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RIGHTS**

World Vision



EMPOWERED AND CONNECTED:
Encounters between children and
young people and global stakeholders

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CREDITS

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Authors:

Michelle Templeton, Laura Lundy and Patricio Cuevas-Parra.

Dr. Michelle Templeton is Research Project Coordinator at the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast. Her research largely focuses on facilitating children and young people's participation in the co-production of child-centred health and education interventions and child-friendly, accessible information on their rights.

Professor Laura Lundy, Co-director of the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast and professor of law at University College Cork. Her expertise is in international children's rights with a particular focus on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in law and policy, education rights and children and young people's right to participate in decision-making.

Dr. Patricio Cuevas-Parra is Director of Child Participation and Rights at World Vision International. He has a particular interest in exploring innovative and participatory methodologies to engage children and young people in decision-making processes.

Copyediting:

Helen Shipman

Design & layout:

Carol Homsí

Cover & inside photos:

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World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, World Vision is dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

Queen's University Belfast's Centre for Children's Rights is a leading research centre globally, operating as a focus for research intended to better understand and improve children's lives. The centre focuses on substantive children's rights issues, children's participation in decision making and children's rights-based research methods with an emphasis on research activity, education, training and professional development.

OVERVIEW



The Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast (QUB) was commissioned to work alongside World Vision International to explore the claims, practices and outcomes of its Young Leaders project. The main focus of the study was to understand the common challenges affecting children and young people's participation during international fora, from the perspectives of the children and young people themselves and the adult global stakeholders they engage with, with a particular interest in how they may influence decision-making. This research is relevant because while children and young people's participation has greatly increased over the past ten years or more, particularly in major international oversight bodies and panels, there is little known about the influence, if any, this have had and may continue to have in the future.



The purpose of this report is to provide information to academics, practitioners and policy makers who work with, or who seek to involve, children and young people in organisational activities and policy decision-making. The authors conducted one-to-one and group interviews with a random sample of 16 children and young people supported by World Vision and 12 adult leaders who participated in high-level international fora, to explore their views and experiences of children and young people's participation on the world stage. Analysis of the interview data highlighted a difference in how children and young people and adults understand the expectations and value of children and young people's participation.

The children and young people described direct benefits from the opportunity to participate at such events which adults did not anticipate. These included experiencing camaraderie with other inspirational children and young people, learning new things about issues in their own and other countries, and getting to converse with influential adults who they viewed as allies with whom to effect change. However, they also experienced challenges with the organisational



culture of meetings and their capacity to get involved, and faced assumptions about who they represent and how they were chosen to participate. Adults also questioned what they could achieve through their participation and the likelihood of them influencing positive action or policy change based on their inputs and suggestions. Consequently, the 'adult-centric' setup of intergenerational meetings continued to impede children and young people's meaningful participation and to dilute the respect, value and influence they hoped to have.

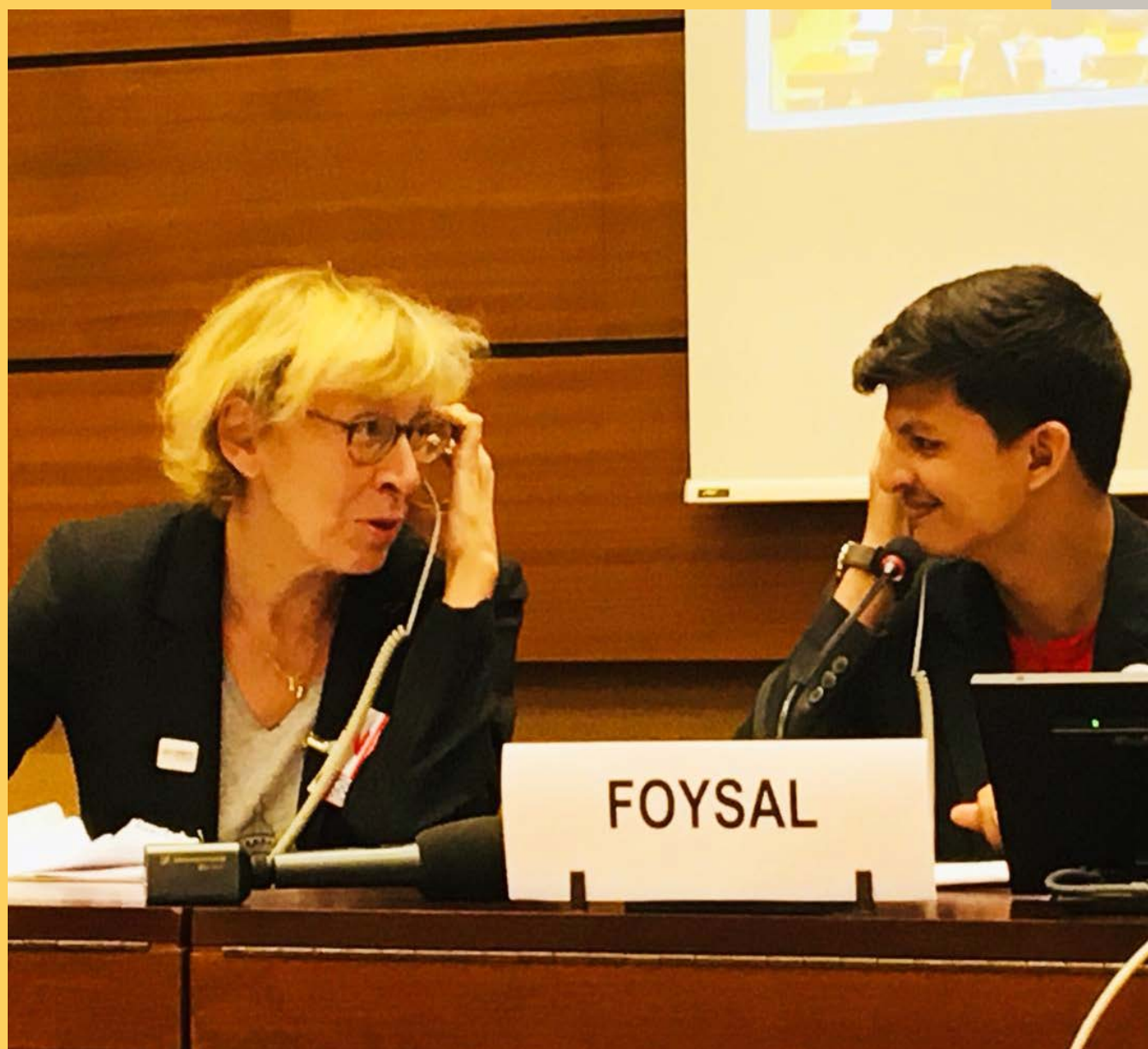
The report expands on these issues and provides recommendations on the operational ethos and procedures required for successful intergenerational meetings. These are formulated from the insights gained by the children and young people themselves, who suggested a course of action to ensure their participation was conducted in the best way possible. However, adults retain the power to address challenges that impede children and young people's participation and incorporate, embed and implement these suggestions. The report concludes by reflecting on the fact that adults and children and young people hold different perceptions of the value and influence they may have during these events and the implications this has for continuing with such events in the future.

KEY FINDINGS

- Children and young people and adults may hold different ideas about the purpose, value, benefits and impact of children and young people's participation during intergenerational meetings on the global stage.
- Children and young people considered their participation on the global stage relevant as they were representing children and young people's voices and sharing their own experiences in order to motivate global stakeholders to act based on the information they provided.
- Some adults were sceptical about the overall value of children and young people taking part in international fora. They questioned whether their appearance on the international stage might be a waste of time, suggesting that their contribution may be more relevant at the local, community level. In contrast, children and young people unanimously perceived that their participation in international fora had positive impacts, not just for them personally but also for their activity at a national level and for the issues for which they were advocating.
- Adults did not always accept children and young people as relevant representatives of their own and other children and young people's experiences. Instead, they treated them differently to adults, who typically engage in representation on behalf of themselves and others without question, and queried their value as competent social actors.
- The personal ability of the children and young people to participate in international fora (i.e. in terms of having relevant presentation styles, competencies, knowledge and skills), compounded by practical and organisational challenges (i.e. time limits, translation issues and unprepared responses to questions), may affect their capacity to get involved in international fora and yet was used by adults to assess their legitimacy to be involved.



INTRODUCTION



There has been growing global attention to child participation rights since the 1990s, largely encouraged and promoted by the establishment of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). The impetus for this is a growing awareness of children and young people's entitlement to be heard in all matters affecting them (as outlined in Article 12 of the UNCRC), including being heard on international policy generated by multilateral bodies. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has also welcomed the contributions of NGOs in this regard and 'encourages them to further promote child participation in all matters affecting them, including at the grass-roots, community, and national or international levels', and to facilitate exchanges of best practices (UN, 2009, para. 10). Consequently, children and young people are increasingly



participating in events organised by international organisations, such as the European Union (EU), Council of Europe (CoE) and the United Nations (UN). Such high-level international fora tend to conduct meetings, panels and events that explore and report on important social and political issues. Critically, they include adults who are senior figures in their countries with influential decision-making powers from high-level political and advocacy organisations.

Despite the fact that there is a growing body of research and evaluations focussed on children and young people's participation in decision-making, little remains known about the value, influence and effect of their participation on themselves and the adults who attend international fora. Children and young people are yet not fully participating in society due to multiple factors, including limited political will to make it happen, lack of resources and adequate methodologies to support their participation, and children and young people's subordination to adults' power (Cuevas-Parra & Tisdall, 2019; Lundy, 2018; Thomas, 2012).

Tisdall (2021) argues that many of the spaces for engagement in public decision-making are not accessible nor understood by children and young people as these have been developed by and for adults. Within this context, one of the key factors undermining the opportunities of children and young people to participate in decision-making are adults' mind-sets, which often underestimate their abilities and capabilities to engage in dialogue with adults due to power imbalances and a lack of appropriate methodologies for capturing children and young people's voices (Collins, 2015, Tisdall, 2017). Children and young people do not have the duty to prove their maturity in order to give their views; on the contrary, State Parties and decision makers have an obligation to ensure this right is implemented by listening to their views and finding the best ways for them to express their opinions (e.g. Lundy, 2007; United Nations, 2009).

This report describes the first study to explore whether child participation differs when children and young people are taken outside their national context to engage with global decision-makers and, if so, how it differs. It is also the first study to capture the experiences and perspectives of both the children and young people and adults attending the same events. A qualitative approach was applied whereby one-to-one, paired and small group interviews were conducted with 16 children and young people and 12 adults who participated in various high-level global events. Analysis compared the children and young people's and adults' narratives to assess opportunities and challenges, and three broad themes were identified across both stakeholders' accounts: representation, capacity and impact. Findings suggest that while children and young people and adults identified similar opportunities and challenges for meaningful participation, children and young people's perceptions of their engagement differed from adults' in that they were more likely to be positive about the value of child participation. In contrast, adults were more likely to question children and young people's ability to get involved and the value added by their involvement.

THE LUNDY MODEL OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

In 1989, the UNCRC established a set of participatory rights for children and elevated these rights to the position of a central principle (Verhellen, 2015). Article 12(1) of the UNCRC includes two key elements: the right to express a view and the right to have that view given due weight. It sets out children and young people's right to get involved in and influence decision-making in a variety of ways that consider their age and maturity (Lundy, 2007; Percy-Smith, 2011; Tisdall, 2015). Conceptualising the operationalisation of Article 12, Lundy (2007) proposes a child's rights-based model for children and young people's participation which consists of four interrelated elements: 'space', 'voice', 'audience' and 'influence'.

- **'Space'** - giving children and young people the opportunity to express a view
- **'Voice'** - facilitating children and young people to express their voices
- **'Audience'** - Obliging others (including adults) to listen to children and young people's views
- **'Influence'** - Ensuring these views are acted upon, as appropriate.

Since the inception of this model, and following changes in legislation and good practice guidelines, many child participation structures have been established, such as Children's Parliaments and Youth Councils. A recent study by Janta et al. (2021) identified more than 300 such mechanisms that enable children and young people to express their views and have them taken into account as part of decision-making at local, national and EU levels. Few events and activities, however, provide evidence of the impact or influence of children and young people's views on policy and decision-making processes.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION AT GLOBAL EVENTS

Adults and organisations remain the guardians of children and young people's participation rights, ultimately weighing and judging the abilities of children and young people to participate based on their age, maturity or perceived best interests (Archard, 2004; Lundy, 2018; Ruggiero, 2022). Many studies have explored child participation in the context of policymaking, both locally and internationally, and have developed toolkits, guides and recommendations on meaningful and ethical child participation from the lessons learned (see for example, Bennett-Woodhouse, 2003; Feinstein, 2008; Lansdown, 2011; Day et al., 2015; Crowley and Larkins, 2018; UNICEF, 2018; Crowley et al., 2021). While there is a growing body of evidence on the experiences of child participation in local and national events (e.g., Forde et al, 2017), there is a dearth of information about children and young people's experiences in international meetings, and less still exploring the reactions and perceptions of the adults whom they encounter at these events.

This study aimed to do just that, exploring the experiences of children and young people and adult decision-makers who met at international fora as a result of a World Vision programme to support children and young people in intergenerational dialogue at both a local and international level. The study represented here is the first to explore whether child participation differs when children and young people are taken outside their national context to engage with global decision-makers and, if so, how it differs. It is also the first study to capture the experiences of both the young people and adults attending the same events to understand the barriers, processes and outcomes of children and young people's participation.

WORLD VISION'S YOUNG LEADERS PROJECT

The Young Leaders for Change is a project designed and managed by World Vision to give children and young people aged 12–17 years the space and opportunity to gain skills, knowledge and tools to engage in child-led advocacy in their countries and across the globe. At the time of the study, more than 600 children and young people

from 22 countries were a part of this initiative, which is a key component of the World Vision Child Participation Framework. This project aims to empower children and young people, providing spaces and opportunities for them to engage in global policy debate to foster social change. The children and young people are provided training and support by World Vision staff to have their voices heard in high-level debates and policy discussions in order to contribute to changing traditional mind-sets and attitudes that perpetuate violence. With the acquired tools and skills, the children and young people mobilise themselves through a global network of young advocates, making their voices heard in policy debate at local, national and global levels.

The children and young people who are part of the Young Leaders project represent diversity and a variety of identities, such as different genders, ethnicities, social classes, faith groups and abilities. They also live in both rural and urban areas. Between 2017 and 2020, young leaders engaged in many global policy events, including,

- the Pan-African Forum to end violence against children (Addis Ababa, 2017),
- European Development Days (Brussels, 2017, 2018, 2019),
- UNCRC anniversary (Geneva, 2017, 2018, 2019),
- European Girls Week (Brussels, 2017),
- Peace and Security Youth Forum (Brussels, 2017, 2018),
- UN End of Violence against Children Solutions Summit (Stockholm, 2018),
- Commonwealth Youth Forum (London, 2018),
- UNCRC Day of General Discussion (Geneva, 2018),
- UN High Level Political Forum (New York, 2019) and
- UN Global Status Report on Preventing Violence against Children (Geneva, 2020).

The Young Leaders for Change project employs the Lundy model of child participation that helps adults to determine i) how spaces can be created for children and young people's participation; ii) the mechanisms needed to ensure that their voices are heard, listened to and taken seriously; iii) how strategic audiences can be selected, and iv) how and when children and young people's views are taken into account during decision-making processes (World Vision, 2017a).



METHODS



RESEARCH SETTING

The researchers attended various high-level political global events in New York, Geneva and Brussels in 2019-2020 to conduct one-to-one, paired and group interviews with participants during or after their attendance at each event. Interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants after events or online with participants who had returned home. The researchers also observed and reflected upon the children and young people's participation at the events they attended.



ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical approval for the study was gained from the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University, Belfast on 4th June 2019. All participants provided their consent to be interviewed and for anonymous quotes from their interviews to be used in all publications. All the adult participants consented to an audio-recorded one-to-one interview, and the children and young people consented to speak to the researchers either on a one-to-one basis, as part of a 'buddy pair', or in a 3-way group interview with other children and young people with whom they shared a panel. Most of the interviews and focus groups were conducted in English. However, in cases where some of the children and young people did not speak English, their adult chaperone was on hand during one-to-one and group interviews to provide translation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research was guided by the following research questions,

- What are the internal and external contextual factors that facilitate the participation of children and young people in the global policy debate?
- How do children and young people and global stakeholders engage in intergenerational dialogue and how do they deal with power, control and hierarchies while trying to ensure the impact of their work in specific socio-political contexts?
- To what extent do children and young people have an impact on decision-making and influence the global stakeholders with whom they interact? What weakens their influence and impact?

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

In total, 28 participants consented to take part in the study. They were a purposeful sample of 12 high-level global stakeholders (4 Male and 8 Female) and 16 children and young people supported by World Vision (aged 14-18 at the time of interviews, and 5 Male; 11 Female). The children and young people participating in this study had a wealth of experience in their roles as World Vision's young leaders and worked on various child rights issues in their communities, as well as at national and international level. For example, one young leader had risen up through the ranks as a child human rights defender (CHRD) from community to national level. She started out as a young associate member of her local Child Forum then became its president at age 13, voted in by her peers via democratic elections. She was then voted to represent her constituency at the National Child Forum. She is an experienced campaigner and speaker who provides information and feedback to children and young people in her community at large school assemblies and other large gatherings in her country on many social issues. Her work ranges from gathering and distributing clothing to children and young people living on the street, to campaigning on the international stage for an end to laws supporting child marriage in her country. Other children and young people had similar experiences as CHRDs and leading on child rights-based issues in their communities.



DATA COLLECTION

All adult participants had a one-to-one interview that focused on their experiences with children and young people, in general, and their specific experiences with children and young people at various global events. For example, sample questions included:

- What was good/not so good about the children and young people's involvement?
- Do you think what the children and young people said influenced the result?

The children and young people spoke with researchers either on a one-to-one basis or as part of a group interview with other child participants with whom they shared a panel. They were asked about their experiences in the Young Leaders project, with sample questions including:

- How (and why) did you get involved?
- What do you think about the kinds of activities you do there?
- What do you like about the Young Leaders project?
- Is there anything you would want to change about the project?

They were also asked about their specific participation experiences at global events:

- How did you get ready or prepare for the global event?
- What did you think about the environment at the global event?
- Did you feel comfortable sharing your views at the global event?

Excerpts of actual quotes from the participants are used throughout the report and the sources of these quotes are identified in the following way:

- Adult quotes use the code ID.Sex-Role; for example, 7.F-Human Rights Specialist large global NGO, means that the seventh adult participant in the study was a female human rights specialist from a large global NGO.
- Children and young people's quotes are identified by a similar code, ID.Sex-Age-Country; for example, 11.F16-Romania means that the 11th child participant was a 16 year old female from Romania.
- Please see annex 1 for the details of all participants.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis was conducted during the lockdown period of the COVID pandemic (2020-2021). Transcripts of the interviews were forwarded securely to the authors, who each conducted an independent thematic analysis and met several times online to discuss themes and issues that were emerging from their interpretation of the data. This was an inductive and iterative process and when the authors discussed together their interpretation of the data, new codes and categories were highlighted. Each author identified a coding cluster that they were particularly interested in and returned to the data to interrogate this further. As a result, three key themes were identified in the analysis: representation, capacity and impact. The data also provided a rich picture of the value of children and young people's participation and offered distinctive challenges and recommendations for making the experience more effective going forward.

FINDINGS



REPRESENTATION

This study found that understandings of representation varied, with adult and child participants holding different views about who the latter represent, how they are selected, what they should do on behalf of those represented, and the extent to which they genuinely represent the views or standpoints of others (see Mansbridge, 2011; Saward, 2009; Urbinati & Warren, 2018).

The legitimacy of the children and young people's representativeness, and the assumptions that this generated, was raised by the adults and draws attention to some important questions, including who are the children and young people that attend global forums, how are they identified and invited, and whom do they actually represent?

"what is their legitimacy on that issue, which is a funny thing to say, but I say that because you know someone and you think they seem to be probably... they're not gonna experience... they haven't experienced the issues themselves. They're not representative of a parliament or a network or a youth group or whatever else...they are probably part of an elite sub-set of children in the country that they are coming and therefore not truly representative." (10.M-Director of a global initiative)

This account shows that the concept of representation needs to be critically unpacked in order to clarify the essence of representation, including what children and young people do and whether child representatives represent themselves or represent others. For this research project, representation is not understood simply as political representation in which one person represents the interests of their constituents and is granted the position of representative following regular elections. Since children and young people do not vote and cannot stand for election, their representation does not exist within formal democracy institutions (see also Wall and Dar, 2011). Hence, representation needs to be understood as a constructed role between the representative and the represented, which is the basis of the representative's legitimacy. The children and young people got legitimacy as they were elected and chosen by their peers.

In the interviews, most of the children and young people considered representation to be a form of connecting the views of other children and young people with decision-makers; this form of representation involves expressing views on behalf of others and advocating for a common cause:

"It was a really big event with a great diversity of people, and I was really glad because there were many social causes being discussed in this event. And I had the chance to meet two amazing girls that were also fighting for social causes and they were in the same round table where I was. I talked about discrimination. It was a fantastic experience... because I could feel that the people who were listening to my speech were really interested in that issue and they could really feel the intensity of my speech and how important that thing was for me." (4.F15, Brazil)

"I feel confident to speak in public because I am telling my own story and how we - girls from my community - are working together to stop child marriages and promote child rights... and when people asked difficult questions or try to undermine my opinion, I was able to speak loudly because I have full knowledge. I did not read it somewhere." (2.F16-Ghana)

Most children and young people perceived representing other children and young people's voices in global fora to be an empowering experience as they act on behalf of their peers, influence decision-making and, above all, represent these views from the position of being children and young people themselves and, thus, from a position of expertise. Therefore, they considered themselves to be well-placed to speak about the issues affecting them and to represent their peers' views based on their lived experiences and their ability to present relevant insights.

A further question that requires answering is the extent to which representation allows children and young people to enter into a dialogue that is transparent and transcends the common barriers that children and young people face while interacting in international events, where the adults do not often respect their lived experiences and the extent to which they represent other children.

"I think the problem of representativeness of these children [is that] I don't know on the behalf of whom they are speaking. Who really decides that they are representative of all children? For me, this is not normal and we need to be very careful of that. Another point [is] why [do] we decide that they are leaders. I have no idea. Because, maybe, we need to have [a] kind of criteria to make sure." (6.F-UNCRC Member)



This quote reflects a common concern amongst the adult respondents about the extent to which child representatives truly represent their peers, with representativeness being depicted as a potentially contested and complex term. This more negative assessment of child representation raises questions about the extent to which representation should always be considered a meaningful form of child participation. Some adult respondents considered that children and young people are often unable to engage in intergenerational exchanges of ideas at anything more than a tokenistic level when their level of representation, or legitimacy as representatives, is unclear.

In contrast, the children and young people all thought that even more representation from children and young people is necessary in such an adult-centric environment. Whereas the adults were looking at the quality of representation, from a position that demanded children and young people proved their value and legitimacy.

"I think more children should have been here..., we should have had a lot of children from different countries, different communities all around the world so that they can speak about their rights and voice out the problems they are facing in their different communities. I was really sad when I saw that we had more adults than children."
(3.F16-Ghana)

Participating children and young people emphasised the need for more child representatives in global forums as they bring their knowledge, perspectives and lived experiences without needing adult mediation. However, children and young people recognised that many barriers still prevent children and young people from participating on an equal basis when interacting in an adult domain. They argued this could be improved by validating their representation based on their own personal experiences of the information they wanted to share with the audience. This echoes Percy-Smith (2011), who argues that representation needs to be understood in relation to others in order to analyse how it is carried out in contexts of power disparity between children and adults.

CAPACITY

The ability of children and young people to get meaningfully involved in international fora was dependant on two components associated with capacity. One was their personal capacity, which included the attributes (e.g., competency, knowledge and skills) required to understand and deliver their messages. The second was their organisational capacity, which included the practical elements required when preparing for and attending meetings and events (e.g., finances, logistics relating to travel, child protection and safeguarding considerations, language and translation etc.), which can enable or disable children and young people's meaningful participation.

When considering personal capacity, the participating children and young people all felt supported, well trained and prepared by their support organisation based on their long-term involvement in the Young Leaders project.

"I learned how to deliver my argument and aspirations, deliver my recommendations to high-level politicians. I gained more confidence. I talked at the village level with the government of the village, but when I come to New York, we talk with the people from other countries in high-level position. I feel more comfortable and confident. I think that they made me feel really, really confident and that everybody is going to listen to me. (13. M14-Indonesia)

However, despite the children and young people's feeling well-equipped to express their arguments, adult participants were sometimes dismissive of young leaders' personal capacity and the growth that was required for them to participate successfully. They assumed that the children and young people were well educated and had been chosen to speak at such events because they were confident and could articulate their messages well. This might reflect on the need to explain better how World Vision recruit people into the young leaders' project.

Assumptions were also made by adults on the children and young people's credibility and authentic voice, so much so that they noted a distinction between children and young people who acted alone and those who acted with others (as CHRDs), with children and young people groups being viewed as more credible due to their level of representation. The adult participants also questioned the extent of children and young people's personal experience of the topic they were discussing. Even if children and young people were unable to answer questions or engage in further debate about the issues off-script, some adults felt that their messages were forced and suspected that they might have been coached or brought to the event to forward a particular political agenda. This further reduced the children and young people's credibility and legitimacy. In contrast, the adult participants tended to favour a child 'victim' who could speak passionately and from personal experience on an issue and could generate an emotive response in the adults. This increased the adult's participants' impression that the young leader was authentic and credible.

Children and young people's meaningful participation in intergenerational dialogue on topics that affect them was also understood to be reliant on the capacity (or lack of) within the organisation to limit physical and psychological barriers that affected their ability to engage. According to the adults in this study, if children and young people's participation is not perfectly operationalised, it may not be worth doing, may be easily dismissed, and may not translate well into policy to effect change. Linked to this, some of the adults expressed concerns about the complexities of working ethically with children and young people, particularly in terms of expecting them to 'fit-in' with existing organisational cultures and structures.

"the UN meetings they are so formatted. There is no flexibility as to the length of the speech and the format of the speech, and, you know, that is also very difficult to, kind of, try to make a child fit into that because the child has no creativity, there is no room for creativity on how to convey your message." (7.F-UNICEF Human Rights Specialist)

Adult participants also noted that additional procedures and systems are required for children and young people's successful participation, such as safeguarding structures (see also Crowley et al., 2021; Crowley & Larkins, 2018; Feinstein, 2008). These included dealing appropriately with a child who might become upset or one that was unable to speak due to being nervous.

"How we ensure that [there is] an accompanying adult; what happens if any...we don't want any situation; we are too scared of any situation where the child feels uncomfortable and we don't how to respond or react." (6.F-UNCRC Member)

Thus, whilst adults appeared aware of the different logistical barriers facing child participants, particularly relating to children and young people being asked to perform in an adult-centric domain, they seemed ill-equipped to suggest solutions to these barriers.

In summary, assumptions were made regarding capacity by both parties. On one hand, the children and young people all felt well trained, supported, and confident to be there and share their views with adults whom they assumed would want to listen to them and help. They therefore felt they had sufficient capacity to engage in meaningful participation and were optimistic about the impact of their participation. However, the adult participants tended to focus on the children and young people's ability to appear credible and authentic, and thus their legitimacy to become involved in such high-level discussions. Children and young people who possessed high levels of personal capacity were at risk of losing credibility since adults assumed they were well-educated and likely to be less affected by the issues at hand.

Thus, the personal capacities that the child participants perceived as a strength could actually be used against them to limit the impact of their participation. Adult participants were also aware that the child participants were being asked to participate within adult-centric structures, but did not appear to have solutions to address this problem. The findings consequently emphasised the tension between tokenistic and meaningful participation by drawing attention to children and young people's need to 'fit' within adult-centric environments and highlighting adults' lack of movement in relation to working in a child friendly way (Lundy, 2007). Whilst tokenistic participation is a start, it is not ideal, and adults must find ways, time and resources to include children and young people in the way that is intended under the UNCRC.

IMPACT

Discussion about the impact of children and young people's participation in international fora covered impact on the children and young people, limited impact on the adults and impact on the issues that concern them. The children and young people reported a range of personal benefits common to participation efforts in other areas, such as a growth in confidence and the opportunity to make new friends. Specific to the international experience, additional benefits were gained from travel, such as first experiences with snow in Geneva, trying new foods, and meeting people from other countries and cultures. Children and young people also gained a range of new knowledge and skills, information and strategies for their activist activities that they could take back home and put into practice. Their participation allowed them to connect with like-minded others to reinforce their identity and sense of purpose.

"My favourite part is that I feel like we are a family, to be honest, because I've met in Geneva F and P, and we just bonded immediately." (11.F16-Romania)

"And then another thing is that I have got from Geneva is, women can do anything. I've like...women and girls, we were talking about gender equality or something like that, but if you're want to establish...women in parliament, then we should follow the Geneva rules...I shared all of the experience to my child forum leaders and they just say like yeah um in Bangladesh, we have to mend too many kinds of rules. It's like we are staying in the girls' school, girls can't go...girls can't go out for work, they can't go for their study or something like that. But from Geneva, I have learnt that, yeah, every girl has rights, so they can move...so that's the most interesting experience for me." (15.F15-Bangladesh)

Some adults questioned the personal impact of participation at international fora on children and young people, particularly the fact that they could be missing school. Yet, none of the children and young people expressed similar concerns, focusing instead on the positive personal impacts.

When considering the impact of their participation on the issues that concern them, the children and young people viewed themselves and each other as 'change-makers' and assumed that adults who attended these panels wanted to work with them as allies, galvanised around a common pursuit to help them make the world a better place. They were aware that their authority as 'change-makers' was judged on their ability to convince the adults of their experience and knowledge, sometimes in a 10-minute speech.

"I just hope that my government, everyone else's government, every country's government after viewing my speech will think again of what they are doing and what they will do, and this will make a difference." (6.F14-Mongolia)

However, for the most part, the children and young people interviewed for this study said that they received positive feedback on their contributions during formal sessions and explained this was because audiences were well informed and interested to engage with them about the issues.

Nonetheless, while they hoped to influence change and have an impact on the high-level (adult) policy makers, children and young people were quickly made aware that they lacked the political power to actually change policy.

"I'm just not sure if my speech will make any difference if I was to learn anything from it... I'm not saying like make a difference right now. I said making a difference in the future...near future." (6.F-14-Mongolia)

Some were also left disappointed as they noticed that outside the formal setting, meaningful engagement dropped and they were easily dismissed, for example, when they were hosting a stall at side event.

"Some, if you approach them, they will be like they are in a hurry going somewhere. Yes, we felt bad. It's like they didn't want to talk to us. We think because we were children...Some, when I asked them, they told me they will see me later but they never came." (1.M16-Ghana)

"We (official from home country) will talk to each other and just for the image (photograph) for the people to see and believe that he is doing something. And in reality they say 'yes, yes, of course we are listening' or their assistants will listen for them. It is a bit annoying, to be honest, and it's a bit disappointing." (11.F16- Romania)

Perhaps explaining this, adults viewed the 'change-maker' role as the children and young people coming along with messages and action points that were demanding, idealistic and unrealistic.

"Children speak or make demands etc. And in a very informal way, I'd turn to the person next to me and I've heard people say, 'well that's great but it's completely unrealistic'. These kids are making all kinds of a whole bunch of completely unrealistic demands of the adults and leaving so what's the point of the session" (10.M-Director of a Global Partnership)

'Change-makers', they said, were more suited to making a difference in their own lives and that of their families and communities at a grass roots level, affecting change in places where their energy and efforts can be better realised.

The impact of children and young people's participation in international fora covered impact on them personally, on the adults attending the fora, and on the issues. In common with other participation research, children and young people reported a range of personal benefits, such as, increased confidence, travelling to new places and meeting new people, and learning new information and strategies they could take away with them. These children and young people displayed a high level of political interest and engagement which had been nurtured and encouraged. However, they were disappointed to learn that their participation was less impactful on the attending adults and the issues. Whereas the children and young people viewed themselves positively as change-makers, the adults in the study found this attitude to be aspirational and idealistic and commented that their wants and demands were unrealistic. The adults went further to suggest that change makers are better suited to making a difference in their own lives and communities where their efforts and intentions might be better realised. Context matters in shaping youth political engagement (Kitanova, 2020) and it was disappointing for the children and young people to learn that on the international stage, they lacked any real mandate and political power to effect actual policy change.

CONCLUSION



Children and young people's participation on the international stage has been growing rapidly as global NGOs and other child-focused advocacy groups seek to uphold children and young people's right to have their voices heard in all matters that affect them. High-level political fora are also providing more opportunities for children and young people to participate in discussions on topics that are of interest to them. The Young Leaders project at World Vision is one such example of a global initiative that works over an extended period of time with children and young people from all over the world to support and empower them to contribute their views, experiences and solutions to high-level political stakeholders. The research found that children and young people who participated in international fora gained many personal benefits by attending such events. Furthermore, the

majority of the adults embraced their presence and welcomed their views and passion for the issues.

However, while all participants - adults, children and young people alike - agreed that such intergenerational efforts should continue, the adults noted that it was difficult to translate the children and young people's contributions into any real policy agenda or change process. It was clear that the intersection between the degree of children and young people's participation and the current mechanisms that exist to support it are worthy of further exploration. New forms of friendly political participation must also be developed if children and young people are to have a recognisable mandate and be able to participate in a meaningful way.

Moreover, adults and children and young people may have different perceptions of the value and limitations of child participation at international level events, which has implications for organising such events in the future. This study confirms that the international stage is a challenging arena to implement children and young people's meaningful participation. A conducive environment is difficult to establish, especially when both sets of stakeholders have differing ideas regarding the value of what children and young people bring to proceedings. It must be noted that children and young people's entitlement to be heard wherever decisions are made, including in international events, is not dependent on the value or outcomes it is purported to have for them or for adults.

While some adults were sceptical about the overall value and effect of children and young people's participation, the young leaders were unanimous that it had positive impacts for them personally, for their activity at a national level and for the issues for which they are advocating. Children and young people who attended international events placed just as much value on face-to-face connections with decision-makers as they do when they encounter them at the local level. However, when attending international meetings, the children and young people acted as invited guests and lacked any influence over the planning of the meeting nor its agenda. This made it difficult for them to take full advantage of the opportunity and for some adults this is where their collaboration with the children and young people peaked.

Adults queried the children and young people's authenticity and legitimacy to be involved in international fora and commented that they could not easily translate their emotive stories and energy into policy. However, it must be noted that the adults did not comment on the representativeness of adult panellists, as their legitimacy was already confirmed, possibly through experience of working together with these people or being knowledgeable about their professional background and credentials. More importantly, no adult commented that adults on the panels needed to have personal experience of the issues or be good presenters who can illicit an emotional response. Thus, it could be argued that the adults in the study viewed the extent and value of child participation as bringing personal experiences to bear on proceedings.

In contrast, the young leaders saw children and young people's participation as a form of empowerment - the inclusion of younger citizens who are interested or enraged by the social injustices they see around them and who want to make a difference for themselves and others. They came along to meetings and panels with much enthusiasm, experiences and full of energy. However, they had little understanding of how political bodies affect change and how social change might happen, and possibly had idealistic and unrealistic expectations. It is important to note that global stakeholders may have been working tirelessly on the issues for years, facing many political and economic resource and logistic challenges. As such, they may have a better understanding of how difficult it can be to inform attitudes and implement change.

Following their participation, the young leaders did recognise that they could not easily affect change at the global level, despite their intentions, as the adults did not seek any further engagement from them on how they could do this. There are consequently lessons here for civil society organisations and political bodies to learn how to manage children and young people's expectations and work more closely with them to encourage their involvement to enable the translation of their solutions into policy. This illustrates the need for adults to take children and young people's views seriously, engage better with them and provide feedback on the possibilities for translating their ideas into concrete policy recommendations.



RECOMENDATIONS



This exploration of children and young people's and adults' understanding of child participation on the international stage permits the formulation of recommendations for academic, professionals and policy makers who seek to support children's and young people's participation in programmes, decision making and intergenerational initiatives. Within the sample of adult participants, there was a sub-set of adult allies in the child participation arena who value and uphold children and young people's right to participate and were much more likely to offer alternative ways for children and young people to participate rather than appearing in person. The recommendations aim to improve how children and young people's support organisations and adults who organise intergenerational meetings can work together to not only encourage and support children and young

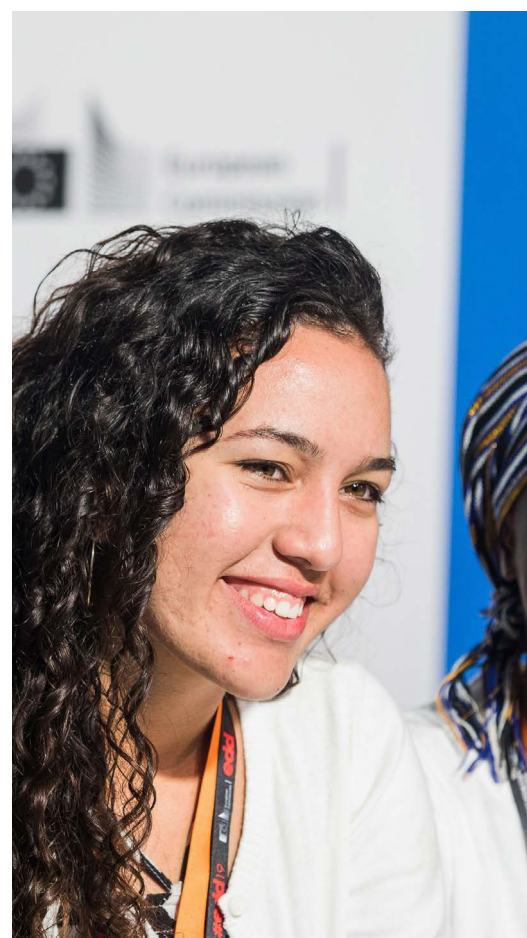
people's participation but embed their influence in policy making by including their valued contributions, ideas, solutions and actions.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION LEVEL

- International meeting organisers and children's support organisations must work together to involve all stakeholders, including child participants, in organising meetings to ensure the design is child friendly and child protection elements are included.
- Appropriate child friendly mechanisms and standards need to be in place to ensure that child participation and engagement is ethical, well-resourced and meaningful in order to fulfil the obligation that adult decision-makers engage with children and young people directly.
- International meeting organisers should develop guidance for children and young people that communicates the organisational methods and processes used at international fora to them in advance. Following an event, they should also review children and young people's evaluations to identify any structural barriers or implementation issues and suggest improvements.

SUPPORT ORGANISATION LEVEL

- Support organisations should be transparent about the process and procedures through which child delegates are selected to be included on specific panels and global forums, their experience and who they represent. This will help limit assumptions. The aims of the Young Leaders' project - to empower and build the capacity of children and young people to act on behalf of their peers and represent them in dialogue with stakeholders, policy experts and decision-makers to promote social change in their communities, countries and regions (World Vision, 2017b) - need to be made more explicit.
- While the children and young people and their supporting organisations know of the work these children and young people are doing, this knowledge needs to be made more explicit so that informed judgements can be made about their expertise rather than assumptions being made on their legitimacy to participate based on their presentation confidence and style. This could be through formal introductions of young people at events, time permitting, or by sharing their credentials in advance to all in attendance by providing their history and background in the area. A biographical statement similar to a keynote or guest speaker, that is given to attendees and panellists who will share their platform, could provide a bit more context to their participation.
- Children and young people should demonstrate and describe more about the changes (actions) they have been involved with at the community level (practical and political) and how they mobilised and improved the situation to show what can be done and how they can continue to work rather than simply pleading for adults to do 'something'.
- Support organisations should provide more training and awareness to adults on how to manage children and young people's 'idealistic and unrealistic' expectations of what they can actually achieve at the international level.



ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH LEVEL

- More should be done to embed participation in all areas of everyday life so that seeking and including children and young people's views becomes normalised, upstreamed from family and community level up to international level.
- Rethink the concept of children and young people as 'experts on their lives' to one of their legitimacy to become involved based on their rights, knowledge, awareness and interests. In other words, a focus on what children and young people bring to the table since they are closer to the experience by age and have either experienced it themselves or know children in their community who have experienced it.
- The 'change-maker' concept needs to be interrogated as children and young people viewed adults at these panels as allies with a common purpose to help them make the world a better place. However, judging by their actions and reactions, only a sub-set of adults appeared to share this view and encourage the 'change-maker' role, which may be more practical at a grass roots level but has not yet been embraced at the international level.
- The differing value adults and children and young people place on policy may be used as the foundation for change to develop new ways of working together to make children and young people's views translatable.

"[we need] assessment themselves by children who participate to understand what was going on, if we want to improve what would we do?...To make sure that children are seen as actors, not instrumentalised for various purposes. If we need them to continue to trust adults, to trust institutions... we need to be very credible. (8.F-UN Special Representative).

WHAT CAN WORLD VISION PRACTICALLY DO WITH THE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS?

As World Vision has launched the ENOUGH campaign that seeks to shape a 'world where every child, no matter where they live and who they are, is able to access and afford nourishing food, so they can survive and thrive, now and in the future, even amidst situation of crisis.' To realise this vision, it is critical to create opportunities for children and young people to be 'visible and heard in the global and national hunger, nutrition & food security related policies at all levels.' Within this landscape, we recommend:

- Empower children and young people to take action on hunger, malnutrition, and food security issues in their local communities and in their wider country.
- Secure safe and meaningful spaces for children and young people to shape global debate on child hunger and malnutrition in order to ensure that policy and practice are child-centred and rights-based.
- Establish a global network of children and young people to mobilise them from local and to global action.
- Highlight the positive impact and outcomes resulting from the empowerment and inclusion of children and young people in the global campaign and advocacy efforts.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

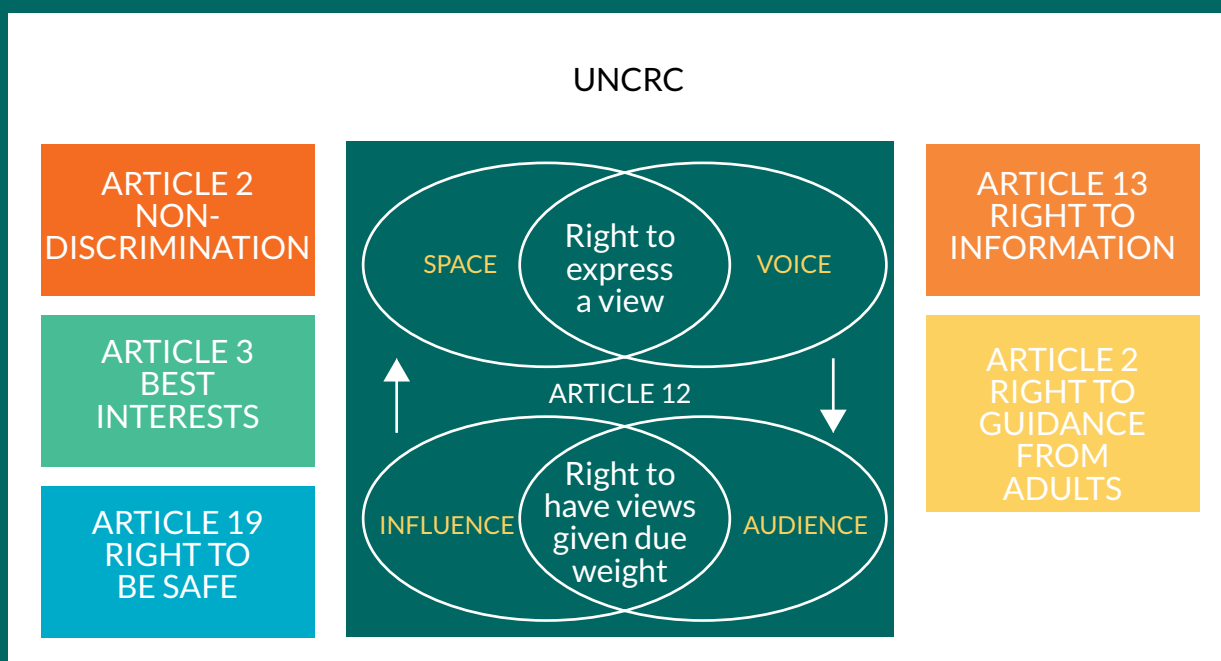
GLOBAL STAKEHOLDERS (ID.SEX-ROLE)

1. M-Senior Social Development Specialist
2. M-Cabinet Minister
3. F-Member of European Parliament
4. M-EU Special Representative for Human Rights
5. F-House of Lords UK & Council of Europe
6. F-UNCRC Member
7. F-Human Rights Specialist large global NGO
8. F-UN Special Representative
9. F-Member of European Parliament
10. M-Director of a Global Initiative
11. F-UNCRC Secretariat
12. F-Diplomatic service of the European Union

YOUNG LEADERS (ID.SEX/AGE-COUNTRY)

1. M-16-Ghana
2. F-16-Ghana
3. F-16-Ghana
4. F-15-Brazil
5. F-16-Romania
6. F-14-Mongolia
7. F-14-Indonesia
8. F-17-Lesotho
9. F-16-Sri Lanka
10. M-15-Sri Lanka
11. F-16-Romania
12. M-14-Albania
13. M-14-Indonesia
14. M-15-Brazil
15. F-15-Bangladesh
16. F-18-Bangladesh

ANNEX 2: LUNDY MODEL



LUNDY, 2007.



INTERNATIONAL OFFICES

Executive Office

Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road, London,
SE1 7JB
UK

New York and United Nations Liaison Office

777 United Nations Plaza, 5th floor
New York, N.Y. 10017
USA

Geneva and United Nations Liaison Office

Rue Varembe 1, 1202
Geneva,
Switzerland

World Vision Brussels and European Union Representation

18, Square de Meeûs 1st floor,
Box 2 B-1050
Brussels,
Belgium

wvi.org/our-work/child-participation

Queen's University Belfast's Centre for Children's Rights

[https://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/
CentreforChildrensRights/](https://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/CentreforChildrensRights/)