



Technical Brief

AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF THE CHILDREN: WORLD VISION'S ROLE IN CHANGING THE NARRATIVE OF INCLUSIVE CHILD PARTICIPATION

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Background

Participation gives children an opportunity to learn new skills, appreciate community needs and contribute to the development of a nation. The involvement of children also enables them to contribute their views regarding their needs to thrive and reach their full potential. However, cultural and traditional barriers, particularly attitudes that adults have on children's ability to participate (i.e., children should be seen and not heard), hinder children from meaningfully participating in the house and community. Therefore, World Vision Zambia has recognized the importance of creating a platform for children to speak without infringing their rights.

Technical Approaches

World Vision works with children in different settings to ensure that children participate in decision-making processes. Some of the platforms where children participate include household and family, school, health settings, community or local government settings, and national policy.

Families

Parents/caregivers are trained on child protection rights and responsibilities to understand how a child can be protected while in their care. Caregivers are also supported through a series of sessions using the WVZ model called celebrating families¹, which ensures that children and caregivers can communicate in a safe space and creating respect for one another without fear of reproach. The model also enlightens parents on ensuring that children are encouraged to participate in the home on their decisions that affect them.

For example, children decide which schools they would like to attend or which food they want to eat. Caregivers are also encouraged to give children time to air out their worries/discomforts in all sectors of their lives. This ensures that a child can freely open up to their caregivers if they are going through challenging situations in their lives such as abuse, bullying etc.

Further, parents are taught positive parenting skills, and they are linked to support systems that will ensure that they can receive support at any time they need it. This can be through emotional support and counselling from a religious leader and other trusted and respected community members.

Text Box 1: Approaches used by World Vision Zambia to Enhance Child Participation

To enhance the participation of children in issues affecting them, World Vision Zambia implements the following programmes:

- Celebrating Families – builds capacity of caregivers in child protection, responsibilities and importance of child participation in decision making.
- Young Journalist Clubs – platforms that engage children to discuss issues that affect them and their communities through radio and TV.
- School Councils - these are school based structures that encourage children to participate in the governance of their schools.
- Policy advocacy - at national level, WVZ is part of the Joining Forces Alliance that advocates for children's rights and increase their participation in decision making.

¹Celebrating Families model, is a World Vision model that supports and equips families to create a safe and loving family for children through the Pastors.

Schools

At the school level, World Vision builds capacity for in-school children to develop skills for participation in the school governance processes using two structures – Young Journalist Clubs and School Councils. Similarly, teachers and the school administrative staff are provided with skills to include children in the decision-making processes and ensure that children can freely participate in the governance process in the two structures.

1. Young Journalist Clubs.

Young Journalist Clubs have been established to support school-going children to discuss and report on issues affecting them using the media forums like the radio and the TV stations. In addition, World Vision Zambia collaborates with Zambia National Information Services (ZANIS) to train young people in the principles and protocols of journalism so that children can engage in different forums. World Vision has established 416 Young Journalist Clubs in schools in 33 of its Area Programmes in nine (9) provinces.



2. School Councils

School Councils are representative structures through which learners become involved in the affairs of the school². WVZ supports schools to set up and revive the School Councils to enhance child participation. Therefore, 91 School Councils have been established in eight (8) World Vision Area Programmes.

Policy Level

Advocacy plays a significant role in child participation programming. Children can advocate for their rights both at the local and the national levels. Using the Young Journalist Clubs and the Children's Councils, children have the opportunity to interact with Parliamentarians and air out their views on their rights and what support they require from the Government for them to realize their child protection rights. They are also able to engage Parliamentarians to advocate for enacting the children's codification bill³. Through the Young Journalist Clubs, children have also advocated for developing by-laws and worked to ensure that communities abide by the by-laws.

Key Outcomes of the Child Participation Programme

Children's participation in World Vision Zambia's programmes has an impact on both children and adult beneficiaries. Knowledge regarding children's rights and the meaning and value of child participation has increased for adults and children. Child Participation capacity building has provided opportunities for both children and adults to learn from each other and gain skills to engage with one another respectfully and value the contribution that each makes in their society⁴. Over 1300 children are members of the Children's Councils and Young Journalist Clubs. The capacity that comes with the members of these groups has enabled children in the community to be equipped with life skills to support fellow children in their day to day lives. Further, children have learned to be assertive and understand their child protection rights and responsibilities.

Evidence from the World Vision Zambia's Annual

Text Box 2: Key Outcomes of the Child Participation Programme

Through its child participation programme, World Vision Zambia has made a lot of achievements. Some of the key achievements include:

- Caregivers especially those who participate in the Celebrating Families appreciate and report engaging children in decision making.
- Over 1300 Children participants in School Councils and Young Journalist Clubs have participated in issues affecting them and the governance of their schools and communities.
- World Vision and its partners have and continue to advocate for children's rights and participation. To this end, it has also facilitated children to interact with Parliamentarians and air out their views on issues affecting them; therefore increase attention of their needs to policy markers.

²Republic of Zambia, Ministry of General Education, (2018): Enhanced Participation, Accountability and Governance in Education. World Vision, UKaid, Zambia Accountability Programme, British Council.

³A Bill that will harmonise Child Protection Rights in Zambia.

⁴Save the Children Sweden (2010): Regional Study on Children's Participation in Southern Africa: South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia.-

Community Engagement and Sponsorship report of 2019 to 2020 showed that children and adults can now understand and appreciate child participation following capacity building and knowledge sharing in the 416 children's groups during this period. Therefore, children are increasingly expressing themselves among adults. Adults are more inclined to listen to children's opinions. Notable positive changes in behaviour and attitude towards child participation on the part of children and adults have been reported and embraced in the communities that know positive communication and other child participation principles.

Limitations and Challenges

Despite World Vision Zambia's contribution to enhancing child participation, limitations and challenges have been noted in child participation programmes:

- Zambia is home to many cultural beliefs and practices. Unfortunately, some cultural beliefs and traditions play a significant role in undermining child participation initiatives. Women and children are not allowed to participate in decisions made at home and in the community meaningfully. Therefore, the voices of children are not heard and not represented in decisions affecting them. The belief that children do not have meaningful contributions and that they should adhere to parents and adults' authority has allowed caregivers or parents not to give the children an opportunity to make decisions that affect them.
- Legal frameworks provide limited opportunity for any meaningful engagement from citizens generally but more importantly, from children. There are multiple reasons for this; (i) the failure to develop specific national laws and policies governing children's rights that reflect international conventions that have been ratified; (ii) the inability to formulate clear plans of action for implementing laws and policies; (iii) the absence of mechanisms to enable citizens of any age to participate in public life.
- In the communities where WVZ works, irrespective of whether or not opinions expressed within the public sphere support children's rights, the home environment remains one where children's participation is not viewed favourably. Parents or caregivers perceive child participation as meaningless but also as undermining their authority in the home.

Opportunities

Despite the limitations and challenges that work as barriers to the participation of children, some opportunities can be leveraged to increase children's meaningful participation in decision making:

- Zambia has ratified the CRC Article 12 and the adoption of the African Charter on the Rights and the Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) Article 2, 4, and 7. These emphasize the significance of the children participatory rights in Zambia and how these legal binding charters can ensure child participation is upheld.
- Children's groups such as; Children's Councils, Young Journalist Clubs, Children's Parliaments, and many more have given children an opportunity to participate in decision-making positions. Moreover, their participation in these forums has raised awareness and the importance of child participation.
- Organizations such as World Vision have come on board to build the capacity of the community members and the children on how they can participate in the decision-making processes from the family to the community through the different capacity building models like Celebrating Families and Citizens Voice in Action.
- Parents or Caregivers of the children engaged in the child participation groups are vital in ensuring the children's successful participation. Cultural beliefs and practices that undermine child participation initiatives in the households are demystified when parents are engaged and aware of the benefits of having healthy relationships. Therefore, there are opportunities to increase child participation groups and the involvement of their parents or caregivers.

Our Call for Action

World Vision Zambia's experience in implementing child participation programmes at the home and community level has generated lessons that could be harnessed to improve children's participation by all stakeholders working with and for children. Therefore, to increase the meaningful involvement of children in decisions that affect their lives, every stakeholder should play their role particularly on the following issues:

Policy Markers

- The Children's Code Bill should quickly be enacted into law to enhance children's participation in issues affecting them and their communities.

- There is a need to put in place mechanisms to enforce the implementation of the different child policies and guidelines to ensure that they benefit the children they were meant for.

Partners

- Increase the involvement of community actors to take the lead in improving child participation.
- Community Leaders such as traditional and religious leaders need to be engaged to spearhead child participation and understand the importance of children in their communities.
- Ensure that children take the lead in children's groups. This will enable the children to develop a sense of ownership of

the groups and for the children to have space where they are free to open up and interact.

- Community awareness is essential to ensure that child participation takes place. In addition, awareness should target to challenge beliefs and practices that undermine child participation.

Programme Implementers

- Facilitate and scale up the development of by-laws to promote child participation at the home and community level.
- Scale up the strengthening of children's School Councils in the programme areas to increase participation of children in the governance of their school affairs.

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World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities to reach their full potential by tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.

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