

# Seen but Not Heard



**Child's Right  
to Participation**

# Child's Right to Participation

## Do you Know That

Children are human beings and individuals who are able to

- think independently
- discern information
- form and express their opinion
- make decisions by themselves
- make judgements independently, according to their age!

Let us ask this question to ourselves,

“Do we ask children for their preferences and views in matters concerning themselves such as their dresses, play equipment, play activities, vacation?”

If the answer is **yes**, it means that——

- We are conscious of children's capacity to think and express views and opinions. In other words, **we respect children.**

If the answer is **no**, it means that—

- We know more and best as to what the children need or what they want
- We assume that children are not competent to give their opinion
- We do not like to give up our superior status
- We want children to fit into the adult mould
- We feel threatened by children's forthright expression

In other words, **we do not respect children as independent individuals having specific potential and unique personality.**

If we are open to children's ideas and perceptions, it helps us to create an enabling and conducive environment, where children would feel free to share their thoughts, feelings and apprehensions with other children and adults.

If we take into account children's ideas and insights, it would help us to develop programmes that are more appropriate for children, their peers and their families

**Adults should respect children and treat them with dignity**

## **W**hat is Child Participation?

Right to participation is one of the four groups of child rights

Child participation means involving the child in discussions and decisions taken about them. In particular, child participation involves

- respecting their views and opinions
- providing opportunities to express their views
- listening to children carefully
- giving them the information that they require
- involving them in planning and implementation of activities
- involving them in decisions that affect them
- giving them the freedom to unite and form an association

**Participation is a state of mind,  
a strategy and a democratic value to be  
practised.**

## **W**hat Child Participation is Not?

- Adults decide what to do and allow children to take some minor decisions (Tokenism)
- Adults decide what to do and children take part by dancing, singing etc; (Decoration)
- Adults decide what to do and ask children if they agree (Manipulation)
- Children being used to do things adults do not want to or should do.

## **W**hy Child Participation?

Involving children in discussions and decisions that affect them, makes them feel wanted, respected and accepted. It helps in developing mutual trust between children and adults.

Child participation is essential so that....

- Children feel that we are genuinely interested in them

- Children express their thoughts and feelings freely and frankly
- They readily accept the decisions taken collectively
- Self-made decisions motivate them to strive for achieving their goal
- They develop self-confidence and self-respect

## **Who is responsible to enhance participation of children?**

Parents

The Government

NGOs

Child Care Services

The Courts

Schools

Family

Community

Children themselves

## **Child Participation in Different Scenarios**

Children of different age groups have the ability to participate in different ways in different settings such as in the family, in school and in non-formal setting.



## ***Children below 10 years of age in Home Setting***

### **Red Jacket**

Two children – 6 year old sister and 3 year old brother were in the midst of an argument about a red jacket they both wanted to wear. The jacket used to be worn by the sister when she was young and was used by the brother at the time of this incident. The family was getting ready to go out and the children were fighting and screaming about who should wear the jacket.

Their mother said, “I see that two children want to wear the same jacket. I believe that you can come up with a solution. I’ll be in the kitchen. Call me when you are ready.” Both the parents were amazed when the children entered the kitchen five minutes later and said “We have found the solution.” The daughter said, “Jay will wear the jacket when we go to the restaurant. And when we leave the restaurant to go to the fair, I will wear the jacket and Jay can wear my new yellow one!”

*Adapted from: Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. How To Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk, Avon Books, New York, 1980.*



## The Magic of Black Grass

Kailash lived in a village called Garibpur. He studied in the Sidh school. His father had died some time ago. One day, Kailash returned from school to find a crowd of people at his house. He ran inside and found his mother lying in bed, soaked in blood. She had fallen from the roof, and her head was bleeding. The village people could not think of any remedy and the hospital was very far off. Kailash remembered learning during one of his school projects that to stop bleeding you should make a paste out of black grass and apply it on the wound. Kailash did that and his mother soon felt some relief. Everybody praised Kailash.

*Source: Seen, but not Heard, VHAI, New Delhi, 2002*

## Children in Pre-primary and Primary School Setting

- Let the four year old child select the play equipment that s/he wants to play with.
- A teacher gives the choice to preschool and primary school children about the song which they want to sing from those that they know or the story that they would like to listen to.

- A teacher asks children of a primary / secondary school to collect skits for the school function. They read out the skits together and decide which one to select. Later, they jointly decide who will play which role while performing the skit.
- Children and teachers watch a movie together and discuss episodes from the movie to decide which ones are applicable to their school and how they could be adapted.

## **B**al Sansad (Children’s Parliament) -

### **Informal Setting**

Adolescents form mock parliament wherein they take on the roles. They raise issues which concern them such as “why are so many children not attending the school?” “Why is the quality of mid-day meal so poor?” “What action is taken to save the girls from violence / rape?” “What about the alternate source of income for the child labourers who are not allowed to work in order to implement the law related to Child Labour?”

## **B**achpan Sena (Children’s Battalion) -

### **Informal Setting**

Bachpan Sena comprises of seven members – one head of the sena, one girl, one differently able child and four other children who are duly elected. The members are then

trained by GANTAR, an Ahmedabad based CBO (Community Based Organisation), which works on issues related to child labour. The objective of Bachpan Sena is to bring school dropouts back to school.

They meet four times in a month and discuss the problems that affect them and the possible solutions. They share the minutes of their meetings with the Child Rights Committee comprising community leaders, teachers, local self-government representatives, parents and ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) workers with equal representation of men and women and all castes.

Through Bachpan Sena, children are able to advocate on their own behalf and are active participants in all decision making processes and interventions.

## **P**articipation of Girls and Boys

In a patriarchal social set-up, if we wish that all children express their concerns and participate in community life we need to address the special barriers to the participation of girls.

In most Indian homes especially in rural areas and urban slums, from a very young age, girls are often expected to share the domestic responsibilities with their mothers such as taking care of their younger siblings, performing numerous domestic tasks, collecting fuel and fodder, fetching water etc. Such responsibilities rarely give them the

time and opportunity to participate in the community development projects. On the other hand, boys have less domestic responsibilities and hence more time for community activities. Their involvement in community activities is also seen as preparation of their adult role as the head of the family.

In order to encourage involvement of girls, the community leaders need to have a dialogue with the parents and think of culturally appropriate activities through which girls can contribute to community development.

Careful selection of the place and timings of community programmes to suit the girls' routines is essential to ensure their participation. For example, the programmes could be held late in the evenings or in the afternoons when girls would be relatively free to actively participate because they have the ability and capacity to contribute and enrich the programmes.



Participation of Girls and Boys

## Child-to-Child Approach



Child-to-Child is a right-based approach to children's participation in health promotion and development. Through participating in Child-to-Child activities the personal, physical, social, emotional, moral and intellectual development of children is enhanced.

It is a practical way in which children's rights can be effectively implemented.

### ***The Child-to-Child approach***

- ***Respects*** children's views and voices to enable them to grow into responsible adults.
- ***Advocates*** for children's active participation that links learning with living and promotes reflection.
- ***Facilitates*** children's understanding of development issues and why healthy behaviours are important.
- ***Includes*** relevant, do-able and fun activities that promote life skills, confidence and self-esteem.
- ***Encourages*** children to take ownership and identify health and development priorities relevant to themselves and their communities.
- ***Develops*** children's decision-making and problem-solving abilities in order to take action on identified priorities.
- ***Develops*** children's ability to communicate, empathise and cope with difficult circumstances.
- ***Recognises*** children's capacities as change agents, who require the facilitative support but not the dominance of adults.

- **Ensures** that the personal development and gains of the children implementing activities are as important as those of children with whom they are working (e.g. older children working with pre-schoolers).

## **R**ole of Various Stake holders in Enhancing Child Participation

### **As Government**



- Make it a policy to have student representatives in State Textbook Production Committees, Sports Authorities, Mid-day Meal Committees, and Examination Boards and such forums.
- Encourage the concepts of Bal Sansad (Children's Parliament), Bal Panchayat (Children's Forum at village level) and similar concepts in order to help children voice their views and opinion regarding their issues and find solutions.
- Involve children in deciding the menu, rules and disciplinary action in Juvenile Homes and hostels.

### **As Academic Institutions**



- Empower children so that they may approach the policy makers to make themselves heard and seen.
- Make classroom teaching more participatory with full involvement of students rather than lecturing to them.
- Have students' representation on School/ College/Management Committee.

- Have students' involvement in organising events such as Annual Sports, Annual Day, Cultural Events, School/College Tours, School/College Picnics and School Magazine etc.
- Guide students at an appropriate time but be receptive and open to their views and ideas.
- Make child participation inclusive i.e. encourage all the children to have their 'say' in matters concerning them without discrimination of age, caste, gender, religion, socio-economic status of parents etc.
- Encourage students to improve their general knowledge by reading, participation in debates, elocution and Quiz type of activities and by visiting new places to enable them to take informed decisions.

### **As NGOs<sup>1</sup> /CBOs<sup>2</sup>/ VOs<sup>3</sup>**

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- Enable the NGOs/CBOs/VOs accept Child Participation as a value.
- Organise capacity building programmes for the functionaries at different levels to clarify the concept of child participation and promote it.
- Introduce innovative approaches besides the tried out approaches such as Child-to-Child, Children's Parliament, Bal Panchayat etc. to enable children to contribute to their own, their families' and their communities' health and development.
- Work out the indicators of child participation to make it possible to systematically monitor, evaluate and further improve the programmes.

- Empower children so that they may approach the policy makers to make themselves heard and seen.

## **As Civil Society**



- Accept child participation as a value and inter-weave it into our social fabric.
- Create the conditions where children feel free to think, understand, experience and develop.
- Create social climate where adults and children have a dialogue
- Give equal opportunity to a girl child and a boy child to participate.
- Encourage formation of children's groups, councils, associations and forums to discuss issues, which concern them.
- Operationalise child-related policies
- Involve communities and local self-governments in promoting and implementing children's programmes.
- Relinquish our adults' position of authority and assume new ways of relating to children.
- Create space and opportunities for children to express their views
- Listen to children, provide them the necessary information and respect their opinions.

### **Children and Adults should be Partners in their Development**

#### **(Footnotes)**

<sup>1</sup> Non Government Organisations

<sup>2</sup> Community Based Organisations

<sup>3</sup> Voluntary Organisations

## About CHETNA

CHETNA<sup>1</sup>, meaning “awareness” in several Indian languages and an acronym for Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness is a non-government support organisation based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. CHETNA’s mission is to contribute to the empowerment of disadvantaged children, adolescents and women to gain control over their own, their families’ and communities’ health. Beginning its activities in 1980, CHETNA has broadened its activities in the field of nutrition, health, education and development from a “Rights” perspective.

CHETNA builds the management capacities of education/health practitioners/supervisors/managers with a view to enable them to implement their field programmes from a holistic and gender perspective and advocate for people centered policies.

CHETNA develops need-based training and education materials, which are widely disseminated at the state, national and international levels.

An Information and Documentation Centre (IDC) addresses the information needs of individuals, organisations, academicians, reserachers and students working on health, education and development concerns.

CHETNA has been identified as a Regional Resource Centre (RRC) for Gujarat State and the Union Territories of Daman, Diu and Dadra Nagar Haveli to provide technical assistance to NGOs to improve RCH, facilitate GO-NGO partnership, document and disseminate successful approaches and provide inputs to GOI to ensure effective implementation of policies.



For Children Young People Women

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