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JULY 2022

# UNICEF CHILD RIGHTS SCHOOLS TOOLKIT – CHILD PARTICIPATION

**HOW TO INCLUDE RIGHTS-BASED CHILD PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOLS**

**For schools**

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# CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

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**Cover -** ©UNICEF/UN0647676/Bänsch: At a Child Rights School in Germany, the children have set themselves the goal of making children's rights known at the school. Everyone wants to make sure – including the adults – that children's rights are respected (2022)

# Acknowledgements

# Introduction

This toolkit is for teachers and schools. It explains why a child rights approach to participation is important and how to facilitate it in schools. Section I is aimed at educators who work with children of all ages. It explains the basic requirements and process to follow to facilitate child participation that is inclusive of all children. Section I applies to any school setting, whether or not the school is part of a UNICEF Child Rights Schools (CRS) initiative.

Section II is aimed at schools which are part of a UNICEF CRS initiative. Rights-based child participation is an essential integral component of the CRS initiative. It is one of the minimum requirements set out in the 2022 UNICEF CRS Framework. Section II of this toolkit helps schools to unpack what this means in practice. It provides practical tips on how to embed rights-based child participation into the planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluating and learning of the initiative at the level of individual schools.

Annex E provides additional information on rights-based participation for UNICEF National Committees and country offices who are designing and implementing CRS initiatives overall.



Hi! I'm Benji.
I'm a teacher.
I will share questions and tips to help you understand how to embed rights-based participation in your school.

# SECTION I: RIGHTS-BASED CHILD PARTICIPATION EXPLAINED

## 1. What is rights-based child participation?

UNICEF defines adolescent participation as "adolescents (individually and/or collectively) form and express their views and influence matters that concern them directly and indirectly."[1] This definition can be expanded to apply to all children under 18 years of age, not just adolescents. The UNICEF CRS Framework refers more specifically to "rights-based child participation" to draw attention to the importance of applying a child rights approach. According to the CRS Framework, "rights-based child participation builds the capacity of children as rights-holders to claim their rights, and the capacity of school staff as duty-bearers to fulfill their obligations, taking into account the nine basic requirements [outlined by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child[2]] of being: 1. Transparent and informative; 2. Voluntary; 3. Respectful 4. Relevant; 5. Child-friendly; 6. Inclusive; 7. Supported by training; 8. Safe and sensitive to risk; 9. Accountable". The rights-holder/duty-bearer relationship and the nine basic requirements are explored further in sections 3 and 4. This toolkit in general provides ideas on how to apply all of this in practice for UNICEF CRS. Many of the principles are also relevant for other schools which are not part of this specific initiative. It's not just about "achieving" child participation: it's about doing this in a way that appreciates the roles of the children and adults involved, and which respects the dignity and agency of children as rights-bearing human beings.

## 2. Why is rights-based child participation so important for schools?

Since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989 there has been an increase in awareness and understanding of the importance of children's participation. Although the importance of welcoming children's points of view is recognised, especially in matters that concern them, there have been some challenges in making rights-based child participation constant and consistent in daily school life. For example, in a national survey with 6-18-year-olds by UNICEF France, 26.9 per cent of children report that they do not have a trusted adult to confide in within their school if they need to[3]. Before exploring how to improve this in practice, we present some key reminders as to why rights-based child participation is so important in the school context.

### a. Understand child participation as a human right
Children have the right to be heard in all matters affecting them, in addition to rights and freedoms to appropriate information, thought, expression, association and peaceful assembly. Children may exercise the right to participation in various ways, individually or in groups, including participation in decisions taken at home, at school or in the community, and this applies to all children capable of forming a view. This obligation is also reflected at the local level, and requires schools, communities, and cities to foster and enable child participation practices and structures and ensure that children can be heard safely and effectively[4]. It is not only an autonomous right, but also a general principle of the CRC. This means that the exercise of the right to participation is an essential lever for the realisation of all children's rights. Article 12 is also closely linked to other rights, including the rights to freedom of expression (Article 13), freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14), freedom of association and peaceful assembly (Article 15), privacy (Article 16) and information (Article 17). The State, as primary duty-bearer, has obligations to create an enabling environment to allow the views of children to be heard on practices and policies that directly or indirectly concern them. Therefore public schools have responsibilities to listen to children and to take their views seriously.

1. UNICEF (2020), *Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement*, p.6.

2. *Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.12, The Right of the Child to be Heard*, para 134. See also UNICEF (2020), *Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement,* pp. 6-10.

3. UNICEF France (2021) national consultation of 6-18-year-olds: *https://www.unicef.fr/article/la-jeunesse-bonne-ecole-ce-sont-les-premiers-concernes-qui-en-parlent-le-mieux*

4. UNICEF (2022), *Effective, representative, and inclusive child participation at the local level: A study on child and youth councils in UNICEF National Committee countries*, p.8.

**b. Increase relevant programmes and improve services and policies**

Children's knowledge about their own lives, their creativity, skills, and aspirations can be harnessed to inform the development and monitoring of more effective, relevant, and sustainable services, policies, and practices. Child participation should allow for an adequate reflection of children's individual and collective needs, views of the world, responsibilities, and desires. Their engagement strengthens adult decision-making and results in more relevant, more effective and more sustainable practices[5].

**c. Enhance protection and non-discrimination**

Having both the right and the space to voice their views and to be heard are powerful means through which children can challenge discrimination, violence, exploitation, or injustice. Denying children the right to be heard and failing to put in place accessible and safe systems through which they can challenge violence and abuse has allowed for cultures and practice of abuse to be perpetuated with relative impunity. In order to expose such abuses and prevent their recurrence, it is imperative that children are encouraged to speak up and have access to safe and accessible mechanisms of complaint and redress. Moreover, when children use these mechanisms of complaint, they must believe that they are heard, taken seriously, and that action will be taken. Protecting children is possible through the creation of safe cultural environments in which children build the confidence in all contexts to express their views[6]. For example, UNICEF France has noted that in their CRS children are more aware of their rights and are therefore able to detect violations of their rights outside school. A small number of students confide in teachers about out-of-school situations where their rights have not been respected. UNICEF UK has examples where knowledge of rights, and being able to use the language of rights, has empowered children to speak up about abuse they are experiencing, when they were not able to do so previously.

**d. Strengthen child development and well-being**

Childhood, particularly adolescence, is a critical period of rapid growth, learning, adaptation, and neurobiological development. Participatory opportunities enhance children's communication, problem-solving and negotiation skills and allow them to build better relationships and connectedness with their peers, families, and communities. However, children are not the sole beneficiaries of child participation. Adults also have an opportunity to see their skills flourish and may experience improvements in their well-being when interacting with children[7]. Participation enables children to gain more self-awareness (through opportunities to explore their own identity and views), self-esteem (when their words and actions are valued by others) and self-confidence (through the development of communication and social skills in group interactions).

**e. Enhance accountability and democracy**

Participation increases opportunities for children to promote accountability and good governance. When they have access to decision makers they can assert, claim, and exercise their rights, and strengthen accountability. Child participation and the potential election process for school councils and other representative bodies offer opportunities for children to enhance their understanding of and commitment to democratic processes, accountability, and transparency. They provide a hands-on view of how power relations unfold, and decision making takes place. Moreover, when well executed, child participation at the school, community and municipality levels is especially important because it allows all children from different walks of life to reflect on and influence decisions affecting them[8]. For example, having learned about their rights, children from some of UNICEF Germany's CRS have involved local politicians in the initiative. In some cases, this has led to the establishment of children's councils at the municipal level. Students from one primary school council also initiated a parliament of all schools within their town. UNICEF Korea reports that after implementing the CRS initiative, children from one school asked the mayor to move the children's centre closer to their schools.

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5. Ibid, p.8.
6. Ibid, p.8.
7. Ibid, p.9.
8. Ibid, p.9.

## 3. Child rights approach

**A child rights approach is one that:**

- furthers the realization of child rights as laid down in the CRC and other international human rights instruments;
- Uses child rights standards and principles from the CRC and other international human rights instruments to guide behaviour, actions, policies and programmes (in particular non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; the right to be heard and taken seriously; and the child's right to be guided in the exercise of his/her rights by caregivers, parents and community members, in line with the child's evolving capacities);
- builds the capacity of children as rights-holders to claim their rights and the capacity of duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations to children[9].

The strength of a rights-based approach to child participation, for both children and adults, is the relationship between rights-holders on one side and duty-bearers on the other. All human beings, both children and adults, are rights-holders, and there are a number of international human rights treaties that protect all our rights. When we talk specifically about children's rights, however, then children (under-18s) are the main rights-holders and adults are the duty-bearers (those who have a responsibility to promote, protect and fulfil children's rights). 'Primary' duty-bearers are the State and anyone who works for the State, including public school teachers[10]. However, we also talk about 'secondary' duty-bearers: adults who play an important role in children's lives, regardless of their connection to the State. This includes parents/guardians, community members, private school teachers, businesses and so on.



All teachers and school staff are duty-bearers for children's rights, whether we work in public or private schools!

The relationship between rights-holders and duty-bearers can be represented by the image of an arch - one of the strongest structures in architecture. Just as an arch supports a building, those of us working on child rights are trying to support strong families, communities, societies and global solidarity. We do this by supporting duty-bearers on the one side to fulfill their obligations and by building the capacity of rights-holders on the other side to claim their rights. We aim to build collaborative relationships between duty-bearers and rights-holders where possible, with both sides meeting in the middle to form a strong 'arch'- or, in our case, a strong CRS. The arch image can also illustrate the importance of respecting the rights of others. It is difficult to build strong arches if you are busy trying to knock down other people's arches or if they are trying to knock down yours; hence the need to respect the rights of others. (Please note: While it is

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9. UNICEF (2014), *Child Rights Education Toolkit: Rooting Child Rights in Early Childhood Education, Primary and Secondary Schools* – First Edition, p.21.
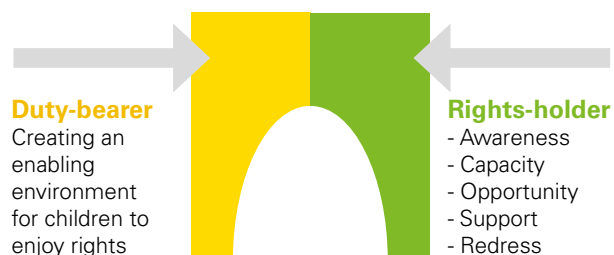
10. This is because it is the State that signs and ratifies international human rights treaties (like entering into a legally binding contract) and through this contract the State, and their agents, have the main responsibility to implement the provisions in practice.

important to respect the rights of others, it should never be suggested or taught that rights are dependent on children fulfilling certain responsibilities. Rights are 'inalienable': that means you can't take them away from someone. Rights must not be used as a way to punish children or control their behaviour).

> Ah! So rights-based child participation is not just about building the capacity of children. If we don't also prepare adults and help everyone come on the journey together then our arch might fall down and people will get frustrated.

## THE ARCH OF HUMAN RIGHTS

**Duty-bearer**
Creating an enabling environment for children to enjoy rights

**Rights-holder**
- Awareness
- Capacity
- Opportunity
- Support
- Redress

In terms of the elements that make up a child rights approach, we have focused here on the arch of human rights due to its particular importance to rights-based child participation, but if you want to learn more about the 'table leg test' for the child rights approach, then see Annex A. It is important to understand that child participation is only one aspect of the child rights approach, albeit a very important aspect and the particular focus of this toolkit. There is much more to implementing child rights in the school environment than 'just' working on child participation: consider all articles of the CRC, not just Articles 12-17.

Annex B of this document breaks down some of the common misconceptions about child participation and child rights that UNICEF has come across when working with schools.

© UNICEF/ Schermbrucker: Child Rights Education activities in South Africa (2019).

## 4. Nine basic requirements for child participation

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has defined nine basic requirements for quality child participation in its General Comment No. 12[11]. These principles also underpin UNICEF's approach to meaningful, effective, and ethical child participation at the local level. Child participation should be:

**1. Transparent and informative** - Children must receive complete, accessible, diversity-sensitive, and age-appropriate information about their right to express their views freely. Moreover, decision-makers must give due weight to children's views and provide information on how children's participation will take place, its scope, purpose, and potential impact.

**2. Voluntary** - Children participate voluntarily. Decision makers or groups with whom children collaborate should never force by coercion or requirement any child to express their views on any given issue. Participation is a right, not an obligation. No organization should force children to participate in representative participation mechanisms. If a school, community, or city-level organization establishes a child participation mechanism, that organization must inform children of the voluntary nature of their participation.

**3. Respectful** - Adults must treat children's views with respect. Unless children believe that adults will really listen to and value their contributions, they will not feel confident in expressing them. Moreover, adults working with children should be aware of the different cultures and background of each individual and their views regarding their voice or image appearing in public. Adults also need an understanding of the socio-economic, environmental, and cultural context of the children's lives.

**4. Relevant** - The issues addressed by the child participation mechanism are more likely to be relevant to children if they reflect concrete concerns that children experience in their day-to-day lives in their local communities. Therefore, children should be free to raise issues that they themselves identify as important and be free to determine for themselves whether they choose to engage with issues adults raise. Their participation should build on their personal knowledge – the information and insights that children have about their own lives, their communities and the issues that affect them.

**5. Child-friendly** - A child-friendly environment is crucial to meaningful child participation. It requires a space where adults adapt discussions and projects to the capacities and needs of children. Additionally, adults provide appropriate levels of support, so children feel able to contribute to their school and community. Child-friendliness incudes recognizing that different children will have different support needs. Moreover, in accordance with their evolving capacities and their ages and backgrounds, they may need to participate through various of alternative approaches.

**6. Inclusive** - Inclusivity means acknowledging that children constitute a diverse group and positively considering differences without discrimination on any grounds. It is essential to ensure that the participatory environment is gender and culture sensitive and takes proactive measures to include children from different communities and backgrounds and children of different ages and different abilities. Creating inclusive participation will need a commitment to extensive and broad communication to groups of children who may be harder to reach, and to ensuring that within the participation mechanism, all children receive support to take part on an equal basis. Participation must avoid existing patterns of discrimination and encourage opportunities for involvement of marginalized children. Children are not a homogeneous group and participation needs to provide for equality of opportunity for all.

**7. Supported by training** - Adults need preparation, skills, and support to facilitate children's participation, to provide them, for example, with skills in listening, working jointly with children and engaging children in accordance with their evolving capacities and safeguarding children's rights. Ensuring that adults working with children receive appropriate support and are accountable for their actions by evaluating their practices is

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11. Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.12, *The Right of the Child to be Heard*, para 134.

also essential to the long-term ensuring of safe and enabling environments for children. Children themselves may act as trainers and facilitators on how to promote effective participation. Additionally, children require capacity-building to strengthen their skills in, for example, effective awareness of their rights and training in organizing meetings, raising funds, dealing with the media, public speaking, and advocacy.

**8. Safe and sensitive to risk** - Adults have a responsibility towards the children with whom they work and must take every precaution to minimize the risk of harm to children. These risks of harm include physical or psychological violence, neglect, exploitation, or any other negative consequence of their participation. In certain situations, the expression of views by children may involve risks – from those in authority, from peers, or from family. Action necessary to provide appropriate protection will include the development of a clear child safeguarding strategy which recognizes the particular risks some groups of children face and the extra barriers they face in obtaining help. Children must be aware of their right to protection from harm and know where to go for help if they should need it. Investment in working with families and communities is important to build understanding of the value and implications of participation and to minimize children's exposure to risks of harm. However, the adults who lead these activities are responsible to ensure that children participate in a safe environment. This responsibility remains with the adults at all times.

**9. Accountable** - A commitment to follow-up and to evaluate child participation is essential. For example, if a child council participates in some research or a consultation on a given issue to give decision makers additional information, the decision makers must provide the children with feedback. In this case, those using the views of the children must provide information on the interpretation and use of the information they received. Moreover, where necessary, the adults must give the children the opportunity to challenge and influence the analysis of the findings. Any group using children's views or participation must give explicit feedback on how the children's participation has affected or may affect any outcomes. Wherever appropriate, children should have the opportunity to participate in follow-up processes or activities. Where possible, children should monitor and evaluate their participation.



© UNICEF/UN0619156/Baruah: Students inside their primary school classroom in the north-east of India (2022).
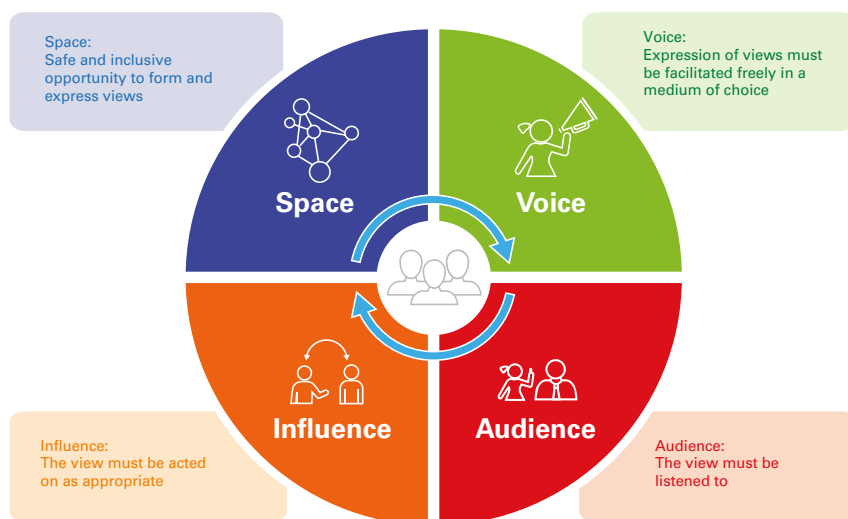
## 5. Participation is a process – the Lundy model

Participation is a process —not a one-off activity. It is not enough just to listen to children. Once children express their views, these views must receive proper and serious consideration with feedback on outcomes and decisions that follow. Moreover, children must have access to the necessary information and support to facilitate the expression of their views through the medium of their choice. In addition, children must have access to those in a position to influence decisions affecting them. Effective participation, therefore, requires space, voice, audience, and influence[12].

The Lundy Model of Participation helps to conceptualise Article 12 of the CRC. It focuses on four distinct, albeit interrelated, elements. The four elements have a rational chronological order. This implies the following conditions[13]:

- **Space:** Children need opportunities that give them the space and time to freely form and express their views and opinions. This space should be inclusive and offer equal opportunities to all, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.
- **Voice:** Children should be provided with appropriate information to inform their views and they should be able to use the media of their choice to communicate their views and negotiate decisions (e.g. verbal expression, art, digital media).
- **Audience:** Children's views should be respectfully and seriously heard by those who have the power and authority to act on them (e.g. schools, government officials, parents/guardians, social workers, UNICEF National Committees or country offices).
- **Influence:** The views of children should be given due consideration, and they should receive feedback on the outcome(s) and the extent of their influence.



Space:
Safe and inclusive opportunity to form and express views

Voice:
Expression of views must be facilitated freely in a medium of choice

Influence:
The view must be acted on as appropriate

Audience:
The view must be listened to

Space   Voice   Influence   Audience

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**You may find the following exercises useful to help children deepen their understanding of the right to participate:**

- **Compasito – Manual on human rights education for children: Actitivty 35 'Where do you stand?', page 184,** helps children to deepen their understanding of participation, to develop listening skills and to develop discussion and argumentation skills.

- **We are here – A child participation toolbox: Activity C1.1 'Making participation meaningful', page 84,** helps children and adults learn about the nine requirements for child participation, discuss how relevant each requirement is, and how they can achieve them together.

- **Partnerships for participation – child participation handbook: 'Who should decide', page 56,** is an activity to discuss who can and should participate in different situations.

12. UNICEF (2022), *Effective, representative, and inclusive child participation at the local level: A study on child and youth councils in UNICEF National Committee countries*, p.10.
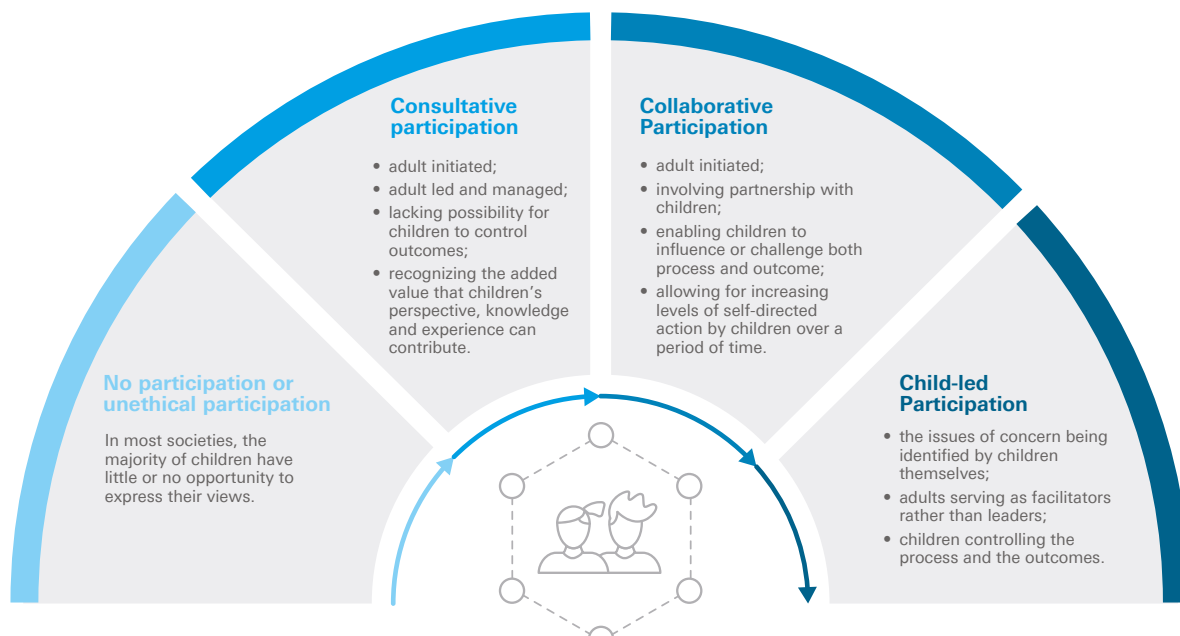
13. Lundy, L., (2007), 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, *British Educational Research Journal, 33(6)*, pp. 927-942.

Diagram taken from UNICEF (2019), *Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation.*

## 6. Levels of participation

Children can engage in a participatory process at different levels, depending on the context, the issues and the support and resources available: consultative, collaborative and child-led. **All levels can be appropriate for different purposes** but must always comply with the rights-holder and duty-bearer approach, the need for space, voice, audience, and influence, and be informed by the nine basic requirements[14].



**Consultative participation**
- adult initiated;
- adult led and managed;
- lacking possibility for children to control outcomes;
- recognizing the added value that children's perspective, knowledge and experience can contribute.

**Collaborative Participation**
- adult initiated;
- involving partnership with children;
- enabling children to influence or challenge both process and outcome;
- allowing for increasing levels of self-directed action by children over a period of time.

**No participation or unethical participation**

In most societies, the majority of children have little or no opportunity to express their views.

**Child-led Participation**
- the issues of concern being identified by children themselves;
- adults serving as facilitators rather than leaders;
- children controlling the process and the outcomes.

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**THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION CAN BE DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS[15]:**

**Consultative Participation** occurs when adults seek children's views to build knowledge and understanding of their lives and experiences or to design a programme. It involves an approach that is adult-initiated and led and managed by adults. However, it recognizes that children have a valuable perspective to contribute to the development of policies, services, or local facilities. For example:
- Ensuring that the views of children with disabilities are heard in relation to specialist support services in the school environment, linked to CRC Articles 2 and 23.
- Undertaking an online survey or running focus groups with children to explore enjoyment of rights in the school environment, for example safety in the playground or the nutritional value of food provided in the canteen, linked to CRC Articles 19 and 24.

**Collaborative Participation** involves a partnership between adults and children. Collaborative participation is usually adult-initiated but involves working with children as partners and empowers them to influence an initiative. It allows for increasing levels of self-directed action by children over a period of time. Participation in a CRS can be collaborative where children and adults work together in addressing issues of common concern. For example:
- Involving children in developing a policy or programme within the school to reduce waste and encourage recycling, linked to CRC Articles 24 and 29.

**Child-led Participation** is where adults provide children with the space and opportunity to initiate their own activities and carry out advocacy. Instead of responding to ideas or projects suggested by adults, the children have the support to make their own choices or establish their own structures or organizations for determining the issues that are most important to them and

14. Diagram adapted from UNICEF (2019), *Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation*, [original diagram refers to 'adolescent', replaced here with 'child'].

15. Adapted from UNICEF (2022), *Effective, representative, and inclusive child participation at the local level: A study on child and youth councils in UNICEF National Committee countries*, pp.19-20.

which issues they wish to address. It allows children to meet and organize their own activities and identify the issues that concern them. It involves adults serving as facilitators rather than leaders although it is important to recognize that, increasingly, children can and do participate actively online without adult involvement. However, even when children are leading activities themselves, adults should be ready to support with risk assessment and available to respond to any child safeguarding issues should they arise. For example, adults should help children with data protection when children have the need to collect or handle children's data. For example:

- Children identifying the need for, then implementing, a campaign to reduce road traffic and air pollution in the streets around their school, linked to CRC Articles 6, 24 and 29.

When exploring opportunities for involving children, assess what level of participation it might involve, whether this is the most appropriate level and whether it is possible to engage children more significantly. **Initiatives that begin as consultative can develop into collaborative or child-led activities in the longer term.** Furthermore, one initiative might contain a mixture of levels: children may lead on some aspects and be consulted or work collaboratively on other aspects. **Schools can function at all three levels depending on the context, the issues and the support and resources available and – significantly – the wishes of the children themselves. The tools in Section II can also help you with this.**

## 7. Inclusive child participation

The child rights approach must ensure that all children, including the most marginalized, can exercise their right to participate. All too often, however, school structures and approaches to participation can reinforce existing patterns of discrimination: student councils often appeal only to those children who are already articulate, confident and motivated to put themselves forward; children who are already popular with their classmates are more likely to be peer-voted onto a decision-making committee; younger children, pre-verbal and non-verbal children may often be excluded where participation opportunities rely on words; lack of time and money prevents materials being developed in accessible versions for children with disabilities etc.

The most marginalized children are those who are excluded from the civic, cultural, economic, political, social and/or educational opportunities available to other children. This may be due to individual, family and external factors – such as (but not limited to) ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, migrant or refugee status, indigenous identity, violence (at home, in communities, in institutions), substance abuse, racism, economic inequalities, stigma, being in residential care, children who are themselves caregivers, being in conflict with the law and/or having close family members in conflict with the law. Through a rights lens, the most marginalized children are therefore those experiencing multiple rights violations and/or those least able to access their rights. Special efforts must be made to ensure that marginalized children are facilitated, supported and encouraged to exercise their participation rights, yet without singling them out as being 'different', 'special' or 'representative' of all or other children who share their identity and/or circumstances.

Promoting participation of the most marginalized children means:
- Understanding who those children are in your context (without drawing attention to them in a stigmatising way);
- Reinforcing inclusion by considering that all children are potentially concerned by all subjects: for example, children with disabilities or with migrant status may be frustrated to be consulted only on issues related to disability or migration;
- Targeting all profiles of children (not just the 'easy' ones to contact; diversifying the profiles for committee members as much as possible);
- Being sensitive to all the diversitý of children's styles in terms of communication (ensuring materials and devices to allow all children who wish to, to express themselves; varying between oral, written and visual communication, etc.);
- Being aware of the digital divide if information is circulated and/or participation is facilitated online;
- Ensuring that participation does not represent a cost for children experiencing poverty;
- Being flexible as to how to meet a wide range of different needs.

To ensure the most marginalized children will be able to participate, it is essential to identify all the barriers that serve to exclude children from being able to participate on an equal basis.

The barriers can be related to attitudes, the environment, poverty, access to transport, communication, and language. In addition, for children who have a long history of experiencing discrimination and exclusion, it is important not to rely on the absence of obvious excluding factors. It is necessary to reach out and overtly welcome and include them[16]. The following actions can help to develop an inclusive environment for rights-based child participation:

**a) Remove the accessibility barriers**
- Make sure the meetings are held at times and in places where it is safe for all children to attend.
- Always hold meetings in places that are physically accessible to all children.
- Think about the transport available to children, its cost and availability and what support can be provided, where necessary.
- Consider the options of holding meetings both on and offline. If online meetings are being held, ensure that all children have the necessary devices and access to Wi-Fi or data to be able to participate. Consider the creation of a budget to ensure that all children have the necessary equipment.
- Where children do not speak the local language, ensure that there are interpreters available and that these children are afforded the time and space to contribute on an equal basis with others.
- Think about the activities children are engaged in and how to facilitate the inclusion of children with different disabilities[17]. More tips and tools are provided in *Take Us Seriously! Engaging Children with Disabilities in Decisions Affecting their Lives* developed by UNICEF, and Plan International's *Guidelines for Consulting with Children and Young People With Disabilities*.

**b) Promote confidence**
- Allow all children to attend committee meetings, even if they are not formal members, as this can encourage them to see how it all works, and to build confidence in the process.
- Involve local NGOs to provide support and expertise on how to involve children from different communities effectively.
- Work with parents/guardians to ensure that they know about the work and can support their children.
- Explore the idea of a 'buddy' system for children who are more isolated or vulnerable to be paired up with a peer.
- Ensure that where children drop out of participation processes, there is follow-up with them to explore the reasons and work with them to find solutions[18].

**c) Encourage inclusive attitudes and practice**
- Provide training for the whole school community on inclusion, non-discrimination and feeling safe. Work with the children to create a core set of ground rules for ensuring that everyone feels included.
- Provide training for teachers, adult support workers and facilitators on inclusive and participatory practices.
- Ensure that all communications highlight the representation of different groups of children.
- Develop a system of monitoring and evaluating the experiences of all children in order to find out how inclusive the environment is and where changes need to be made. It may be necessary to enable children to contribute confidentially if they are anxious about being criticized publicly.
- Develop, with students of the school, a 'feedback and reporting mechanism' that enables children who feel they are not being listened to, are being discriminated against or are marginalized, to get help in resolving the problem[19].

Even if this represents a human and financial cost, integrating diversity should not be seen as a hindrance but as necessary to securing the participation rights of all children, and an asset to be valued. Favouring diversity is an asset for a participatory approach because it ensures a faithful representation of children, and therefore of their needs and potential to contribute to the school environment.

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16. Ibid, p.69.
17. Ibid, p.70.
18. Ibid, p.70.
19. Ibid, p.70.

## 8. Safeguarding in child participation

Schools have a responsibility to put in place child safeguarding prevention and response measures to make children's participation a safe and positive experience for everyone.

It is important that child participation processes contribute positively to the realization of children's rights, that they are fun, and that we minimise the possibility and impact of unintended negative consequences for the children and adults directly or indirectly involved. Compliance with the nine requirements in general will help with this, as will these more targeted questions.

- Does this project actively promote the realization of children's rights?
- Does this project discriminate against any children?
- Does the project serve the best interests of children?
- Can all children participate in the project in an ethical and meaningful way?
- What preparation do children need to feel safe and empowered to participate in activities?
- Can children withdraw from the project if they wish?
- Can children be intimidated or overwhelmed by the activities they are invited to participate in?
- What is the ideal length of time for the activities depending on the age and abilities of the children, and how many breaks should children take depending on their age and abilities?
- What will be the procedure for dealing with any problems?

**The following are a series of questions to help you identify risks in relation to specific child participation activities:**

- Who is the child safeguarding focal point who will have overall responsibility for this aspect of your child participation work and who you can contact for advice and support?
- Are there any risks related to the intervention itself? We usually think of the physical risks, and too often forget the potential emotional harm to children.
- Were children consulted before the intervention about its content? Have they been able to give their informed consent to participate or possibly not participate?
- Can children be intimidated or overwhelmed by the activities they are invited to participate in? What additional support could be provided to ensure that they can participate safely?
- What information have they received about the activities?
- What information about the children do you need to collect in advance (any disabilities or special communication needs, medical information including allergies, permissions, contact details etc.)?
- What will be the procedure for dealing with any problems?
- How will everyone present, including the children and their adult carers, know who to contact if there is a problem?
- If the subject of your intervention is difficult or sensitive, is there a time for further discussion, a debriefing with the teacher/facilitator after the intervention?
- Are the children's parents/guardians informed of the intervention so that they can monitor any signs of anxiety or unease in their children after the intervention?



© UNICEF/ UN0633987/ Holerga. A child puts his arm around another child in a classroom in a kindergarten in Romania (2022)

# SECTION II: RIGHTS-BASED PARTICIPATION IN CHILD RIGHTS SCHOOLS

## 9. What are Child Rights Schools?

CRS are UNICEF- or National Committee-led initiatives that support partners in realizing the rights of children at the level of schools by explicitly using a child rights approach to achieve this. For the purpose of this Framework, the term "schools" refers to formal education settings for children aged 0-18 years. "CRS" is the generic term for these types of initiatives, although names may vary at the country level.

A UNICEF CRS puts the CRC and the child rights approach into practice on a daily basis, within the school's ethos, values, relationships, decision-making processes and curriculum. Children not only learn *about* rights, but also *through* rights (in a school environment that is rights-respecting), and *for* rights (promoting and defending rights in practice)[20]. Children as rights-holders understand and claim their own rights and respect the rights of others. Adults understand their role as duty-bearers and treat children with dignity, respect and equality, recognizing and nurturing children's increasing agency as rights-holders, in line with their evolving capacities. Children and adults take action to promote the rights of children locally and globally, and to defend the rights of children when these are violated. The positive impact of CRS- in terms of rights-based child participation, democratic decision-making, active citizenship and mutual respect for human rights without discrimination- extends beyond schools, into families, communities and society as a whole. Schools undertake a journey to become fully rights-respecting over a period of time, taking into account the local educational and cultural context. CRS are safe and inspiring places to learn, where children are respected, their talents are nurtured and they are able to thrive. CRS uphold and promote the rights of children with disabilities, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. CRS provide a foundational understanding of human rights and the nature of rights in general, as set out in other international human rights instruments. CRS contribute directly to Sustainable Development Goal 4 to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education [...]" and in particular to Goals 4.1[21], 4.2[22], 4.4[23], 4.5[24], 4.7[25,] and 4a[26].

## 10. Specific requirements for Child Rights Schools

In addition to the general reasons in section 2 about the importance of rights-based child participation, there are also some specific requirements for UNICEF CRS initiatives, as set out in the CRS Framework.

### a) In relation to the initiative overall
In addition to rights-based participation at the level of individual schools, children may be involved in any stage of the planning process for a CRS initiative overall. For example, they can help

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20. The categorization of about rights, through rights and for rights is taken from the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, 2011.

21. "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes."

22. "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education."

23. "By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship."

24. "By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations."

25. "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development."

26. "Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all."

UNICEF to understand whether or not a CRS initiative is appropriate in the country context, what sort of risks might be involved in such an initiative, how to make the theory of change relevant in their country, how to reach the most marginalized children, and how children should be involved in the 'recognition' process for CRS.

**b) In relation to the school-level process**
The UNICEF CRS Framework requires that "children are involved as decision-makers, alongside adults, in the implementation process, through rights-based child participation."

**c) In relation to the content of school-level implementation**
The Framework includes significant references to child participation in relation to what a school needs to have in place, or show significant progress in working towards, in order to achieve CRS status.

**Learning about rights - accurate, explicit and regular use of child rights language and concepts:** Children (and adults) in CRS need to understand and communicate, in age- and ability-appropriate ways, about the 'nature of rights'. This is directly relevant for rights-based child participation. For example, concepts such as "rights must not be taught as being contingent on children fulfilling responsibilities", "children are rights-holders and adults (like teachers and parents/guardians) are duty-bearers who are responsible for ensuring that child rights are met", and "rights are universal, inherent, inalienable, unconditional and indivisible" help to frame the way that child participation is promoted and respected in CRS.

**Learning through rights:** Among other things, the school's ethos, policies and relationships must take into account key elements of a child rights approach based on CRC Articles 2 (no discrimination), 3 (best interests of the child), 4 (making rights real), 5 (family guidance as children develop), 6 (life, survival and development) and 12 (respect for children's views). Children should be able to enjoy their rights in the school setting, as set out in the CRC, including "children are included and are valued as individuals" and "children value education and are involved in making decisions about their learning".

**Learning for rights:** This action-oriented component of CRS is very strongly linked to rights-based child participation. For example, the Framework requires that: "children feel comfortable to give their opinions and know that their views are taken seriously"; "children are supported to safely take age- and ability-appropriate action to claim their rights and promote and defend the rights of others, in school, locally, nationally and globally. Adult duty-bearers help children to understand that balance is needed between children's participation and protecting children in relation to such actions, acknowledging that this balance may shift in line with the evolving capacities of the child"; "children know what to do if their rights, or the rights of others are violated in school, locally, nationally and globally, and they are supported by adults to take action". In addition to adults supporting children, "adults (primary and secondary duty-bearers) [themselves] take action to positively promote and implement child rights using the child rights approach, and to defend child rights. Primary duty-bearers also provide reparations and remedies for rights violations."

> **Our first assessment that we are already very far on the way to being a CRS was suddenly questioned critically. Did we already ask the children about all the concepts? No, we didn't really have that. We have fallen into the trap that many adults fall into when they advocate for children. We develop projects, concepts and programmes without first getting a real picture of the children's opinions. After all, we know what children think and need. But it is not like that. Children's rights can only assert themselves if children are given the right to participate."**
>
> - Principal from a UNICEF Germany CRS

## 11. Overview of rights-based participation in the Child Rights Schools process

OK.
I've now got a better idea of what rights-based child participation is, why it's so important for CRS, and what is meant by the child rights approach in relation to quality, process and levels of participation. Now break it down for me in terms of stages of implementing CRS.

**STAGES OF THE CRS INITIATIVE:**

**1. Child rights analysis** – find out what you are doing well in your school and identify what needs improvement.
**2. Action plan** - decide what improvements to focus on, how you will achieve them, by when.
**3. Implementation** – carry out the activities to reach the goals set out in your action plan to improve your school culture and environment.
**4. Monitoring and evaluation** - measure what happens, its impact and any learnings from the experience.
**5. Dissemination and feedback** - act on the findings from the monitoring and evaluation process, share the information with the whole school community and consider how it will inform future planning

Remember that children can engage in a participatory process at **different levels**, depending on the context, the issues, and the support and resources available.

| | Consultative | Collaborative | Child-led |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Child rights analysis** | Children are asked to give their views | Children are asked to contribute to the process of finding out what problems they face in life | Children undertake their own research with other children to identify issues of concern |
| **Action plan** | Planning takes account of the issues raised by children | Children are involved in deciding what projects to prioritise and develop | Children decide for themselves what issues they want to work on |
| **Implementation** | Children are invited to take part in the activities | Children work with adults to design and implement the initiative | Children organise and manage the initiative and have significant responsibility for its implementation |
| **Monitoring and evaluation** | Children are consulted on whether they think the initiative achieved what it planned to do | Children work with adults to decide how to evaluate the initiative | Children determine what should be evaluated and, with adult support, undertake the evaluation of the initiative |
| **Dissemination and feedback** | Children are invited to make suggestions as to how to respond on the basis of the findings | Adults involve children in a joint discussion about the implications of the findings and explore how they should influence future work | Children reflect on the findings and come up with proposals for the implications, which are then shared with adults |

**Start thinking about:** Where are you currently for each stage? Where do you want to be? How can you get there? What will be the challenges? Who can help? See also Annex C for an implementation checklist that can be used throughout the CRS process.

**Examples of rights-based child participation in the CRS initiative**
The following examples show how you can provide children with space, voice, audience and influence throughout the CRS process.

# SPACE

**Children have space and time to freely express and form opinions to influence the CRS initiative in your school.**

| | |
|---|---|
| Involve children as early as possible | Involve children in the child rights analysis. |
| Sustain children's involvement | Steering committee/representative group gathers input from, and feeds back to, the whole school (including the most marginalized). |
| Ensure all stages are inclusive of all children | Adapt the tools used (e.g. language, format, difficulty level) and ensure the spaces are accessible for all children (e.g. physical environment, time of day of the action). |
| Support children to feel safe and comfortable to express themselves | Different tools for different scenarios. For example, the child rights analysis questionnaires can be used for children to answer individually to give a personal perspective. Accessibility surveys can be done in groups so that children can support each other. |
| Provide support for children who become anxious, upset or uncomfortable | Identify a designated safeguarding focal point person in the school. This person should explain their role to the children and make themselves available to children or teachers who want to ask questions or express concerns. |

# VOICE

**Children are provided with appropriate information to inform their views and negotiate decisions.**

| | |
|---|---|
| Be clear with the children about what topics you want to hear their views on | Inform children about the CRS initiative – its aims, why the school is participating and what is involved. Explain that their views will inform the approach the school takes. |
| Keep focused on the topics identified | Use tools provided by UNICEF, such as the action plan. Provide opportunities for children to review and make adjustments to the action plan throughout the year. |
| Ensure the children know that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time | This is particularly relevant for children participating in a committee. Develop a committee charter. Have it visible/easily accessible. Review the charter regularly at meetings and check in with the children to ensure that they are happy to proceed as a committee member. Include 'I don't know' options in feedback discussions and questionnaires. |
| Support children to give their own views, and include age-appropriate and accessible information | Use the tools provided by UNICEF such as the safety walk, accessibility walk, questionnaires and action plan, adapting when necessary. |
| Provide a range of ways for children to express themselves that best suits their needs and choices | Link the process to the curriculum. Encourage children to express their views through art, music, drama and other creative projects. If they are expressing their views on a sensitive topic, facilitate an opinions box to allow for anonymous feedback. |
| Ensure that children are allowed to identify topics that they want to discuss | The committee can facilitate the gathering of ideas from their peers through discussions, suggestion forms, or by using UNICEF tools (questionnaire, surveys). The committee decides by vote which topics to focus on in the implementation of the initiative. |

# AUDIENCE

**Children's views are respectfully and seriously heard by those who have power to act on them in the school.**

| | |
|---|---|
| Inform children who their views will be communicated to and how | The supporting adult in the committee is an important link between children and staff. Agree the process when developing the committee charter. |
| Show the children your commitment to being informed and influenced by their views | Involve children in the development and implementation of the action plan. Include a CRS slot in staff meetings to update and involve staff in the plan. |
| Identify and involve relevant decision makers (those responsible for influencing change) | Agree a process with the principal or school leadership team. Involve the board of governors/management in the decision. Involve children in the development of the action plan and get sign off/agreement by the school leader. |
| Compile a record and a child-friendly summary of children's views | Appoint roles to the committee members. Record meeting minutes and actions in child-friendly templates (which may be provided by UNICEF). Ensure children are involved in completCompile a record and a child-friendly summary of children's viewsing these. Share these with UNICEF and present them to the whole school community on a regular basis. |
| Provide children with an opportunity to confirm that their views are accurately recorded | Run a practice presentation, giving the children an opportunity to adapt the information. |
| Put plans in place to support children to play a role in communicating their own views | Ensure the presentation is child-led. Provide support where needed, but don't take over. |

# INFLUENCE

**The views of the children are given due consideration by the decision makers in the school, and the children receive feedback on the outcomes and the extent of their influence**

| | |
|---|---|
| Inform the children about the scope they have (including the limitations) to influence decision-making | Meet with the school leadership team to discuss and set out the possible level of influence when developing the action plan. Meet with school leadership each term to ensure that what was agreed is happening in practice. |
| Provide age-appropriate and accessible feedback at key points during the process and in a timely manner, explaining how their views were used and the reasons for the decisions taken | When decisions have been made at staff meetings or at management level, information is shared with the committee about their influence. The committee shares this with their peers in the whole school (including the most marginalized). On the committee, particular children can take responsibility for certain issues and be encouraged/supported to follow up with decision makers about results. |
| Ensure that children's views impact on decisions | Get commitment from the school leadership team at the beginning of the year. Integrate the CRS initiative into current school decision-making processes. Buy-in from management is crucial. |
| Provide opportunities for children to evaluate the process throughout | Use monitoring and evaluation tools provided by UNICEF. For example, carry out the questionnaire at the beginning and end of the year and see if there is a change in results. The children could represent the data in images and charts and display these around the school and organize events to explore the changes with all children and staff in the school. |

© UNICEF/ Schermbrucker: Child Rights Education activities in South Africa (2019).

## 12. Creating and sustaining a steering committee

Child participation is the cornerstone of the CRS initiative. Children should be involved in the full cycle of the initiative. The establishment and ongoing running of a representative group, whether it is called a Steering Committee, a Rights Council or a Student Council is a great way to get children involved. Although it is not compulsory in the global UNICEF CRS Framework, the creation and sustaining of a committee is recommended in every CRS implementation strategy. A committee can be understood as "a representative group of children and adults from the educational community [and possibly parents/guardians] that monitors the implementation of children's rights in the school environment. The committee makes suggestions for improvement, proposes and carries out activities and projects related to children's rights in the school, and ensures transparent and democratic communication with the whole school community so that 'participation' does not rest with just a small group of individuals." A committee's shape and function may vary depending on its role in the CRS, for example in terms of the number of people, the frequency of meetings, the age of participants, the place of the committee in the school's decision-making process and so on. Each school can adjust the functioning of the committee according to its specific needs.

**Lessons learned and recommendations for creating and sustaining a steering committee**

- The committee to implement CRS should be made up of at least 50 per cent children.
- It is extremely valuable to have a diverse and inclusive committee (for example, in relation to age, gender, disability, ethnic and socio-economic background) as this is the shortest route to ensure a rights-respecting school environment for all. [See also section 7 on inclusive participation].
- The involvement of adults as duty-bearers is essential to ensure rights-based participation, as they have the ability to support children with: age- and ability- appropriate information and help in general, increasingly encouraging children to do more and more for themselves in line with their evolving capacities; developing critical thinking skills; balancing participation and protection, including conducting risk assessments and responding to any child safeguarding issues that may arise (adults bear ultimate responsibility for keeping children safe in the school environment). As a specific example, children should be supported in data protection when collecting or handling other children's data.
- Include non-teaching staff, parents/guardians and a member of the school governing body (if possible and relevant in your context).
- However, be mindful of a potential power imbalance when your committee involves both children and adults, for example adults taking over the conversation and children not feeling safe or empowered to share their thoughts, experiences or opinions with the group. Success lies in creating a safe, respectful, comfortable and empowering environment for everyone. If you notice that not all members have the opportunity to express their views, it can help to break the committee into smaller sub-groups for certain tasks.
- It may or may not be appropriate to work with an existing body like an established student council. This depends on how inclusive and effective the body is, and whether it has the interest, time and mandate to incorporate the running of the CRS initiative into its existing work. It may also depend on how the existing body is perceived: if it is felt to be 'exclusive', 'just for the smart children' and 'never taken seriously/never leading to change' then this may be a good opportunity to start fresh. Develop, in a participatory way, an agreement on how the committee should function, its membership, how children and adults should be voted onto the committee in a way that is fair and inclusive, its aims, the roles of people in the committee (both children and adults), and how to deal with disagreements and changes in membership.
- It can be challenging to find suitable and inclusive communication tools for the committee that work well for each member. It might be helpful to reserve time during the first session to discuss how they would like to communicate, what channels they prefer, what frequency etc. The outcomes of this conversation could be documented as a 'communications agreement'.
- To identify what is happening in the school and to set the agenda for committee meetings, a 'child rights suggestion box' can be a helpful tool for all children in the school to post suggestions or concerns that should be discussed by the committee.
- Encourage children who are members of the committee to share and continue the discussions of the committee in their own classrooms. Likewise adult members of the committee should also continue discussions and share information with other adults in the school. The experience of participation should not be limited to just a small group in the school.

**You may find the following exercises useful in getting started with rights-based child participation in the CRS initative:**

<u>**We are here – A child participation toolbox:**</u>
- **A1.1 - Hope and fears, page 53:** participants (e.g. from the Steering Committee/Rights Council) introduce themselves and indicate, in a private and confidential way, their hopes and fears about working in the group.
- **A1.2 – Ground rules (Code of Conduct), page 55:** activity whereby the whole group (e.g. Steering Committee/Rights Council) establishes 'ground rules', exploring what is needed for things to work well, and making everyone familiar with safeguarding measures.
- **A3.1 – Through my eyes, page 59:** children and adults have a chance to explore how they perceive each other.
- **C1.2 – Unpacking participation, page 85:** children and adults reflect on what they need before, during and after setting up the CRS initative by using the nine requirements for child participation.

<u>**Partnerships for participation – Child participation handbook:**</u>

**'What if…?', page 46:** children imagine the consequences that could arise from particular situations, using drama techniques to think- in particular- about what would happen if children took all decisions.

## 13. Child rights analysis and action plan

The purpose of carrying out a child rights analysis is to create, with children, a baseline of the child rights situation in your school environment. It assesses the whole educational community, both adults and children, and both physical and non-physical aspects of school life. At the end of this analysis, the school will be able to develop an action plan to prioritise the needs identified through the initial assessment and thus increasingly make the school more rights-respecting. This is a process that can be repeated each year, to ensure continuing improvement across different areas. The process of planning and implementing the child rights analysis, analysing the results and developing the annual action plan can be led by the CRS committee (see section 12), but ensuring feedback from and to the whole school community so that everyone is involved. In order to make the child rights analysis as accurate as possible, it is essential that children across the school – including the most marginalized- actively participate and have their voices heard, for instance through questionnaires and activities/discussions with children, child-led safety walks and accessibility walks, and student council/committee discussions. The child rights analysis must ensure attention to the nine requirements, including robust child safeguarding.

Children and adults together need to conduct an analysis of how rights-respecting our school is, which will lead to a jointly developed action plan that we can work on together throughout the year. See how many times I stressed children and adults doing this stuff together? I think I'm getting the hang of this!

**Lessons learned and recommendations for conducting a child rights analysis and developing an action plan**

- Make the child rights analysis fun and participatory: it is important that the whole school community should be involved and represented.
- Involve children in the analysis from the beginning. Children can collaborate or lead on developing and implementing the analysis tools (older children can help younger ones to fill in questionnaires etc.), and on collecting, analysing and communicating the results, prioritising the key child rights gaps or violations, and developing the action plan – with ideas for approaches and activities to implement throughout the year.
- Remember that child participation is a right, not an obligation. Do not force children to participate, nor to answer all of the questions in all of the tools. Give them the opportunity to not get involved, if that is their wish. Include the answer option "I don't know" or "I don't want to answer" in the tools.
- Ensure the CRS action plan is aligned with the school's overall plans. This should make it easier to involve children and get management support.

# 14. Implementing the action plan

In the previous section, we discussed child participation in developing the action plan. It is also important to include children in implementing your CRS action plan. Standard action plan templates and tools, provided by UNICEF, can help to ensure alignment with the outcomes of the overall country CRS initiative and theory of change. These tools not only help the school to plan its activities but are also used to monitor the school's progress and results. Schools establish a clear plan of activities and objectives at the beginning of the year/initiative. At the end of the year, they can be reviewed to assess the results. This process gives a very clear picture of the school's progress in becoming increasingly rights-respecting.

**Lessons learned and recommendations for implementing the action plan**

- The steering committee can help to lead the process, but a whole school approach to implementing the action plan is highly recommended. This means that all children in the school can participate in implementing the tasks and activities, not just the few members of the committee.
- Children should feel ownership of the child rights activities, whereby teachers take a supporting role. For example, this could mean that a certain class or sub-group of children are responsible for a concrete task in the action plan, including a deadline when it needs to be implemented.
- Allocate more time than you envision for each task and activity to allow for quality child participation. It may take (a lot) more time to ensure rights-based child participation in implementing the action plan than you will anticipate.

**Examples of everyday participation in the classroom**

- Teachers can facilitate child-led learning. Acknowledging that most schools have a set curriculum to follow, children can be given choice on what topics they learn and how they learn. For example, if learning about influential people in history, the children could choose which people to research. This enquiry-based learning approach allows children to lead their learning based on their own interests and capabilities. The children could also be encouraged to choose how they learn about the topic. For example, they could be given a choice of group work or individual learning, online research, a trip to a local museum or access to books in the library.
- Classroom timetables can be developed collaboratively between the teacher and children. Time allocation per subject is usually set by the authorities. However, when specialist teachers are not involved, children could vote on what days and times they work on each curricular area. In Ireland, a child in a CRS has a passion for physical education (P.E). She developed a petition to increase the time her class spent doing P.E. She collected 34 signatures and presented it to her class teacher. The teacher was already teaching the state allocated time on P.E., therefore could not increase the lesson time. However, she did not want to ignore the views of the children in her class. She suggested they take 30 minutes per month of their 'golden time' to spend on P.E. Golden time is unallocated time that schools can choose to use as they wish. The children were happy with this compromise and now enjoy and extra 30 minutes of P.E. each month.

- Classroom layout and seating arrangements can be decided collaboratively. This provides extra opportunity for the most marginalized children to express their views so that their needs are being met. For example, a child who uses a wheelchair will be able to express what layout of furniture would work best for them.
- The children could be consulted on how the classroom budget is spent. For example, which books to buy for the classroom library, and which art supplies, games and learning resources they would like.

**Examples of everyday participation in the playground**

- In one of Norway's CRS, members of the Child Rights Board assist the teacher's inspection in the school yard and contribute to creating a safe playground for everyone.
- In a CRS in Germany, there were always fights about the football ground in the school yard. Each class gave suggestions on how to overcome this issue which were discussed by the school parliament. A decision was made to develop timetables for each class to use the ground during breaks and referees were assigned to monitor the situation. Nevertheless, after a while, some children did not follow the rules. The children in their classes and later the school parliament (they meet once a month) discussed consequences. The school sees it as an ongoing process.
- If equipment is being bought for the playground, or decisions being made about payground design, children could be consulted and involved in deciding what to buy and where to set it up.

**Examples of everyday participation at whole school level**

- Students in another CRS in Norway successfully campaigned for wheelchair ramps to be installed, thus enabling one of their peers to access the library in the same way as everyone else.
- The school caretaker could consult with children when making changes to the school environment. For example, if the school grounds are being landscaped, the children could express their views on the trees or flowers to be planted. They could also support the caretaker to plant them. If the school building is being painted, the children's views on colours could be taken into account.
- Children can take the lead in organizing and running open days for incoming families or events for parents/guardians.
- If schools hold regular whole school assemblies, they could be child-led. The children could decide on the theme and the content.
- If a school is changing the uniform, dress code or developing a school logo, children could inform the design.
- Creating a culture of respect in the school will ensure that children feel safe to go to an adult in the school to share ideas or concerns. This is particularly important if they want to disclose information about a scenario where their own rights or the rights of others are being violated.
- Restorative practice or peer mediation to deal with conflict resolution is participation in action. Avoiding punishments and detentions enforced by adults, and instead facilitating child-led solutions can help to develop and sustain good relationships between the children, and between children and adults at school. A CRS in Ireland reported an exponential decline in the use of discipline sheets since actively facilitating child participation in the school. They went from holding detention sessions every week, to only two per term. The number of students in those detentions are down by 90 per cent. The school acknowledges that student voice gives the children the confidence to talk with adults in the school and to report any worries. Children are given the opportunity to lead the conflict resolution process and no situation is concluded until all parties involved feel positive about the outcome.

**You may find the following activity useful to ensure rights-based child participation throughout the CRS initative:**
**We are here – A child participation toolbox:**

**A5.1 – Parking lot, page 63:** children and adults make visible any questions or reflections on a board, so they can be addressed at a later stage of their time together.

## 15. Monitoring, evaluation and learning about Child Rights Schools

Children are integral to the CRS evaluation process. Whatever type of assessment is operating in your country, the participation of children should meet all the nine requirements outlined above, including safeguarding.

**Lessons learned and recommendations for child participation in monitoring and evaluating the CRS initiative**

- Bring clarity to the monitoring and evaluation process: explain it very well and communicate the results to the whole school in child-friendly language and media.
- All children should be represented and involved in the monitoring and evaluation process, especially the most marginalized children.
- Monitoring and evaluation tools should be accessible to all children, using simple language and means of response so that all children clearly understand what they are evaluating.
- Simplify the evaluation process: evaluate your initiatives according to the goals defined in plans, but with enough flexibility to allow for feedback on unexpected/unanticipated outcomes.
- Reflect and learn: the whole school should be involved in reflecting on the evaluation results. What was successful? What was not successful? What could be done differently next time? Why or why not? How can this experience be used to improve future initiatives?[27]

**You may find the following exercises useful when monitoring and evaluating rights-based child participation in your CRS:**

**We are here – A child participation toolbox:**

- **C2.1 – Hitting the 'pause' button, page 87:** pausing and taking a step back to see where you are standing is a good way to help with potential frustration and enable children to feel prepared to speak out when the process is not working for them.
- **F1.6 – Looking back, looking forward, page 160:** this activity offers children the opportunity to share how things have gone, and in looking forward, it offers the opportunity to make changes, using the nine requirements to evaluate the experiences.

**Tools for monitoring and evaluating children's participation:** a range of tools are provided that you can use with children to monitor and evaluate the scope **(pages 21–34)**, quality **(pages 35–40)** and outcomes **(pages 41–57)** of children's participation.

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27. Adapted from UNICEF (2021), *Tip Sheet for Adolescents and Youth on Participation in Advocacy Events,* p.2.

**Sample child evaluation form[28]**

It is important to capture feedback from the children on their experiences of participation throughout the CRS process. This form can be adapted for age and ability.

**What do the faces mean?**

😢 I totally disagree    🙁 I disagree    😐 I am not sure    🙂 I agree    😍 I totally agree

## SPACE

| | 😢 | 🙁 | 😐 | 🙂 | 😍 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adults have listened to me **from the start** | | | | | |
| I felt **comfortable** giving my opinions | | | | | |
| I felt **safe** giving my opinions | | | | | |
| They asked for a lot of **different voices** | | | | | |

## VOICE

| | 😢 | 🙁 | 😐 | 🙂 | 😍 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I got the **chance** to give my opinions | | | | | |
| I got **enough information** to help me give my opinion | | | | | |
| I got the **help I needed** to give my opinion | | | | | |
| I **understood** what was being discussed | | | | | |
| I could give my opinions in **whatever way I wanted** | | | | | |
| I had **enough time** to give my opinion | | | | | |

## AUDIENCE

| | 😢 | 🙁 | 😐 | 🙂 | 😍 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I know **who** wants to hear our opinions | | | | | |
| I know **why** they want the opinions of children | | | | | |
| They were honest about **what they would try to do** with our opinions | | | | | |

## INFLUENCE

| | 😢 | 🙁 | 😐 | 🙂 | 😍 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I know **where** our opinions are going next | | | | | |
| I know **how we will be told** about what happens to our opinions | | | | | |
| I think what we said today will be **taken seriously** | | | | | |

28. This form is adapted from *Participation Framework: National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making*, p.21, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (2022), Government of Ireland.

© UNICEF/UNI372155/Zimmermann: Children in front of the parliament building in Berlin during the campaign for World Children's Day by UNICEF Germany and the Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk (German Children's Fund) (2020).

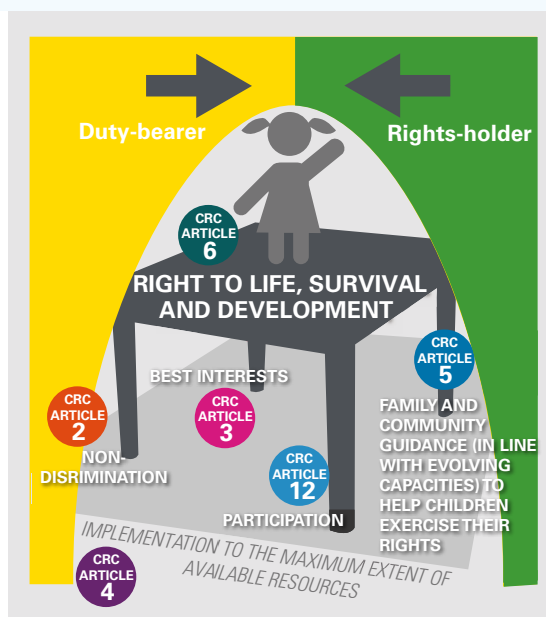# Annex A – The child rights approach

## Always apply the child rights approach!

The child rights approach is an approach that:

- **furthers the realization of child rights** as laid down in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments;
- **uses child rights standards and principles from the Convention and other international human rights instruments to guide behaviour, actions, policies and programmes** (in particular non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; the right to be heard and taken seriously; and the child's right to be guided in the exercise of his/her rights by caregivers, parents and community members, in line with the child's evolving capacities);
- **builds the capacity of children as rights-holders to claim their rights and the capacity of duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations to children.**

## Does your initiative pass the 'arch and table leg test' of the child rights approach?

Imagine that a child is sitting on the table. For any project, programme, activity, policy, piece of legislation or behaviour to be considered 'child rights-based', it needs to: further the realization of child rights; build the capacity of rights-holders and duty-bearers; and take all of the umbrella rights into consideration (Convention Articles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 12). If one of the table legs or the foundation (implementation to the maximum extent of available resources) is missing, the table is not stable and the child will fall.

The ***child* rights approach** falls under the broader scope of the ***human* rights-based approach**, but it specifically applies child rights provisions and principles in a more systematic manner (particularly the 6 Convention umbrella rights).

# Annex B – Common misconceptions about child participation and rights

The information here is adapted from: UNICEF (2020), *Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement*, Appendix 11; UNICEF UK, *Myths and Misconceptions About the Convention on the Rights of the Child*; and UNICEF France (2018), *Droits de l'enfant – 10 idées reçues et comment y répondre*.

### Children lack competence to be involved in decision-making processes

Inaccurate- In different contexts, including humanitarian scenarios, children have demonstrated competence to act responsibly and effectively to protect themselves, their families, their peers and their communities. Above all, children should be heard in all matters concerning them, as enshrined in Article 12 of the CRC. Adults should inform and guide children, in line with their evolving capacities, providing them with all the tools and opportunities to be able to increasingly make the best decisions for themselves.

### Children's participation is too complicated, expensive and time-consuming

Inaccurate- Children's participation is fundamental, especially in matters that concern them. Children should participate and be involved in the life of their school and community. They enjoy a different perspective and vision than adults. They often contribute with simple, easy to implement, and low-cost solutions and resolutions. It requires competence on the part of adults and organizations so that participation is not seen as something extra and sporadic. The reality is that participation benefits children, families, schools and communities. Suggesting that it is an 'optional extra' or an additional burden is unhelpful, unrealistic and does not adequately respond to children's circumstances, protection and development.

### Children can be manipulated by adults

Inaccurate- Adults can control participation processes and manipulate children through poor quality and unethical processes to get results for themselves. It may superficially appear to be participation, but this is because there needs to be more experience and critical understanding of the definitions, processes and outcomes of participation. Such manipulation should be avoided by ensuring a common understanding of rights-based children's participation, different modes of participation, the rights-holder/duty-bearer relationship, and the nine basic requirements. Attention to these can guard against manipulation.

### Some rights are more important than others

Inaccurate- The CRC must be considered as a whole because all rights are connected to each other. There are no rights that are more important than others. Four 'general principles' play a fundamental role in the interpretation and exercise of rights: no discrimination (Article 2), best interests of the child (Article 3), life, survival and development (Article 6), and respect for children's views (Article 12). There are times when adults, as duty-bearers to children, must give priority to one right over another under the general principle of the best interests of the child. For example, where it is in the child's best interests, a child may be separated from their parents. Or the right to freedom of expression (Article 13) might be restricted if someone uses their right to freedom of expression to abuse other people and/or deny them their rights. In all these circumstances, any action or decision that could stop a child from enjoying his or her rights should only happen in specific instances, within a time limit and with the child's best interests in mind. The child's right to be heard and taken seriously must also be respected at all times, and all actions must be done in a way that respects the child's dignity.

### Rights are a grown-up thing! Children don't need them

Inaccurate – All human beings are entitled to the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The status of children is often wrongly understood as secondary to the status of adults. Furthermore children are human beings with specific characteristics

linked to their special stages of development. For this reason there is a need for human rights specifically for children (as set out in the CRC), in addition to what is available to everyone in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

### When you turn 18, you have new human rights that are just for adults

Inaccurate – All human rights treaties apply to adults and children alike, regardless of age or any other status. This means that when children reach 18 and cease to be protected under the CRC, they continue to be protected by other human rights treaties. This includes the International Bill of Human Rights which consists of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. So while the CRC only applies to people under 18 and contains rights that are unique to children, the International Bill of Rights applies equally to everyone, regardless of whether they are an adult or a child, and whatever their race, language, gender, national origin or any other status.

### The CRC is a UNICEF document

Inaccurate – The CRC is a universal legal document. This means it is not the property of UNICEF and its articles are not 'UNICEF rights'. What is true is that UNICEF's work is guided by the CRC and that, as the leading children's agency in the United Nations system, UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly "to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential". UNICEF is also the only agency explicitly named in the CRC (Article 45) and UNICEF was part of the working group, alongside other organizations and individuals from across the world, that drafted the text.

### With rights come responsibilities

Inaccurate – There is a common misunderstanding that children's rights are linked with responsibilities. But this is not correct. Children's rights, like all human rights, are unconditional. This means there are no conditions attached to rights. Rights can never be a reward for the fulfilment of a responsibility, and they can never be taken away because a 'responsibility' hasn't been met. Children's rights are also universal, so both adults and children should be encouraged to respect other people's rights but this does not mean that a child's rights are dependent on them respecting the rights of others. This is why within CRS we talk of rights and respect, not about rights and responsibilities.

### The CRC is a useful tool to control children's behaviour at school

Inaccurate – When children know about the CRC and learn in an environment that respects their rights, they gain a deeper understanding of other people's rights and the need to respect them. This in turn improves relationships at all levels as well as behaviour and attitudes. However, the rights in the CRC should not be used to control children nor be considered as a bargaining tool for positive attitudes or behaviour. Keep in mind that there are no conditions attached to rights and rights cannot be taken away or earned. It's also useful to note that if school behaviour policies are developed using a rights-based approach, it is more likely that the children will embrace their ethos and be respectful of the rules in place. Not only should human rights principles such as non-discrimination, dignity and respect underpin all school policies, but children should also be meaningfully involved in the development or review of the policy. All children should also be fully informed of the content of the policy and understand how the rules and principles apply.

### The CRC is useless in countries with child protection laws

Inaccurate- It is precisely because the CRC exists and has been ratified that many national child protection laws have been created: countries have modified their domestic law (civil code, penal code, constitution, etc.) in order to bring it into line with the CRC.

### Since children's rights are still not respected in the world, the CRC is useless

Inaccurate- The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, composed of independent experts, monitors implementation every five years in countries which have ratified the CRC. It examines reports that countries submit to it and makes recommendations to clarify articles and improve the situation of children. These monitoring mechanisms, although not legally binding,

can have a strong impact and serve as a basis for advocacy by organizations such as UNICEF. Progress is being made every year to progressively realize children's rights. Also, since its adoption by the United National General Assembly in 1989, 'optional protocols' have been added: these are legal instruments related to an existing treaty that address issues that the parent treaty does not cover or does not cover sufficiently. The CRC Committee also regularly develops 'general comments' which are the Committee's interpretation of particular provisions of the CRC or thematic issues. The CRC thus remains a living and evolving legislative instrument which people all over the world use on a regular basis to improve the lives of children.

**Children's rights are always respected in high income countries**

Inaccurate- When we hear of a lack of respect for the rights of the child or of injustices in the world, we often think that this only happens in low income countries. However, the causes of great injustices are attitudes and situations that exist everywhere, for example discrimination, violence, poverty, power imbalances, injustice, and bureaucratic processes which are difficult to access and navigate. Also, we can find lack of respect for children's rights in everyday situations when adults make all the decisions for children because they consider them incapable, or when children do not have the possibility to express their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment.

**I can't do anything about children's rights**

Inaccurate- Yes, we can! The first thing we can all do is to make child rights known and understood by as many peple as possible- both children and adults. This will allow us to reflect on situations of non-respect or violations of rights that may occur around us. Don't hesitate to find out about the different means available to defend these rights: the laws that protect children, the associations or organizations specialised in this field, and the initiatives promoting the participation of children in your country context.



© UNICEF/ UN0543472/ Diarassouba - Girls attending class at a school in northern Côte d'Ivoire (2021).

# Annex C – Implementation checklist for adults

**Questions to ask yourself throughout the CRS process:** At each stage consider the **general questions** in the following checklist. Additional questions are included further down the checklist that are **specific to each stage.**

## What do the faces mean?

😢 I totally disagree    🥺 I disagree    😐 I am not sure

😊 I agree    😍 I totally agree

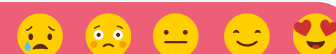| General questions that should be considered at each stage of the initiative | 😢 | 🥺 | 😐 | 😊 | 😍 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Have the children been given sufficiently clear information about each stage of the CRS initiative and how the process will work? | | | | | |
| Have you notified relevant decision makers that you are facilitating this process? | | | | | |
| Have you considered and adhered to the safeguarding procedures outlined in the school's policy? | | | | | |
| Are all children, without exception, invited to participate in each stage of the initiative? | | | | | |
| Are the children aware that they are free to withdraw from the process at any time? | | | | | |
| Do the children understand why you are gathering their views and who the information will be shared with? | | | | | |
| Do children understand the level of influence that they will have on school decisions? | | | | | |
| Are the children encouraged to express their views freely? | | | | | |
| Are extra resources in place to support the most marginalized children in expressing their views? | | | | | |
| Do you offer several modes of expression (for example, discussion, drawing, painting, stickers, games)? | | | | | |
| Is enough time given by adults to listen to the views of all the participating children? | | | | | |
| Are all of the children's questions answered appropriately and clearly? | | | | | |
| Have you ensured any personal information or data that they provide is protected? | | | | | |
| Have you ensured that the children are satisfied with how their views are being represented? | | | | | |
| Have you ensured that their views are shared with key decision makers? | | | | | |
| Do you provide feedback to the children on any actions taken (or not) because of their input? | | | | | |
| Are the children involved in sharing the findings with UNICEF? | | | | | |

| Additional considerations when setting up and running a representative group/committee | 😢 | 😟 | 😐 | 😊 | 😍 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Does the whole school community, including decision makers, understand and agree to the role of the committee? | | | | | |
| Are all children in the school involved in deciding the committee members? (For example, a committee election) | | | | | |
| Have the roles of the children and the adults in the committee been discussed and agreed by the members? | | | | | |
| Is the space and time for committee meetings decided with the committee members? | | | | | |
| Have the committee members collaboratively agreed on the objectives of the committee? | | | | | |
| Do committee members actively ask other children in the school to propose ideas, projects and proposals for improvement to discuss at committee meetings? | | | | | |

| Additional considerations when conducting a situation analysis | 😢 | 😟 | 😐 | 😊 | 😍 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Are the participating children given adequate time to analyse the results and express their views on the findings? | | | | | |
| Has a summary of the results been shared with the other children in the school and their views sought? | | | | | |

| Additional considerations when developing and implementing an action plan | 😢 | 😟 | 😐 | 😊 | 😍 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Are children given the opportunity to review and make adjustments necessary to the action plan throughout the school year? | | | | | |
| Are all children in the school, not just the committee, given opportunities to be involved in the implementation of the action plan? | | | | | |
| Are all staff aware of the importance of rights-based child participation? | | | | | |
| Are staff supported and reminded to facilitate rights-based child participation day to day? | | | | | |

| Additional considerations when monitoring, evaluating and learning about CRS | 😢 | 😟 | 😐 | 😊 | 😍 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Do the children agree to provide feedback in the monitoring and evaluation process? | | | | | |
| Do the children have a say in what information is gathered, how it is gathered and from whom? | | | | | |
| Are the findings shared with other children in the school who are not directly involved in the process? | | | | | |

**At each stage of the initiative note whether you encounter any challenges and how you overcame them. In addition to Space/Voice/Audience/Influence, you can also consider:**

- How well are you building the capacity of children as rights-holders and the capacity of adults as duty-bearers? (Think of the arch of human rights)
- What level of child participation is involved (consultative, collaborative and/or child-led)? Are these levels appropriate to the context or can they be improved?
- How well are you implementing the nine requirements of quality rights-based participation?

# Annex D - Other existing tools to enable a participatory environment

**We are here: Child participation toolbox:** (developed by Eurochild and Learning for Well-Being Foundation): this toolbox contains practical activites for children and adults to create mutual trust and establish meaningful child participation.

**Compasito: Manual on human rights education for children** (developed by the Council of Europe): A manual on human rights education for educators and trainers working with children aged 6–13 years to help and inspire them with ideas and activities to explore children's rights and child participation.

**Listen – Act – Change: Council of Europe handbook on children's participation for professionals working for and with children:** a handbook to assist professionals in understanding and supporting children's right to be heard.

**Partnerships for participation: Child participation handbook** (developed by the International Falcon Movement – Socialist Educational International IFM-SEI): this resource aims to raise awareness of the importance of child participation and to support educators to empower children to participate in decision making, inside and outside their groups and organizations.

**Tusla Child and Youth Participation Toolkit** (developed by Tusla Child and Family Agency in Ireland): this resource is to support professionals working for and with children (in child protection and family support) to engage with children and young people in decision making affecting their lives at the individual and collective level. It includes various activities linked to the Lundy model on how to enable space, voice, audience and influence for rights-based child participation.

**Everyday Spaces Checklist** (from the Participation Framework of the Government of Ireland): this checklist is designed as a guide – based on the Lundy model- to help you ensure that children have a voice in decision making. It can be applied in many everyday situations including in classrooms, hospitals, childcare settings, child and youth services, youth and sports clubs, youth projects, arts and creative initiatives and other spaces.

**A toolkit for monitoring and evaluating children's participation – Booklet 5:** Tools for monitoring and evaluating children's participation (developed by Save the Children): This booklet provides a range of tools that you can use with different stakeholders, especially children, to gather and analyse information to monitor and evaluate the scope (pages 21–34), quality (pages 35–40) and outcomes (pages 41–57) of children's participation.

# Annex E – Additional information for UNICEF National Committees and country offices

## 1. Can I adapt this toolkit to suit my local context?

Yes! in addition to translating it into local languages, you may want to remove this Annex which is more relevant for UNICEF and for the initiative overall. You might want to include examples and additional information from your specific national CRS model. This is fine, so long as you respect the guidance in the overall UNICEF CRS Framework.

## 2. What rights-based participation requirements do I need to have in place for a CRS initiative?

Please refer to the UNICEF CRS Framework in full for the child participation-related requirements for the initiative overall. The following is a summary of the key CRS processes that should involve children.

### a) Justification and risk assessment

Although it may not be explicit in the Framework, children may be involved in any stage of the planning process for a CRS initiative. For example, in relation to 'justification', "a CRS initiative has to respond to an identified rights-based need, based on evidence, which has been prioritized by the country office or National Committee through standard planning procedures, with consideration given to reaching the most marginalized children in the country context (children experiencing multiple violations of their rights)." Although it is broader than the scope of CRS, children may contribute their experiences to the country-level child rights analysis directly, through first-hand evidence or by leading and analysing the results of peer consultations, or indirectly through existing research and evidence which this exercise draws on. If the UNICEF National Committee or country office works with a Child/Youth Advisory Board, then they can also assist with the prioritization process. Likewise, children can be involved directly or indirectly in the 'risk assessment' stage for CRS initiatives which is required by the Framework.

### b) Theory of change

In relation to adapting the generic CRS Theory of Change to the national level, the Framework explicitly requires children to be involved: "The process of developing and reviewing the theory of change must ensure the inclusion of child and adult stakeholders from diverse groups, with an emphasis on those typically excluded, for example persons with disabilities and from other marginalized groups, and families of children with disabilities and from other marginalized groups." More details on this stage, and in relation to designing an overall monitoring and evaluation system, are provided in the separate CRS toolkit on monitoring and evaluation, including tips on how to involve children in the process.

### c) Recognition

The Framework also explicitly requires children to be involved in the 'recognition' process for CRS: "Recognition must not be allocated solely on the basis of schools' own self-assessments. It must include input from children (not just adults)."

When seeking input from children at this stage, bear in mind the outcomes from the overall UNICEF Child Rights Education Theory of Change (CRS Framework Annex A), all of which are relevant for child participation.

- Children and adults communicate using accurate rights language and concepts.
- Children take action to positively promote and implement their own rights and those of others, and to defend their own rights and those of others when these are violated.

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- Adults (primary and secondary duty-bearers) take action to positively promote and implement child rights using the child rights approach, and to defend child rights, and support children to defend their own rights, when these are violated. Primary duty-bearers also provide reparations and remedies for rights violations.

These should be considered in addition to the content of school level implementation – learning about, through and for rights (see section 10 of this toolkit).

## 3. Why does this toolkit emphasize inclusion of the most marginalized children?

At the UNICEF National Committee and country office level we have an obligation to ensure that the CRS initiative overall is reaching the most marginalized. There are lots of references to this in the CRS Framework. All too often, school structures and approaches to participation can reinforce existing patterns of discrimination. Therefore the CRS initiative must go to extra lengths to ensure the most marginalized children are participating. This includes providing additional training and resources to adults in the schools, and constant reminders to schools to adapt their work and processes to be inclusive of all children.

## 4. Is there a CRS safeguarding policy?

Child safeguarding and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) must be considered and applied to the CRS initiative overall, not just at the school level, or only in relation to child participation. In general, UNICEF National Committees and country offices should follow their own organizational policies, procedures and guidelines on child safeguarding and PSEA. Remember to include these issues in the initiative's risk assessments. The tips in section 8 of this toolkit are useful reminders for us, but they don't replace out own comprehensive frameworks.

## 5. Is a child rights analysis carried out by schools or by National Committees/country offices?

Both – there are two types of child rights analysis. For the bigger picture, National Committees and country offices need to make sure that the CRS initiative overall is based on a child rights analysis of their country. This is led by National Committee/country office staff, but children and educators should be consulted in the process. At the school level, when the CRS initiative is up and running, participating National Committee/country office staff must help educators to lead – with children - a school level child rights analysis. The purpose of this analysis is to create a baseline of the child rights situation in the school that informs an action plan. This process can be repeated each year to ensure continuing improvement across the different areas.

### International examples of rights-based child participation in CRS

*[Please note: at the time of writing, CRS are currently only operational in National Committees, although the CRS Framework allows for uptake by interested country offices.]*

#### Steering committee

- In **Germany**, a steering committee (three to eight members) is a requirement for participating in the CRS initiative. Children's participation in the steering committee is recommended but not mandatory, although the CRS trainer discusses options with schools to have children on the steering committee.
- UNICEF **Portugal** encourages CRS to have a school council composed of both children and adults. In some schools- depending on the municipality – two children are elected from the school council to participate in the municipal youth assembly, representing their school. These children meet in their school council to determine which issues are relevant to their school to be discussed in the municipal youth assembly.
- In **France**, the creation of a steering committee is a mandatory requirement for CRS. The committee must involve children. Furthermore, the entire school community is invited to be part of the steering committee (teachers, town hall staff, extracurricular activity leaders, parents/guardians, etc.).
- In **Ireland**, a student council is a requirement for participating in the initiative. The council is encouraged to hold regular meetings (every two weeks), then to go back to their classrooms and share what has been discussed. Schools are encouraged to have a student council

suggestion box, where children put forward their suggestions or concerns to be discussed at the next meeting. UNICEF Ireland stresses the importance of developing training for student councils and it shares a set of guidelines for teachers, including the democratic selection of student council representatives. The guidelines also suggest including representatives from every class, even 5-year-olds (the youngest children in primary schools). Unfortunately, this does not always happen in practice.

- In **Norway**, the Rights Council is composed of both educational staff and children, with the children being in the majority, and with an important role as representatives of their peers. The Rights Council is led by the school staff member who is the coordinator of the CRS initiative (and main contact person for UNICEF Norway). The Rights Council develops the action plan and priorities for children's rights for the school year.

## Child rights analysis and action plan

- In **Ireland**, this stage of the child rights analysis is called the 'Rights Detective Stage'. It encourages the student council to assess the extent to which the school already respects children's rights. UNICEF Ireland provides questionnaires, safety and accessibility surveys, and school mapping templates to be used in carrying out this analysis. Schools are then encouraged to use the 'Rights Ribbon' to plan their activities and actions, based on the outcomes of the child rights analysis. The student council leads the planning of the activities with support from an adult. The students then go back to their classrooms and share the information with their teachers and peers.

- In **Portugal**, CRS usually use questionnaire templates shared by UNICEF Portugal. In some specific cases, a class or several classes collaborate to develop the questions for the surveys that will be applied to the whole school. Children then colour code the surveys using a 'paint ball system': if it never happens, paint it red; if it only happens a few times, paint it yellow; if it's something that happens a lot in your school, paint it green; use the white ball if you are in doubt or don't know what to answer. This is an inclusive and visual way to analyse the survey answers. UNICEF Portugal has also developed a template for the action plan, accompanied by training for teachers and other school professionals on how to develop and implement it. Overall, however, it is a flexible approach, with each school developing and implementing the child rights action plan according to its particular needs and context.

- In **France**, the whole educational community is invited to take part in the child rights baseline analysis. The participation of children in the initial analysis is mandatory. UNICEF France provides three types of surveys for the baseline analysis: one for parents/guardians, one for students and one for education staff.

- In **Italy**, each CRS designs an action plan based on the initial analysis it carries out each year, responding to the initiative's indicator grid. All stakeholders in the school, students, parents/guardians and staff, have the task of giving a shared response to the indicators. UNICEF Italy provides annual training on all the procedures for the CRS initiative, with particular attention given to participatory planning, i.e. the involvement of children in all school projects.

## Implementing the action plan

- UNICEF **Portugal** has developed several tools to support implementation of the action plan, starting with diagnostic assessment sheets, as a tool for monitoring the actions developed, evaluating the action plan and disseminating its results to communities. CRS are aware that when planning their activities and actions, they must take into account accessibility for all children. They will need to adapt their activities to ensure inclusion of the most marginalized children. UNICEF Portugal promotes training for schools with unaccompanied foreign children to raise awareness, and to train teachers and school professionals in good practice and rights-based pedagogical methodologies adapted to the reality of unaccompanied children.

- In **Norway**, children in CRS are expected to be responsible for some of the tasks in the action plan, with a concrete description and a deadline for implementation.

## Monitoring, evaluating, and learning

- The most popular approach taken by National Committees to involve children in monitoring the impact of the initiative is through child-friendly questionnaires. Children complete these individually and anonymously. Some National Committees have three versions of the same questionnaire adapted for different age groups. In most countries this is a compulsory element of the CRS initiative.

- In most countries, children are also involved in reviewing and adapting the action plan.

© UNICEF/UN0341606/Pinheiro: Peer-to-peer education work in the north east of Brazil. Letícia says "We are the future, but most of all, we have rights today.

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