their village. This had effectively ended the education of the children who travel by bus to nearby Valachchenai to attend school; walking or cycling to school would have exposed children to harassment by soldiers. Previous efforts by villagers had failed, yet the Children's Club gathered the signatures of all the residents of Sivanthivu on a petition. NGO workers passed this petition on and managed to have the matter raised with the army at a senior level. The road was duly reopened and the bus has come to the village ever since.⁸¹

Obviously delighted by the 11-year-old puppeteer, Anderson Diniz, young children at Casa Grande Foundation's communications school seem oblivious to the 16-year-old photographer, João Paulo Morôpo.

CHILDREN AND THE MEDIA

"Say it!" And they have.

"Troç!" – the Albanian word for "say it" or "tell it like it is" – is a news show produced by children aged 13 to 18 and broadcast on Albanian National TV, reaching an audience of nearly 75,000 viewers each week.

In a country where nearly half the population lives below the poverty line and some 36,000 to 44,000 children emigrate illegally to Europe every year, a group of 70-80 young people is trying to make a difference.

"The only goal that all of us have," says 16-year-old Ebi Spahiu, a *Troç* reporter, "is to bring out the truth, so that things can improve."

With UNICEF support, *Troç* is proving to be one of the most innovative and influential forms of youth participation in the region. Young people themselves write and produce the programmes, which are not only popular but often produce change. In one instance, a month after an exposé by *Troç* reporters showed the poor treatment of children in a dormitory, local authorities met with the director of the dormitory and fired him. In another case, after the show highlighted the lack of textbooks in high schools in one town, educational authorities promptly provided textbooks in time for students to study for final exams.

Troç is part of a bigger initiative that UNICEF is developing in the region: the Young People's Media Network, which encourages groups of young media creators through exchanges, such as missions in the Balkans, partnerships, internships, awards, grants and donations.

Using the media as a tool for building ethnic tolerance and understanding, the *Troç* team has documented inter-ethnic youth attempts at reconciliation and dialogue in Kosovo, Yugoslavia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. "Through these stories," writes Akil Kraja, 16, *Troç* reporter and producer, "we would like to build bridges of communication and understanding through young people of different ethnic groups. To accept the language, culture and traditions of the others is the first step if we want to have peace in the region."

Casa Grande

In Brazil, the impact of children's participation in the media can be seen in a small city in the north-east region where the Casa Grande Foundation draws children and young people who are eager to learn more than what they are taught in school.

"Even though I had heard about Casa Grande before and admired its work, my husband and I didn't want our daughter to come," says Maria Macedo de Freitas, mother of Samara Diniz, 19, a reporter for Casa Grande. "Here in the *sertão* (interior dry land), girls are supposed to stay home, next to their mothers."¹

But Samara kept sneaking into Casa Grande after school, and her mother kept fetching her back home at her father's demand. "She disagreed with her 'macho' dad," said Samara's mother, "something we don't do here. But her insistence and her achievements as a reporter inspired me to also start participating in Casa Grande's activities." Now, Samara's mother is the Director of Education at Casa Grande and Samara's father is proud of his daughter.



Courtesy of Fundação Casa Grande/Brazil

Founded in 1992 by Brazilian musicians Alemberg Quindins and Rosiane Limaverde, the Casa Grande Foundation is supported by UNICEF and other partners. Some 70 children and adolescents participate in planning and decision-making and are included in the management of the Foundation. They produce videos, comic books, newsletters and radio programmes for children and youth. "Even though we are in a small city," says Samuel Macedo, 17, Radio Manager and member of the TV team and a rock band, "we can have information and knowledge like any other youth in Brazil."

In April 2001, the project team launched a magazine and a video developed with the support of UNICEF and the United Nations Foundation. The material on the prevention of smoking was so successful that it was distributed to more than 550,000 children and adolescents at schools in Ceará. "The activities that I develop here changed my life," says Samuel, "because I didn't use to think about the future and I didn't care too much about life. Now I work on coordinating radio and TV programmes, I know how to handle musical instruments, computers, but most importantly, how to interact in a group."

ICDB

International media initiatives have also been an effective means of creating opportunities for children to voice their opinions. On the second Sunday of every December since 1992, thousands of children around the world celebrate the International Children's Day of Broadcasting (ICDB). Children take to the air as reporters, presenters and producers of programmes on issues including children's rights, poverty,

HIV/AIDS, discrimination and conflict. With more than 2,000 participating broadcasters, ICDB is the largest broadcasting campaign for children in the world.

A joint initiative of the International Council of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (NATAS) and UNICEF, ICDB has moved beyond the Day itself and encouraged children's participation in the media throughout the year. Some programmes created to celebrate the Day have turned into weekly programmes; others have led to the opening of training institutes.

One such example is the creation in August 2002 of China's Galaxy Teenagers' TV Media Training School by the China Central Television (CCTV) for children aged 9 to 12. From the nearly 300 children of Beijing who applied and attended the admissions exam, 50 were selected to be trained as young TV journalists who can work part-time at CCTV until the age of 14. In the near future, more children will be given the chance to participate as more branches of the school open throughout the country.

"I think I'm lucky to have had this chance to be a child reporter and to do interviews in the field especially," says Yang Yi, 12, Galaxy child reporter. "I've got to see for myself how reporting is hard work and what needs to go into a good interview. I think I learn patience, how to appear confident in front of the camera and how to adapt to changing conditions. Being a child reporter has broadened my vision, taking me to meet people and to be in places I wouldn't have otherwise been to."

¹ Casa Grande, *A Escola de Comunicação da Meninada do Sertão*, video produced by SENAC, the National Service on Commercial Learning, 2001.

SAY YES!! FOR CHILDREN

Love & Peace

郁江

HANABI



I love Peace
Viva Colombia
Say yes for children's

Thuy Trang

Viet Nam

COLOMBIA

Say yes for children
9-07

umina
umii!



los unidos

STREETVISION

8

AT THE UN SPECIAL SESSION ON CHILDREN

“In 1990 our countries signed the CRC but they have done next to nothing to realize it,” said a 17-year-old delegate, his body shaking as he spoke, though out of sheer passion rather than nerves. “We agree with your promises but now you have to show you mean it. I am talking from the heart – you must do the same.”⁸²

All the possible opportunities, benefits and pitfalls surrounding children and participation were at issue in the lead-up to the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in May 2002. This was something of a test case of meaningful children’s participation at the international level, which took UNICEF, governments and non-governmental organizations into genuinely new territory.

Starting with the World Summit for Children in 1990, there was increasing recognition of the importance of children’s participation, based in large part on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and increasing readiness to try to make participation possible in international conferences. By 1997, when UNICEF conducted a systematic review of children’s participation

in its own work, a total of 302 UNICEF-supported programmes reported young people’s involvement, with particularly high rates of involvement in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States and in Eastern and Southern Africa.

The preparations for the Special Session on Children started early, involving extensive regional consultation: young people’s organizations participated in high-level meetings in Beijing, Berlin, Cairo, Kathmandu, Kingston, Panama City and Rabat to review progress since the World Summit for Children and to guide action for the future. The formal preparatory gatherings in New York for the Special Session provided opportunities for experimentation and for learning from inevitable mistakes.

This is part of a banner that stretched for 26 feet at the Children’s Forum and more than 400 young delegates from 154 countries had the opportunity to write and draw messages on it.

The Global Movement for Children

In the run-up to the Special Session, the Global Movement for Children brought together adults, adolescents and children; campaigners, counsellors and crusaders for child rights: those who cared about forging a world fit for children. While recognizing that children and adolescents cannot be expected to challenge the world's misplaced priorities on their own, this energetic alliance embraced the idea that the job could not be done by adults **without** the passion and perspectives of children.

The primary focus of the Global Movement for Children was a major worldwide campaign called 'Say Yes for Children', launched at events around the world beginning in March 2001. Adults and children alike were asked to say 'Yes' to a pledge – "I believe that all children should be free to grow in health, peace and dignity" – and to support the Global Movement's 10-point agenda for action. They were then asked to identify the three action priorities that they considered most important. The participation involved in a campaign of such a mass scale is bound to be limited. But this element of interactivity – whether over the Internet or on widely distributed paper forms – undoubtedly helped draw both children and adults into the process.

By the time the 'Say Yes' pledges were presented to Nelson Mandela and Graça Machel at the Children's Forum in New York in May 2002, the total number – far exceeding expectations – stood at nearly 95 million, including 20 million from China and a remarkable 16 million (one in four of the population) from Turkey. With the overwhelming number of pledges coming from children, the three issues identified as most urgent were education, discrimination and poverty.

More importantly, the drive to involve as many people as possible provided a focus for promoting discussion and raising awareness of child rights – as in Peru where 800,000 children 'said yes'. In East Asia, 10 countries took the opportunity to hold a National Children's Forum as part of the 'Say Yes' campaign. They then sent representatives to a regional forum in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and selected a delegation of children to the UN Special Session on Children to represent the region. In the Syrian Arab Republic, a national seminar saw 150 children aged 6 to 12 discuss the Convention on the Rights of the Child with writers, artists, educational experts and television producers. The children presented a list of recommendations to the Prime Minister, which included their request for a children's parliament, and said they now dared to hope for change.⁸³

The 'Say Yes for Children' campaign allowed an arc of participation for millions of children and young people, who could trace a path from the pledge they made in their local communities to leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Graça Machel, and from them to the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children, and on into the outcome document and a declaration by world governments.

The Children's Forum

The 400 plus children who travelled to New York City in May to attend the Special Session came from more than 150 countries. Most were in their teens, though some were as young as age 10. Some had been selected rather than elected, either by governments or by NGOs, and thus could not be considered representative. On the other hand, many had been chosen not just for their confidence or eloquence but because they were already

passionately engaged in advocacy for children's rights or had launched their own campaign.

The Children's Forum, which lasted for three days, was opened by the UN Secretary-General and closed with a ceremony presided over by Nelson Mandela, Graça Machel and Mrs. Nane Annan as guests of honour. Between these two events, the only adults present were interpreters and facilitators. Children started off in regional groups, establishing the ground rules of respect for each other and 'unity in diversity' that were to govern their time together. They then divided into groups to discuss eight key issues, which they had identified as exploitation and abuse, environment, protection from war, children's participation, health, HIV/AIDS, poverty and education. Rapporteurs were elected, as was a group delegated to draft a common statement.

The statement 'A World Fit for Us' was read out to the UN General Assembly's Special Session on Children by 13-year-old Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta from Bolivia and 17-year-old Audrey Cheynut from Monaco. (See Panel 8, 'We are the world's children', page 66, and maps on pages 74-79.)

"Until now, I was only aware of the problems of the children of my community, but today for the first time I became aware of the problems of children from all over the world. This sharing and awareness brought us closer to each other and also made us feel compassionately for others. It also made me feel today that I should not only stand up for the rights of my country's children, but also for the rights of all children of the world. We are one!

"The children's views and words that were included in the document were very brilliant.

It was my first experience of hearing a document based on the voices of children, including my own voice. After listening to it, I thought, 'Children can change the world if they are given a chance. We have to fight for that chance.'"⁸⁴

Jehanzeb Khan, 12, Pakistan

There were children everywhere

The children's impact at the Special Session extended far beyond the Children's Forum itself. The presence and participation of children changed the style of the event, infusing proceedings with a directness, idealism and honesty that are too often absent from such international meetings. At press conferences and feedback meetings, child delegates explained their achievements and articulated their expectations with astonishing assurance – not to mention a freshness of approach that compared favourably with the often dry exchanges between adults elsewhere. As 15-year-old Manuel de Jesús Acosta Delgado from Peru put it: "Children have vision that goes deeper than a President's, who looks at everything on a very global level. They are more capable of seeing what needs to be done. They say it how it is – and how they feel."⁸⁵

Workshops and side sessions were enlivened by children's testimonies from every corner of the globe. The effect of their presence, quite as much as the substance of their words, provided its own message. The passionate belief in the value of children's participation resounded throughout. "We're ready," said Ukrainian teenager Kateryna Yasko, "to propose our equal and meaningful partnership...."

In 'Intergenerational Dialogue' workshops child delegates met face to face with prime ministers

and princes, ministers and heads of international agencies. The children's passionate frankness was often remarkable. When 16-year-old Fatoumatta Nduré from the Gambia, for example, welcomed participants – including the President of Mozambique and the King of Lesotho – to the Intergenerational Dialogue on Africa that she chaired, she said, "Welcome first to the children of Africa. And second to all child-friendly adults."

It is impossible to measure the positive overall impact of children's participation at the Special Session – though its empowering, transformative effect on each child's life is easy enough to imagine.

"This was the first time I have travelled outside my country," explained Umo Aua Bari, 17, from Guinea-Bissau. "It has been wonderful being here, seeing what it is like in the most powerful part of the world. But the best thing has been to be with the children. I had the feeling that I met with the whole world here. I knew something about children's problems before, especially in Africa, but I didn't know so much about their possibilities. This has shown me that it is possible to create a New World. The whole world now has to get it into their head that we have to change the world; everybody in their

own area has to feel that the future of the world lies in children."

One cannot but feel that only good can come from this intense interaction between children and the men and women with power to make a difference in the world. The UN Security Council, for example, held a formal meeting on children and armed conflict during the Special Session, and three children – from Africa, Asia and Europe – whose lives had been affected by war addressed the Council.

"The best thing you can do to help children in war," Eliza Kantardzic, 17, from Bosnia and Herzegovina, told the Security Council, "is to stop war, to prevent it. And that is something that this Council has the power to do. The real question is – is that power used?"

"Just the fact that children were given the platform to address the Security Council means a huge change and that is important," said Graça Machel, author of the 1996 UN Report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children and the recently published book, *The Impact of War on Children*, who also addressed the Council. "Children were at the top where they can tell anyone, including governments, what they feel and also what they expect from adults."⁸⁶

“We the children are experts on being 8, 12 or 17 years old in the societies of today.... To consult us would make your work more effective and give better results for children. My proposal is that you make us part of your team.”

Heidi Grande, 17
a Norwegian delegate to the
Special Session on Children

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (center) addresses the more than 400 young people who participated in the Children's Forum on opening day, 5 May 2002. Telling them how significant was their presence at the UN, the Secretary-General promised that their voices would be heard.

WE ARE THE WORLD'S CHILDREN

After three days of discussion and debate during the Children's Forum, an event preceding the United Nations Special Session on Children, some 400 young people agreed on a statement to be presented to world leaders. Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta, 13, from Bolivia and Audrey Cheynut, 17, from Monaco were chosen by their peers to represent them. As the Special Session commenced on 8 May 2002, these two young delegates to the Forum stood before the General Assembly and delivered their message. On this historic occasion, for the first time ever, children formally addressed the UN General Assembly on behalf of children, giving voice to their vision for a better world.

A World Fit for Us

We are the world's children.

We are the victims of exploitation and abuse.
We are street children.
We are the children of war.
We are the victims and orphans of HIV/AIDS.
We are denied good-quality education and health care.
We are victims of political, economic, cultural, religious and environmental discrimination.
We are children whose voices are not being heard: it is time we are taken into account.
We want a world fit for children, because a world fit for us is a world fit for everyone.

In this world,

We see respect for the rights of the child:

- governments and adults having a real and effective commitment to the principle of children's rights and applying the Convention on the Rights of the Child to all children,
- safe, secure and healthy environments for children in families, communities and nations.

We see an end to exploitation, abuse and violence:

- laws that protect children from exploitation and abuse being implemented and respected by all,
- centres and programmes that help to rebuild the lives of victimized children.

We see an end to war:

- world leaders resolving conflict through peaceful dialogue instead of by using force,
- child refugees and child victims of war protected in every way and having the same opportunities as all other children,
- disarmament, elimination of the arms trade and an end to the use of child soldiers.

We see the provision of health care:

- affordable and accessible life-saving drugs and treatment for all children,
- strong and accountable partnerships established among all to promote better health for children.

We see the eradication of HIV/AIDS:

- educational systems that include HIV prevention programmes,
- free testing and counselling centres,



- information about HIV/AIDS freely available to the public,
- orphans of AIDS and children living with HIV/AIDS cared for and enjoying the same opportunities as all other children.

We see the protection of the environment:

- conservation and rescue of natural resources,
- awareness of the need to live in environments that are healthy and favourable to our development,
- accessible surroundings for children with special needs.

We see an end to the vicious cycle of poverty:

- anti-poverty committees that bring about transparency in expenditure and give attention to the needs of all children,
- cancellation of the debt that impedes progress for children.

We see the provision of education:

- equal opportunities and access to quality education that is free and compulsory,
- school environments in which children feel happy about learning,
- education for life that goes beyond the academic and includes lessons in understanding, human rights, peace, acceptance and active citizenship.

We see the active participation of children:

- raised awareness and respect among people of all ages about every child's right to full and meaningful participation, in the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,

- children actively involved in decision-making at all levels and in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating all matters affecting the rights of the child.

We pledge an equal partnership in this fight for children's rights. And while we promise to support the actions you take on behalf of children, we also ask for your commitment and support in the actions we are taking – because the children of the world are misunderstood.

We are not the sources of problems; we are the resources that are needed to solve them.
We are not expenses; we are investments.
We are not just young people; we are people and citizens of this world.

Until others accept their responsibility to us, we will fight for our rights.
We have the will, the knowledge, the sensitivity and the dedication.
We promise that as adults we will defend children's rights with the same passion that we have now as children.
We promise to treat each other with dignity and respect.
We promise to be open and sensitive to our differences.

We are the children of the world, and despite our different backgrounds, we share a common reality. We are united by our struggle to make the world a better place for all.
You call us the future, but we are also the present.



9

MOVING FORWARD

There is no turning back to an era when children suffered in silence, when they waited on the world's protection and charity. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has transformed the landscape irreversibly. Its 54 articles contain not only a clarity of thought and care of phrasing unusual in instruments of international law but also a rare wisdom of which the world should be justly proud. That it has been nearly universally accepted is a tribute in itself.

The effect of the Convention continues to be profound. From Malaysia to Mexico, Namibia to Norway, with every passing day more children understand more about their rights, and those living and working with them understand more about how to respect those rights. While work in child participation is still tentative, uneven and relatively unevaluated, there are lessons that cannot be unlearned.

One of the broadest, most profound lessons of all is that children are capable of much more than is normally thought: at virtually every age from birth onwards children's capacities are greater than previously imagined. Children will rise to meet the challenges in front of them.

But for the millions of children caught up in armed conflict or condemned to a half-life of sexual slavery or hazardous labour, the challenges are far greater than any child should have to bear. The world must protect its children far better than it does at present, even as it opens the door to their participation.

And open the door it must. Not only because the children who walk through it will be better able to protect themselves, but also because we cannot design a world fit for children without carefully listening to what they have to say.

Democracy is neither easy nor guaranteed. As UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan reminds us, "One of the greatest challenges to humankind in the new century will be the struggle to make the practice of democracy truly universal."⁸⁷

If we are to meet the goals of 'A World Fit for Children' and attain the Millennium Development Goals, if we are to change this divided, damaged, conflict-ridden world by advancing the practice of democracy, if we are to make the world truly fit for all people – we will only do so with the full participation of children and young people.

Playful for the camera, this Rwandan orphan, himself a young photographer, has his picture snapped by 16-year-old J. Leon Imanizabayo.

⁸⁷Through the Eyes of Children/The Rwanda Project/2002