



World Vision



**2025
SOUTHERN AFRICA
REGIONAL CHILD PARTICIPATION
IN WORLD VISION
DECISION-MAKING REPORT**

Southern Africa Region

World Vision Angola, DRC, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe

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World Vision staff in each of the countries of this region also worked diligently to gather the data and findings for each of the FO reports and strive each day to engage children meaningfully in World Vision programming, advocacy, and decision making.

Introduction

World Vision is committed to supporting and strengthening children's meaningful participation in all decisions that affect their lives, including and especially in World Vision's own decision-making processes that affect children at local, national, regional and global levels. Ensuring that children have a say in projects and programmes that affect their lives and empowering them to take action on issues that they care about is a cornerstone of World Vision's identity and child-focused programming.

This regional report provides high-level insight on the child participation reporting and data from the countries in the Southern Africa Region who submitted their annual FO report in 2025 (Angola, DRC, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe). These FO reports are produced annually as part of the organisation's Operational Requirements for Child Participation in World Vision Decision-Making, summarising an office's local and national level child participation practices, data, and perspectives from boys and girls. It also digs deeper into how child participation is making an impact on children, local communities, and World Vision, giving the Region and FOs more insight into what practices to strengthen and what areas to target for improvement.

Note: Please note that the following sections draw only from data and examples that were reported in the office's annual child participation in decision-making report from FY25. Each office report follows the same general structure, but some offices provide more or less information about their child participation efforts at their discretion. Therefore, this regional report may not capture the breadth of the region's child participation work in full.



Section 1: What do children think is going well in World Vision programming?

Children across Southern Africa have identified several core areas of World Vision's programming that are successful, primarily due to the **empowerment, improved well-being, and personal dignity** these initiatives provide. Below is a ranking of themes based on the frequency they were mentioned across the eight country reports provided in the sources.

1. Child participation and advocacy

Times Mentioned: 8 out of 8 reports

Children in all reporting countries highlighted the success of platforms that allow them to speak directly to leaders and participate in decision-making at different levels. This engagement builds their self-confidence and sense of agency, transforming children from passive beneficiaries into active agents of change who feel their voices matter.

- **Angola (Child):** "Before, we were shy to talk, but now we can share our problems freely".
- **Zambia (Boy):** "We are not just participants; we are leaders. Our ideas are listened to, and we help make decisions for our club. That makes me feel valued and responsible" (**Twaambo, 16**).

2. Education and school feeding

Times Mentioned: 8 out of 8 reports

This theme is highly valued for providing safe learning environments, materials, and essential nutrition that keeps children in school. Infrastructure like new school blocks and feeding programs directly reduce absenteeism and improve concentration.

- **Zimbabwe (Girl):** "We are tired of going to school hungry. When we eat at school, we learn better and we don't miss classes. I speak so leaders can understand that food is part of protection" (**Tadiwa**).

3. Livelihoods and IMPACT+ Clubs

Times Mentioned: 8 out of 8 reports

Children praised the IMPACT+ model and vocational training for providing practical life skills and economic resilience. It enables adolescents to generate income for school fees and basic needs while teaching them entrepreneurship.

- **Lesotho (Boy):** "This season we planted vegetables in our club... We are able to generate income that assists us... to meet our daily needs, especially school needs" (**Thabo, 17** See photo).

- **Zimbabwe (Girl):** "My project has become a reliable source of income for my family. The earnings help meet school-related expenses and household needs... I never thought I could run my own business at this age" (**Blessing, 17**).



4. Child protection and rights awareness

Times Mentioned: 8 out of 8 reports

Programming that focuses on ending child marriage, child abuse, and providing help services (like helplines) was consistently identified as a strength. Awareness campaigns empower children to know their rights and how to seek help when in danger.

- **Eswatini (Girl):** *"Adolescents clubs have become safety nets for adolescents in the community, children are safe from drug and substance abuse and from teenage pregnancy" (Hlelolenkhosi, 13).*
- **Zambia (Girl):** *"Culture should protect us, not harm us — let's build traditions that celebrate every child's right to grow, learn, and thrive" (Agness, 16).*

5. Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

Times Mentioned: 7 out of 8 reports

The provision of clean water and private latrines was highlighted in most countries as a vital improvement to health and dignity. Having water points near schools or homes reduces the time girls spend fetching water and lowers the risk of waterborne diseases like cholera.

- **Angola (child):** *"We learned to wash our hands and keep the toilet clean"..*

6. Health and nutrition

Times Mentioned: 7 out of 8 reports

Programmes addressing malaria, cholera, and general malnutrition through community interventions were well-regarded. Practical interventions like mosquito nets and nutrition porridge have a tangible impact on saving lives and reducing illness.

- **Angola (child):** *"Now we sleep under mosquito nets, and we don't get malaria often".*
- **Mozambique (Boy):** *"During the nutrition dialogue, I learned why eating porridge from the rehabilitation centre helps me grow strong. I also shared ideas on how we can make sure younger children get enough to eat. Now, I help remind my friends to come to the nutrition sessions." (Boy, 10-year-old).*



Section 2. What do children say could be improved about World Vision programming?

Children across the eight countries provided constructive feedback, identifying critical gaps in World Vision's current operations. The primary areas for improvement centre on hunger, inclusive support for the disabled, and the quality of educational infrastructure.

1. Hunger and expansion of school feeding

Times Mentioned: 8 out of 8 reports

This is the most urgent request from children, who emphasize that learning is impossible on an empty stomach. They call for more consistent feeding programmes that cover all grades and operate during weekends and holidays. Children report that school meals are often the only food they receive, and gaps in distribution lead to dropouts and poor concentration.

- **Eswatini (Girl):** "When we are hungry, it is hard to listen, learn, or even play. Hunger makes us tired and unable to concentrate in class... Every child deserves to learn on a full stomach" (**Mbalenhle, 14**).
- **Zimbabwe (Girl):** "Sometimes the food smells bad and we still eat it because we are hungry. We want meals that are safe, tasty, and enough for everyone" (**Tariro, 13**).

2. Inclusive support for children with disabilities

Times Mentioned: 7 out of 8 reports

Children consistently noted that peers with disabilities are often left out of programming and lack essential assistive devices. Most school infrastructure is not inclusive (lacking ramps), and there is a severe shortage of Braille materials and sign-language-trained teachers.

- **Eswatini (Girl):** "Some children with disabilities can't even access proper education or the support they need, and a lot of teenagers never get the chance to learn real Life Skills that could actually help them in the future. These gaps are real, and it feels like people don't talk about them enough" (**Buhle, 18, visually impaired**).
- **Lesotho (Boy):** "Let us make sure that children with disabilities are actively included in these kinds of discussions... They understand their situations best" (**Liteboho, 16**).

3. Protection from violence, abuse, and harmful practices

Times Mentioned: 7 out of 8 reports

While protection is a core programme, children report that abuse often occurs within the home or by school staff, and reporting mechanisms are not always safe or accessible. Children call for stronger action against child marriage, labour, and sexual harassment, noting that they often fear reporting perpetrators who are family breadwinners.

- **Eswatini (Girl):** "Sometimes the people who are supposed to care for us do bad things, and no one says anything because they are the ones who bring food" (**Hlelolenkhosi, 13**).
- **DRC (Girl):** Girls reported that their privacy is not respected because they have to sleep in shared rooms and sometimes suffer sexual violence at the hands of their brothers, which they are ashamed to report.

4. Education quality and infrastructure

Times Mentioned: 7 out of 8 reports

Beyond basic construction, children expressed a need for better learning materials (textbooks/furniture), sports facilities, and secondary schools. Many schools lack desks, textbooks, and recreational spaces, which limits the holistic development of the child.

- **Malawi (Boy/Girl):** Children highlighted challenges such as inadequate school materials, including furniture and textbooks.
- **Angola (Boy/Girl):** *"Our school has no playground or soccer field... We want space to play sports and have fun after class".*

5. Strengthening participation and accountability

Times Mentioned: 6 out of 8 reports

Children identified a significant gap in being involved in the later stages of projects, such as monitoring, evaluation, and receiving feedback. Participation is often adult-driven or tokenistic, focused on attendance rather than actual decision-making.

- **Malawi (Boy/Girl):** *"We help plan projects, but we wish to lead more often. It would make us feel more responsible".*
- **Zimbabwe (Girl):** *"We want to be part of the decisions, not just asked after things are done. When we speak, we want to see change" (Deby, Junior MP).*



Section 3: How are children participating in advocacy?

Children are participating in advocacy through structured platforms ranging from local community clubs to high-level international summits. Their influence is most prominent in shaping nutrition policies, child protection laws, and national budgeting processes.

1. Nutrition and school feeding (Highest impact & multi-level)

Children have transitioned from beneficiaries to researchers and policy advocates, focusing on the "ENOUGH" campaign to end child hunger.

Type/Spaces: Child-led research inquiries, Nutrition Dialogues, and presentations to Parliamentary committees.

Levels: Local (Area Programmes), National (Parliaments), and International (Global School Meals Summit).

Impact/Examples:

- **Zimbabwe:** 128 children conducted a **School Meals Child-Led Inquiry** across 10 districts, presenting findings to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Education to advocate for the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme.
 - "We know what hunger feels like... If leaders listen, children will grow strong and stay in school" (**Rutendo, 14, Zimbabwe**).
- **DRC:** Children in Kananga initiated the School Feeding Edict Project in Kasai Central, which is currently being processed by the Provincial Assembly.

2. Child protection laws and ending violence against children (EVAC)

Children are actively involved in reviewing and validating legislation to ensure it protects them from marriage, labour, and abuse.

Type/Spaces: Legislative validation sessions, Child Helpline Ambassador programmes, and National Child Parliaments.

Levels: National (Ministry engagements) and Regional/Continental (African Union workshops).

Impact/Examples:

- **Zambia:** Children contributed to the revision of the **Marriage Act No. 13 of 2023** and the national Online Safety Strategy.
 - "Culture should protect us, not harm us — let's build traditions that celebrate every child's right to grow, learn, and thrive" (**Agness, 16, Zambia** – see photo inset).
- **Lesotho:** Children successfully advocated for amendments to the **Child Protection and Welfare Act** to criminalize child marriage.
- **Zimbabwe:** Children participated in validating a **child-friendly version of the African Union Convention** on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.



3. National budgeting and policy frameworks

Children are demanding that national budgets prioritize children's rights and protection services.

Type/Spaces: Children's Manifestos, budget consultation forums, and intergenerational dialogues with Senior Leadership Teams (SLT).

Levels: National and Provincial.

Impact/Examples:

- **Malawi:** The launch of the **National Children's Manifesto** allowed 1,000 children to advance child rights issues for 2025–2030, specifically targeting child hunger.
- **Zambia:** Children partnered with UN agencies to advocate for an **increase in the national budget allocation** for child protection and development.
- Mafolofolo, a 16-year-old child representative from Lesotho, participated in the **Children and Youth Forum** held in Kampala, Uganda, as part of the pre-event for the **11th Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-11)**. This high-level event brought together over 200 stakeholders from across Africa and around the world.



- o *"As children, we should be included in the planning and budgeting stages of sustainable development initiatives from the African Union"* (**Mafolofolo, 16, Lesotho** - see photo above - with his peers at the conference).

4. Organizational strategy and governance

Children are now recognized as partners in shaping World Vision's own five-year strategic directions.

Type/Spaces: Strategy Refresh Processes and Child Advisory Committees.

Levels: National (Field Office level).

Impact/Examples:

- **Eswatini:** Children's emotional stories about hunger and violence led the Board to commit that the **new strategy (FY26-30) would prioritize child hunger and malnutrition**.
 - o *"True progress includes everyone at the table, regardless of the age"* (**Sharon, Board Member, Eswatini**).
- **Lesotho:** Children influenced the Strategy Refresh Process, articulating a vision that emphasized Mental Health support and Digital Learning.

5. Service quality and infrastructure provision

Children use social accountability tools to monitor the quality of local services like water and health.

Type/Spaces: Citizen Voice and Action (CVA) committees and community dialogues.

Levels: Local (Community and School level).

Impact/Examples:

- **Mozambique:** A 14-year-old boy in the Provincial Child Parliament successfully advocated for better water access, leading to concerns being taken to district authorities.
 - o *"Being part of the Provincial Child Parliament has made me feel that my voice matters"* (**14-year-old boy, Mozambique**).
- **Zimbabwe:** The Citizen Voice and Action (CVA) initiative in Tshitshi Madabe involved 240 children whose inputs informed facility monitoring and improved school learning environments.

Section 4: How are children participating in decision-making?

Children across Southern and East Africa are participating in decision-making by transitioning from passive beneficiaries to active partners and advocates within World Vision's programming and national policy spheres. They are involved at multiple levels, from local community review meetings to high-level international summits, where they influence strategic planning, national budgeting, and legislative reviews.

Most common methods of participation in decision-making

The sources identify several primary channels through which children exert influence:

- **Structured representative platforms:** Children participate in National and Provincial Child Parliaments, media clubs, and child-led committees. In these spaces, they debate issues and present formal memoranda to government officials.
- **Intergenerational dialogues:** A highly valued method is direct engagement with Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) and Advisory Boards. These 30-minute to annual sessions allows children to provide feedback on programming and hold leaders accountable for previous commitments.
- **Strategy refresh and redesign processes:** In countries like Lesotho, Eswatini, and Angola, children were formally included in shaping five-year organizational strategies. Their input led to the prioritization of soft issues like child hunger and mental health.
- **Child-led research and advocacy inquiries:** Children act as researchers, collecting data on issues like school meals to present evidence to National Parliaments. This evidence-driven approach has been used to influence the National School Feeding Policy in the DRC and Zimbabwe.
- **Social accountability and monitoring:** Through tools like Citizen Voice and Action (CVA), children monitor the quality of local services, such as clinics and schools, to advocate for improvements directly with facility managers.

What is working and why?

Successful participation in decision-making is characterized by moving beyond tokenistic attendance toward meaningful influence and empowerment.

- **Respect and recognition from adults:** Participation works best when adults move beyond tokenism and take children's opinions seriously. Children in Mali reported that being respected and having their presence recognized by adults was a key factor in feeling their voice mattered.
- **Concrete tangible results:** Seeing their suggestions translated into physical infrastructure reinforces children's engagement. For example, in the Kouidiakan cluster (Mali), children's demands led directly to the construction of school WASH facilities (water points and latrines).
- **Safe and inclusive spaces:** Child-managed spaces, such as clubs, allow children to be themselves, play, and learn without adult imposition. This is particularly impactful for children with disabilities, who reported feeling empowered when treated as equals in these settings.
- **Skill development:** Participation is successful when it is paired with capacity building. Children who received training in communication and leadership showed exceptional confidence when presenting community issues to global stakeholders.
- **Intergenerational dialogue:** In Niger, a shift toward mutual respect and collaboration has been noted, where adults have begun consulting children before making decisions, thereby institutionalizing their voices in local governance.
- **Transparency and voluntary participation:** Children expressed higher levels of trust when they were fully informed about activities and given the choice to participate voluntarily under informed consent.

Despite these successes, the reports note that participation in decision-making is still often **strongest during the implementation phase but remains weaker during needs assessment and evaluation**, where adult perceptions of children's abilities can still act as a barrier.

Section 5: What could be done to make children's participation more effective?

Children have identified several specific requirements to move their participation from symbolic attendance to meaningful influence. Their needs focus on leadership opportunities, inclusive representation, and stronger accountability from adult decision-makers.

1. Shift from consultation to leadership and budgeting

Children across multiple countries expressed a strong desire to be involved at the earliest stages of project design, particularly in planning and budgeting, rather than just being consulted after decisions are made.

- **Leading vs. following:** Children in Malawi noted that while they help plan, they *"wish to lead more often"* to feel more responsible.
- **Budgetary inclusion:** In Lesotho, youth representatives like Mafolofolo emphasized that children should be included in the budgeting stages of development initiatives to ensure their priorities are funded.
- **Influence from the outset:** Zimbabwean children noted they want to be part of decisions *"from the outset"* and *"not just asked after things are done"*.

2. Inclusive support for vulnerable groups

A recurring theme is the need to ensure that marginalized children, particularly those with disabilities, have the specific tools required to participate. Children with disabilities and out of school children are often least represented in decision-making.

- **Assistive devices:** Children in Mozambique and Eswatini highlighted that participation is impossible without wheelchairs, Braille materials, and sign-language-trained teachers.
- **Accessibility:** Liteboho (16, Lesotho) argued that children with disabilities must be *"actively included"* because they understand their own needs best and have the right to advocate for themselves.
- **Simplified language:** In Zimbabwe, children recommended that legal documents and policies be translated into child-friendly versions using simpler English and pictography so that younger children can understand and validate them.

3. Strengthening feedback loops and accountability

Children identified a significant gap in knowing what happens to their suggestions after they are shared.

- **Transparent outcomes:** They called for stronger accountability mechanisms to ensure their feedback leads to tangible action.
- **Closing the loop:** In Malawi, children noted that they don't always get to see what happens next and requested more consistent feedback on how their ideas were used.



4. Direct dialogue and safe spaces

Children want more opportunities to speak directly to power without adult intermediaries.

- **Direct interaction:** In Angola, children explicitly requested that organizations "talk with us, not only with adults".
- **Safe community platforms:** There is a call for regular, well-publicised forums at the community level—not just in schools—to reach children who are out of school or in remote areas.
- **Privacy and sensitivity:** Girls in the DRC highlighted the need for participation spaces that respect their privacy and safety, noting that they often feel ashamed to report issues like sexual violence when they lack secure, private environments to do so.

5. Peer learning and skill building

To be effective advocates, children say they need more practical training and opportunities to learn from one another.

- **Experience exchanges:** Girls in the DRC suggested exchange programmes with peers from other towns to learn different advocacy strategies and experiences.
- **Capacity building:** In Zimbabwe children requested more training in public speaking and child leadership training to build the confidence needed to engage with leaders.
- **Adult sensitization:** Children in Angola suggested that parents and caregivers should be trained to support child participation, as adult perceptions can often be a barrier to children speaking freely.
- **Representation:** Children in Zimbabwe noted that children selected to attend trainings do not effectively cascade their knowledge to their peers, and that representation in decision making processes can be limited to children with strong public speaking skills.



Section 6: Impact of child participation on children, communities and World Vision

Child participation is driving a fundamental shift across Southern Africa, moving children from passive beneficiaries to active agents of change. The impact is observed at the individual, community, and organizational levels.



1. Impact on children

Meaningful participation has a transformative effect on a child's personal development, self-worth, and future prospects. It strengthens children's confidence, agency, and economic resilience. Children develop leadership, vocational, and financial skills, and gain awareness of their rights, empowering them to meet their needs, reduce dependence, and actively shape their futures.

2. Impact on local communities

The involvement of children in decision-making and advocacy is fostering more resilient and accountable communities by challenging traditional norms and improving service delivery. Children's participation is strengthening community accountability and resilience. Their advocacy influences laws and policies, improves service delivery and infrastructure, and shifts social norms, fostering greater respect for children's voices and encouraging their leadership in environmental and community stewardship.

3. Impact on World Vision

Child participation is transforming World Vision from simply listening to children to true partnership with children in decision-making at all levels. Children's voices are directly shaping national strategies and prioritizing issues like child hunger, mental health, and inclusive education. Children have influenced adults to implement feedback loops to explain to children how their input was used, which reinforces transparency and accountability. Throughout the region, World Vision is now recognized as a leader in child-led research due to children's efforts. Finally, involving children in key organisational decision-making processes has improved staff and board understanding of children's capabilities, ensuring that every major decision reflects children's priorities. As a member of Eswatini's Board of Directors noted, *"A strategy shaped with children is more responsive, impactful, and rooted in real children's needs"*.

Conclusions

Across the eight reporting countries, children have successfully transitioned from passive beneficiaries to active agents of change, significantly impacting their personal development, local laws, and organizational priorities. Reports from across the Southern Africa Region demonstrate that child participation is most impactful and meaningful when it moves from simple consultation to genuine partnership between children and adults.

At the same time, children are clear about what must strengthen—particularly leadership opportunities, inclusion of the most vulnerable, and accountability to children. For practitioners, this presents both validation and imperative: to consolidate strong practice, intentionally share power in decision-making, and invest in systems, skills, and mindsets that enable participation to be consistent, inclusive, and truly child led. Sustaining this progress will be critical to ensuring that programmes remain responsive, equitable, and grounded in children’s lived realities.

Appendix: Consolidated child participation data

The following table consolidates data on child participation in various clubs and advocacy spaces across the reporting countries for FY2025.

| Clubs or Participation Spaces | Country | Membership / Participation Numbers | Key impacts |
|--|---|--|--|
| Mali IMPACT+ Clubs / Adolescent Clubs | Mozambique, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Eswatini, Zambia, Malawi | Mozambique: 2,240 members across 23 APs; Zimbabwe: Individual success stories (e.g., poultry projects). | Built leadership, citizenship, and entrepreneurship ; enabled adolescents to generate income for school fees and meet daily needs. In Eswatini, acted as safety nets against drug abuse and teenage pregnancy. |
| National & Provincial Child Parliaments | DRC, Lesotho, Mozambique, Malawi | DRC: Multiple local parliaments (Mweka, Mokali, etc.); Malawi: Children from all APs. | Influenced national policies ; DRC children initiated the School Feeding Edict Project. In Mozambique, child parliamentarians successfully advocated for water access with district authorities. |
| Nutrition Dialogues & "ENOUGH" Campaign | Zimbabwe, Malawi, Eswatini, DRC | Zimbabwe: 7 child-led dialogues; Malawi: 40 sessions with 225+ children; Eswatini: 4 adolescent groups. | Shaped national school feeding policies and prioritized child hunger in five-year strategic cycles. Input influenced global summits like the Nutrition for Growth Summit . |

| | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Citizen Voice and Action (CVA) / Accountability Committees | Zimbabwe, DRC, Mozambique | Zimbabwe: 240 children in Tshitshi Madabe; Mozambique: Child-led CVA committees across APs. | Directly informed facility monitoring and improved learning environments at the school level through responsive decision-making. |
| Child-Led Research / Inquiry Groups | Zimbabwe, Malawi | Zimbabwe: 128 children across 10 districts; Malawi: Children in Tchesa and Chitundu. | Produced evidence-driven reports on school meal gaps (quality and portion sizes) used to advocate before Parliamentary Committees. |
| Young Journalist / Media Clubs | Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi | Zambia: Young journalists interviewed the National Director on radio. | Amplified children's voices on child rights and well-being through local radio and television broadcasts. |
| Bible & Spiritual Development Clubs | Malawi, Lesotho, Eswatini, Angola | Malawi: Active in various clusters. | Nurtured children spiritually , promoted positive behaviour, and provided moral guidance based on faith values. |
| Environmental / Climate Clubs | Angola, Malawi, Zambia | Angola: Young environmental activists in Nzeto. | Trained children to protect the environment , leading to community clean-up campaigns and recycling initiatives. |
| Child Helpline / Protection Ambassadors | Lesotho, Zambia | Lesotho: Trained Child Helpline Ambassadors. | Raised awareness of child rights and reporting mechanisms for abuse, helping peers know where to seek help. |
| Direct SLT/Board Engagement Forums | All Countries | Zimbabwe: 56 children; Lesotho: Strategy Refresh committee; Eswatini: 3 representatives to the Board. | Transformed organizational strategy; children's feedback led to the integration of mental health support and disability inclusion in future planning. |

Quantitative Participation Snapshots

- Malawi: A total of 4,525 children participated in various formal engagements, including national budget consultations and manifestos.
- Zimbabwe: 665 children from 12 Area Programmes participated in a comprehensive Child Participation Assessment to evaluate current programming.
- Mozambique: 3,465 boys and girls were reached through integrated child participation initiatives in FY25.
- Angola: 204 children (123 girls, 81 boys) across seven provinces participated in structured feedback sessions.
- Zambia: 26,716 children participated in activities



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