



Children's Groups as Partners

Measuring How the Enabling Environment of Children's Groups Enhances Child Well-being & Programme Outcomes

A Global Learning Brief by World Vision International

Presented by WVI Global Centre, WV Cambodia, WV Mongolia, and AEQUA Strategies



Overview

Children's Groups are Key Partners

World Vision supports approximately 27,000 children's groups with a membership of around 1,500,000 children worldwide. These groups vary in their membership size, structure, and activities, but all are grounded in promoting children's rights and well-being, as well as the well-being of others in their communities. It is essential to evaluate what impact the groups are having on child well-being and community development, and how children's groups can be partners in promoting outcomes that programmes aim to achieve.

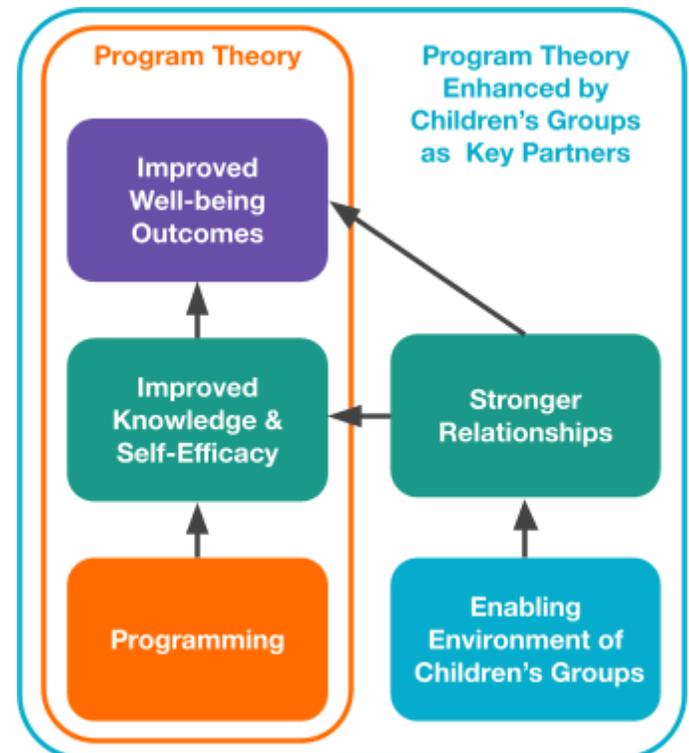
From November 2024 to May 2025, World Vision teams in Cambodia and Mongolia, in partnership with WVI Global Centre staff and AEQUA Strategies, piloted child-friendly methods to measure if and how children's membership groups enhance well-being outcomes for children and communities.

What Makes for an Enabling Environment in Children's Groups?



Does an Enabling Environment in Children's Groups Enhance Programme Outcomes?

We hypothesize that an enabling environment in children's groups can enhance programme outcomes in part from stronger social connections.



Integrating New & Existing Measures, Disaggregating Outcomes to Identify Gaps

We leveraged existing measures of programme success while introducing complementary measures of an enabling environment, notably, the strength of relationships among children and with adults. The pilot engaged five stakeholder groups: children participating in World Vision Area Programmes; children participating in membership groups; group facilitators and WV staff, parents and caregivers; local government authorities. The results of our multi-stakeholder approach demonstrate the value of separating outcome data for groups, especially for children's group members.

Child-Friendly Methods for Local Analysis & Learning

Data collection and analysis methods prioritized children and adults benefiting immediately and directly from findings in order to develop locally-relevant solutions and recommendations.

The pilot leveraged data collection methods from the *Young Citizens' Score Cards* approach developed by the Children's Environments Research Group to evaluate community conditions across the full range of children's rights. The approach elevates how experiences across stakeholder groups may be similar or different, and encourages each group to develop interpretations of findings and collaborate to address community needs.

Age-appropriate evaluation tools and approaches yield richer, more reliable data from child participants, and adults also benefit. Several adult participants commented on how they enjoyed the process of using these tools, speaking to the opportunity to use this approach for evaluating multiple programs.



Children from an area program in Mongolia review and comment on their group's results.



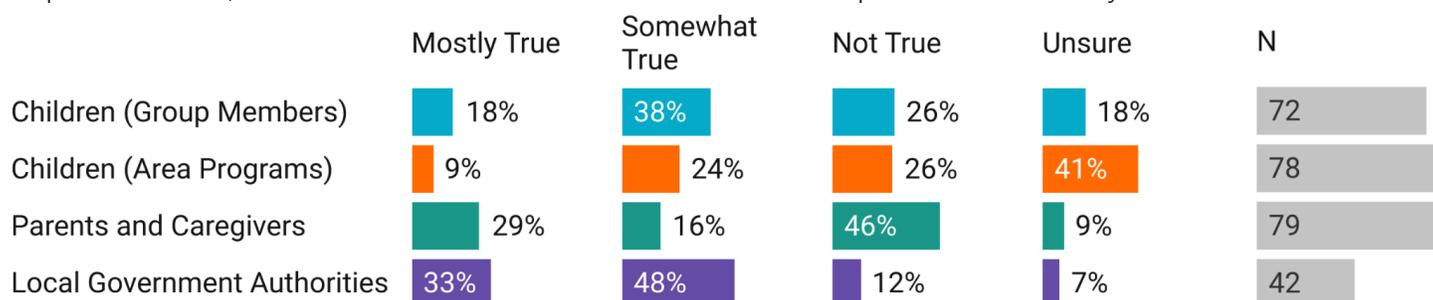
Members of a children's group in Mongolia share their responses by moving to specific areas of the room marked by symbols for *Mostly True* (green), *Somewhat True* (orange), *Unsure* (?), or *Not True* (red).

Examples of What We Learned

PROGRAMME METRIC: Proportion of female and male adolescents (aged 12 to 18) who report that their views are sought and incorporated into the decision-making of local government.

We asked members of each stakeholder group to review several statements and respond whether the statements were *Mostly True*, *Somewhat True*, or *Not True*, or if they were *Unsure*. For example, below are the results for how four stakeholder groups responded to the statement, “Local government authorities seek and incorporate the views of children into their decisions.”

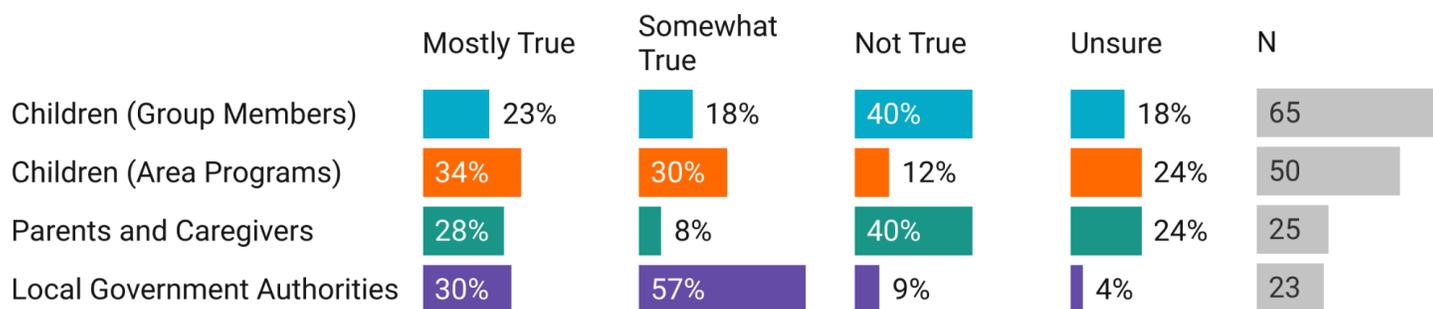
In Cambodia, children who are **Group Members** were more likely to respond *Mostly True* or *Somewhat True* compared to children participating only in **Area Programmes**. **Parents and Caregivers** were most likely to respond *Not True*, and 81% of **Local Government Authorities** responded either *Mostly True* or *Somewhat True*.



Comments from Members of a Children’s Group in Cambodia

“When local authorities implement community development activities related to children’s rights and child protection, they always seek ideas from children. For example, during commune meetings on child protection agendas, they ask for children’s input or provide opportunities for children to share their ideas. However, when the action plans or activities are not related to children’s rights and child protection issues, they do not seek ideas from children. For example, action plans about constructing buildings, roads, schools, and other infrastructure do not involve children for inputs.”

In Mongolia, results followed a similar pattern as in Cambodia for **Parents and Caregivers**, as well as **Local Government Authorities**. However, for children, 41% of **Group Members** responded *Mostly True* or *Somewhat True*, compared to 64% of children in **Area Programmes**. Interpretations of these results follow below.



Examples of What We Learned (continued)

Comments from Members of a Children's Group in Mongolia

"We have no idea about it, possibly because our club isn't very active."

"Other children at school say there is some children's forum. I don't think the authorities listen to children's opinions. I've never participated in a time when our dormitory kids were invited to share their ideas."

"Even though we learn about speaking up in the club, the local authorities don't really listen or use what we say."

Comments from Children in an Area Programme in Mongolia

"We were invited to a meeting hall, and we shared concerns about the lack of clean drinking water at our school. The officials listened, and two weeks later, they installed a new water filter. It felt like they really heard us."

"I wish they would ask us more often. We have ideas, especially about our schools and neighborhoods, but adults usually decide everything without us."

"World Vision listens to children's voices and partners with us to implement some ideas in the community."

The qualitative data from Cambodia and Mongolia suggest that children who agreed more with the statement about their views being considered had more opportunities to connect directly with local authorities, and that they saw the direct results of their input in decisions. Whether as a member of a children's group in Cambodia or a child benefitting from wider Area Programme interventions in Mongolia, children must have consistent opportunities to be part of decision-making processes. This presents an interesting point of reflection for practitioners who interact with children in and outside of children's groups. It is important to have enabling environments across settings in children's lives, whether or not this setting is a children's group. It does seem, however, that we are more likely to find components of an enabling environment in children's groups because when implemented as designed, they are spaces for children to meet regularly, with the support of adults, to advocate for themselves and others. This makes children's groups partners in the larger effort to improve well-being outcomes for children, their families, and communities.

Key Lessons Learned

Data Separation is Essential to Accurately Measure Programme Outcomes:

Treating children in membership groups as distinct from children in area programmes reveals important outcome differences that inform programming strategies. There is a critical need to expand data collection to distinguish between the unique contributions of children's groups compared to programme participation alone. For example, nationally in Cambodia, 48% of adolescents report their views are sought and incorporated into the decision-making of local government. In our sample in Cambodia, 56% of children in membership groups responded "Mostly True" or "Somewhat True" to this statement, compared to 33% of children who participated in area programmes alone. This difference might be explained by children's group members having more opportunities to speak with local government authorities through community service projects compared to children who participate in area programmes alone.

Local Feedback Loops Drive Local Solutions:

Real-time sharing of findings with stakeholders creates opportunities for immediate programme enhancement. Comparing experiences across groups of children, parents, and authorities provides more robust evidence to inform decision-making. For example, 40% of members of children's groups in Mongolia responded "Not True" to the statement, "Local government authorities seek and incorporate the views of children into their decisions," compared to 12% of children in area programs. This is counterintuitive in light of findings from Cambodia where children's group members had more positive experiences. However, among the children's group members in Mongolia sampled during this project, some are exclusively school-based clubs, meet once or twice per month, and may not have consistent connection with trained facilitators, all of which are components of an enabling environment of children groups. In comparison, children in these Area

programmes in Mongolia participate more regularly in programming where World Vision staff request children's feedback on activities in order to develop future programs. In this way, World Vision staff create the conditions of an enabling environment for children in Area programmes. This may partially explain why children in Area programmes have generally positive views of being included in local decisions.

Child-Friendly Methods Enhance Data Collection Experiences for both Children and Adults:

Age-appropriate evaluation tools and approaches yield richer, more reliable data from child participants. For example, because children had the opportunity to provide their own interpretations of the quantitative results of their group, there is less risk for misinterpreting children's views and intentions. Adult stakeholder groups also benefited. We heard from participants in multiple adult stakeholder groups how they enjoyed the data collection and analysis activities, something that may not be common feedback for more traditional survey techniques, especially when there is no opportunity to immediately see the results for local participants.

Enabling Environments are Important for Children in All Settings

Quality relationships between peers and with supportive adults are essential for program success. In Cambodia, children's groups that regularly interact with local authorities through community service had more positive experiences with decision-making inclusion. In Mongolia, children in area programmes with frequent World Vision staff contact felt more heard in decisions. The key finding is that enabling environment components matter more than specific program structures. However, children's membership groups may have greater potential to create enabling environments if they meet frequently enough to build strong relationships and provide advocacy opportunities within their communities.

Strategic Implications & Recommendations

The example and key lessons learned we present in this brief are part of a longer list compiled in a comprehensive report about this pilot. The full range of these findings contribute to the implications and recommendations we share below.

Implications	Recommendations
Minimum standards of an enabling environment for children's groups may be necessary to see benefits in children's well-being.	Further evaluation is needed to refine the minimum standards that support all children across settings.
Children in membership groups may experience benefits of World Vision's programmes differently than children in APs, making data disaggregation essential to understand if programming or components of an enabling environment drive outcomes.	Data collection for existing OIOS indicators should also disaggregate outcomes for children who do or do not participate in children's groups. This would complement data disaggregation for registered children and understanding benefits of sponsorship.
Age-appropriate evaluation tools and approaches enhanced data collection experiences for both children and adults.	World Vision should further integrate child-friendly data collection methods that yield reliable results for both children and adults.
Lower rates of positive responses from children and their parents and caregivers on how children's views are sought and integrated into local decisions suggest current practices are insufficient.	Local Government Authorities should engage more regularly in policy dialogues with children and adults in development of any policies, including local, subnational, and national.
Parents clearly see value in children's groups and programmes, but children report competing expectations for academic and household responsibilities that might curb perceived support.	World Vision should increase outreach to parents and caregivers to gather their views and understand barriers to children's consistent participation in groups or programming broadly
Infrequent meetings and lack of a trained adult facilitator may explain why some children's groups reported less positive experiences.	World Vision should expand access to trained facilitators who meet regularly and support all components of an enabling environment.
Real-time sharing of findings with stakeholders creates opportunities for immediate programme enhancement.	World Vision should strengthen local feedback loops that compare experiences for children, parents, and authorities to inform decision-making.



Call to Action

World Vision should expand support for children's groups and disaggregate outcome measures based on children's group participation. This is particularly important in creating enabling learning environments and integrating registered children into broader programming in ways that enhance the benefits of sponsorship alone.

Conclusion & Contact Information

This brief summarizes key findings from a pilot measuring whether and how the enabling environment of children's membership groups enhances well-being outcomes. Detailed implementation tools and replication guidance, as well as statistical analyses and additional qualitative findings, are available in the full technical report.

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Cover photo: Members of a children's group in Mongolia participate in an energizing activity during their meeting.

Above photo: A group of parents and caregivers in Cambodia share their responses to statements by holding up a slip of paper colour-coded to their response: *Mostly True* (green), *Somewhat True* (orange), *Unsure* (blue), or *Not True* (red).