

Factsheet on the Right to Child Participation

To celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the International Children's Peace Prize KidsRights Foundation has prepared a KidsRights Report, in association with Leiden University, Law School. The report *Child Participation: From Right to Reality* focuses exclusively on child participation and brings examples of the International Children's Peace Prize winners.

Key findings:

- Since the adoption 25 years ago of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), children's participation rights (art. 12-17) have gained significant attention. The CRC recognises participation as a core right, acknowledging the status of children as citizens, and playing an important role in realising other rights.
- Child participation is not a single event, but an ongoing process. Informing children, working in an atmosphere of mutual respect, and sharing outcomes are all part of that process.
- The 194 states which have ratified the CRC are compelled to enable children to exercise their participation rights, including the right to be heard (Article 12), the right to freedom of expression; the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; the right to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly; the right to privacy and the right to access to information (Articles 13-17 CRC).
- Child participation is beneficial for children themselves, as well as for society at large at the local, national and international level. It is beneficial in relation to a child's development as it increases self-esteem and self-believe. And, although not guaranteed, child participation can lead to better outcomes in all kinds of settings and it encourages social democratisation and promotes civic engagement and active citizenship.
- In realising these rights, various stakeholders play a key role. The most important are the children themselves, states, parents and family, school and the local community.
- Despite increased awareness of child participation, several challenges stand in the way of ensuring child participation. Firstly, there is a lack of clarity as to

what 'child participation' means. Secondly, adult resistance to the concept of child participation impedes the realisation hereof. Another problem is the lack of adult capacity to properly encourage, support and facilitate child participation.

Examples of child participation:

Developments in the field of child participation have taken place at international, regional, national and local level. As such children have contributed to the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals. Clear examples are the initiatives of Children's Peace Prize winners:

- Nkosi Johnson (winner 2005) fought to raise awareness for children with hiv and aids, a direct contribution to the goal of combating hiv and aids;
- Thandiwe Chama (winner 2007) and Malala Yousafzai (winner 2013) have both worked towards the realisation of universal primary education;
- Kesz Valdez (winner 2012) has helped thousands of street children through his organisation to access their basic rights including education. Child participation has in these cases produced exceptional results.

Children are also the best ambassadors for child participation, and can encourage other children to participate too. The Children's Peace Prize winners are all perfect examples of this, such as:

- Mayra Avellar Neves (winner 2008), who, at the age of 15, mobilised hundreds of youths to join a successful community march against violence, or;
- Neha Gupta (winner 2014), who supports and has inspired over a thousand children internationally in their endeavours to help vulnerable children and also;
- Chaeli Mycroft (winner 2011), who fights for the rights of children with a disability, has developed an ambassadors programme to inspire and support children to start their own projects. The impact made by Mayra, Neha, Chaeli and the other winners is a clear demonstration of what children can achieve through their own initiatives.

In conclusion, child participation is a crucial children's right. Enabling them to participate is not only enriching

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for children, but also for legislators, policy makers and other decision makers. The ten winners of the International Children's Peace Prize are all powerful examples of what children can achieve. Yet, after 25

years of the UN Convention on the Rights the Child, there is still a long way to go before child participation will be fully realised.

Recommendations:

- All relevant stakeholders need to be provided with appropriate training and resources to make child participation work in practice. Family, school and the community should be of special focus, since these are the most important living environments for children.
- States should adopt and implement legislation that embeds the Convention on the Rights of the Child at national and local level, including the child's right to participate.
- States should develop policies to encourage child participation, requiring the inclusion of children's views in decision-making that affects children. They should also develop procedures to ensure that children's views are given due weight in all contexts.
- States should allocate sufficient funds to realise child participation at all levels, for instance for the development of child-friendly cities.
- States, together with international organisations and NGOs, should take active steps to raise awareness about child participation, its importance, and the role of stakeholders at different levels in putting child participation into practice. Children should be fully informed about why they are being consulted, how the process will work, and the issue at stake itself.
- States, together with international organisations and NGOs, should facilitate child participation at regional, national and international levels using a range of methods which reach a wide cross-section of children.
- States should encourage collaboration at local, national, regional and international level between different stakeholders, including NGOs, community-based organisations and authorities.
- States should establish effective mechanisms to develop, monitor and evaluate participatory practices and report on child participation at regular intervals.
- International organisations and NGOs, as well as academic institutions, should promote research and documentation on child participation.
- States must be accountable for children's access to justice, particularly for vulnerable children, in compliance with child-friendly justice guidelines.

