



BLOGS **CRC@25**

Celebrating Child Rights

A compilation of 25 blogs from child rights advocates on the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child



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Preface

It gives me great pleasure to present this publication, *Celebrating Child Rights: A compilation of 25 blogs from child rights advocates on the 25th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

This anniversary is a milestone worthy of recognition. World Vision along with United Nations agencies, civil society, child-focused organisations and children themselves actively participated in many activities to mark the 25th anniversary. We believe that this commemoration is an opportunity to celebrate the success and achievements that the convention has made in the lives of millions of children worldwide, but also a time to reflect on the challenges, gaps and actions needed to build a fairer society in which every child has enough to thrive.

The 25 blogs included in this publication were initially shared on the World Vision International website (www.wvi.org) and are a celebration of the significant progress that the convention has made in increasing social, economic, cultural, civil and political rights for children. Yet, the blogs also show that transforming children from objects of protection to full rights holders is a long and complex process that requires the full commitment of national governments, the international community, civil society, children and communities.

In particular, we want this commemoration to encourage the renewal of political commitments for the full realisation of the convention and its three Optional Protocols and to draw attention to the stark gap between the promises made by the convention and the realities of children's lives.

As child rights advocates we are mandated to give a voice to children, and we believe that this anniversary is pivotal to empowering children, youth and adults to position child rights at the centre of the post-2015 development agenda. This global initiative cannot truly succeed unless children and communities are fully engaged and aware of their rights, and directly involved in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

We trust that you will find this report both helpful and enjoyable. Let us share this publication and invite members of the communities where we work to join us in reflecting upon these inspiring blogs and to give hope when there are many things that discourage us.

Patricio Cuevas-Parra
Senior Policy Adviser, Child Participation
Advocacy and Justice for Children
World Vision International



I. Showing children their rights matter

By Sara Austin, Director, President's Office, World Vision Canada

This week at the United Nations a quiet victory will take place for children. It is a victory that will amplify the voices of children who have been ignored, neglected, abused and overlooked. It is a victory with the potential to change their lives.

Thanks to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – ratified by every country except the United States, Somalia and South Sudan – governments are obliged to create laws and policies that honour the rights of every child. This means providing health care for every child, for example, and universal education; ensuring they are given a chance to participate in their communities – and to play; and providing protection from harm of all kinds.

The CRC is a shining beacon of hope for the possibility of life in all its fullness. Yet in my work at World Vision I have too often been struck by how children's lives can be tragically different from what their governments promise. Children and their advocates have lacked adequate tools to hold their governments accountable for promises made and broken.

I have watched children and NGOs persistently report violations of children's rights to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. While the UN has repeatedly issued stern recommendations to governments, the pace of change has been unacceptably slow. Even the UN has been constrained in its ability to hold governments accountable.

Next week that will change. It began during my graduate studies in 2006, when I proposed a new international treaty that would give children the power to lodge a complaint with the UN when their rights are violated. The UN would then investigate the claim and hold the child's government accountable. This legal mechanism became known as the Third Optional Protocol (OP3) to the CRC and it binds any government that ratifies it.

Fortunately, my thesis has not gathered dust. For the past eight years I have campaigned for the OP3 treaty to come into force. On Monday, the first ten countries will courageously move to ratify the OP3, clearly demonstrating their commitment to provide meaningful remedies for children whose rights have been denied.

While we celebrate, I will also bear witness for lives that have been lost while the wheels of justice turned too slowly. These children never had the opportunity to experience their rights and never saw justice for the violations they experienced:

For Noi, a 16-year-old girl from Northern Thailand, who was trafficked into the sex trade after being sent by her family to work as a waitress in Bangkok.

For Sikefela, a young girl from Western Zambia, who was orphaned at the age of 6 and died of AIDS-related causes at age 8.

For Jeffrey, a 5-year-old boy from my own city of Toronto, Canada, who slipped through the cracks of a broken child welfare system that led to his severe maltreatment, deprivation and death from starvation in the care of his own grandparents.

Millions more children are still waiting. Forty-five countries have signed the OP3 and are taking steps toward ratification. This leaves 138 countries – including Canada – that must heed the cries of the children and ratify without delay.

UNICEF must work hand in hand with governments to bring about widespread ratification of the protocol, and to make it widely known and understood among children, NGOs and other key stakeholders.

As the international community prepares to mark the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child this November, I urge Canada and other UN Member States not to postpone justice any longer.

We cannot let more precious lives slip away. Let us make good on the promises made to children when the CRC was first enshrined a quarter of a century ago. Let us show children their rights really do have meaning. Let us not waste one more day.

About the author

Sara Austin is a Canadian and a champion for the world's most vulnerable children. Currently a director at World Vision Canada, she studied international human rights law at the University of Oxford and international development and women's studies at Dalhousie University.



2. Why the Convention on the Rights of the Child is worth celebrating

By Tiffany Tao Joiner, Child Participation Specialist and Child Well-being and Rights Community of Practice Manager, World Vision International

This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the most widely ratified human rights instrument in international law to date. The CRC is a human rights treaty that specifically grants everyone under the age of 18 various civil, social, political, economic and cultural rights, and sets minimum standards for the protection of these rights.

As someone who grew up in the United States, the concept of 'child rights' and 'child participation' was foreign to me during my childhood. Living in one of the few countries in the world that has not yet ratified the CRC, I was never taught about my rights as a child, the responsibility that comes along with having these rights, or the significance of such a treaty for children worldwide.

It wasn't until I attended graduate school that I even heard about the CRC and the rights that it provides for children and young people. Even though I was well past 18 years of age, I immediately recognised the importance of the treaty and how it reflects a shift in the way children are thought about and portrayed.

When the CRC was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, it signalled a new era in which children were no longer viewed as passive or helpless beings; the CRC recognises children as rights holders with a voice and a contribution to make to the wider global community.

While the CRC still recognises children's special need for protection, it introduces the concept of participation and grants children the right to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives at all levels of society. By including participation as a right (in Article 12) as well as one of the four foundational principles of the CRC, it acknowledges the contribution children can make to their own development as well as to the well-being of their wider community, their country, and the world as whole.

The CRC gives children a new identity as contributors, partners and collaborators with us in making the world a more just, peaceful and safe place.

In my time with World Vision I have had the privilege of meeting and listening to children around the world who are passionate advocates for justice and social causes. In hearing their stories it is clear they have deep, extensive knowledge of world issues, of poverty, and of the solutions that are needed to bring about sustainable change in their own generation and for the future.

I have seen first-hand how knowledge of one's rights combined with opportunities to participate meaningfully in decision-making can enable children to accomplish incredible things in the most dire of circumstances. I have met children who recount their participation in community decisions as the moment when they realised that their voice was significant and that what they had to say was good.

To me, the CRC is more than a document filled with articles and principles. It is a dynamic, worldview-shifting recognition of children as human beings worthy of dignity and a voice. And that, during this 25th anniversary year, is truly something to celebrate.

About the author

Tiffany Tao Joiner advances the understanding, quality, and practice of child participation throughout the World Vision Partnership and is responsible for integrating participation in various sectors, capacity building and building an evidence base to demonstrate the impact and outcomes of child participation.



3. 2014, a year to celebrate child rights

By Patricio Cuevas-Parra, Senior Policy Adviser, Child Participation, Advocacy and Justice for Children, World Vision International

In 2014 we mark the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989. The anniversary is a great opportunity to pay tribute to the remarkable impact the CRC has had on the lives of millions of children. The anniversary is also an important time to reflect on the challenges and gaps in the struggle to promote equal rights for children.

While the CRC is the most ratified human rights treaty in history, this does not necessarily mean the rights enshrined in the CRC are fully respected or implemented in all countries. Despite this, as a child rights advocate, I am convinced the CRC has made enormous changes in favour of children around the world. National legislation on child rights has been adopted in many countries, and this anniversary is a milestone that should be celebrated.

We also need to celebrate that 194 countries have ratified the CRC and that a large number of organisations have given their support and commitment to its implementation. As a World Vision staff member, I am very proud that our international board endorsed the principles and articles of the CRC and its Optional Protocols. World Vision believes the CRC provides an appropriate statement of the minimum standards related to the survival, development, protection, non-discrimination and participation of all children. It also upholds the standard of the best interest of the child.

The anniversary should also celebrate the recognition of children as right holders who are entitled to be listened to and actively to participate in decision-making processes on issues that affect their lives. In the last 25 years we have observed how the right to participation enshrined in the CRC has brought significant changes to the role of children in the formulation of legislation and policy.

I have seen more and more children invited to join local, national and global political spaces where decision makers want to hear children's opinions. Unfortunately, there are still some opposing voices about engaging children in decision-making, but fortunately children have carved out a space to have their voices heard and this will not be given up.

I would like to invite you to celebrate the CRC's 25th anniversary during the entire year. This is not a one day, one-off event; it is an ongoing process that requires the social commitment and action of everyone to make it happen. By celebrating this anniversary we can achieve the vision of a society where all boys and girls can have all of their human rights respected and upheld.

About the author

Patricio Cuevas-Parra leads and develops the cross-organisational implementation of resources to carry out child participation initiatives at the local, national and international levels. He also leads broader efforts to ensure the development of policies, practices and programmes in order to strengthen child participation in advocacy.



4. As we blow out the candles on the CRC's 25th anniversary cake, let's keep the fires of child participation burning

By Jennifer Philpot-Nissen, Senior Adviser, Human Rights, Advocacy and Justice for Children, World Vision International

'We would like to recommend the Government of Albania ... raise awareness of a child's right to participate in the family and in the community.' As the statement was read, I wanted to shout aloud, to get up and dance, but I restrained myself to a slight, UN-appropriate smile. How fitting these words should come in the year we celebrate the 25th birthday of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The occasion was the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Albania by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva. The recommendation – spoken by a representative of the Government of Slovenia – had been a long time in the making.

The UPR is a unique peer review process through which the members of the HRC review the human rights obligations of all 193 UN Member States. Following the review, each country is required to respond to the recommendations made by their peers.

World Vision influences the UPR in a number of different ways, which include contributing to the consultations the country under review carry out when preparing its report; raising child rights concerns and ensuring these issues are included in the country's report; submitting written reports and recommendations to make sure other states are aware of the main issues of concern; and carrying out advocacy and lobbying activities to persuade states to present particular recommendations during the review.

Following the review World Vision looks to support national governments in their implementation of recommendations and continues to lobby them in this respect. Increasingly, World Vision offices are empowering children to be involved in all stages of the process.

This video¹ outlines how children from Albania – working alongside World Vision and Save the Children – influenced the UPR process by lobbying governments on issues of importance to Albanian children, including the right to participation guaranteed to them in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Unquestionably, the work towards full acceptance of child participation in decisions that affect them must be driven at the grassroots level – and by children themselves. Children in families, schools and communities must be supported consistently to speak out and bring about change where it is most needed.

As the Convention on the Rights of the Child marks its 25th anniversary, we are seeing that in places of international justice and accountability – those mysterious halls of power in Geneva, New York and elsewhere, once distant and closed to all but the most powerful – children's voices are now being heard.

These places and processes, which have the potential to lift up and empower local and national efforts, are being challenged to change their attitudes and fully open their doors to the youngest members of society.

Change is possible, is happening and is being brought about by children themselves.

About the author

Jennifer Philpot-Nissen represents World Vision at the UN Human Rights Council. In this capacity she coordinates the engagement of World Vision with the Universal Periodic Review and other UN human rights processes and supports the participation of children in these processes.



¹ 'Child participation in the UPR mechanism', <http://www.wvi.org/united-nations-and-global-engagement/video/child-participation-upr-mechanism>

5. Sustainable development and progress are not possible without the participation of children

By Mauricio Otasevic, Municipal Public Policy Adviser, World Vision Bolivia

The most important qualitative change generated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child was the shift in the way children and adolescents are viewed. There was a shift from being previously viewed as passive objects of government care and services to human beings with a set of rights. Children became recognised as agents of their own integrated development.

Participation became recognised as a principle in the CRC and as a set of rights, such as the right to access information, join groups and make decisions. According to the CRC, participation also enables the fulfilment of other rights and permits the enforcement of adequate health care, education and protection. It also is an end in itself, making it possible for adults to recognise children as having a genuine voice in the decisions that affect their lives.

Twenty-five years ago there was not the same level of importance given to the participation of children and adolescents; attention to the issue of participation has been and continues to be gradual. Today, more and more child-led organisations are being successful in having their opinions heard. Competitions, fairs, marches and letters to decision makers are some of the mechanisms children are using in different countries. Recently, the UN passed the Third Optional Protocol, which allows children to submit complaints directly to the UN if their rights are not protected in their country and if they have exhausted all domestic remedies to seek justice.

In Bolivia there are many success stories, especially regarding child participation aimed at generating or modifying public policies. For example, at the national level a Children's Parliament existed for many years where children drafted several laws that later became the basis of Bolivian legislation. More recently, the National Union of Bolivian Child Workers has been successful in modifying the reform bill for the Children's Code, which was approved in July by the Bolivian president.

At the local level experiences have been rich and diverse. Children have participated in intergenerational assemblies to prepare the Municipal Organic Charters, statutes governing territorial autonomy and local development. Children are also participating in the creation of laws and municipal regulations, incorporating their proposals into annual operating plans and monitoring health, education and protection services using the methodology 'Citizen Voice and Action'.

These are just some of the examples of success to be celebrated during the anniversary of the CRC; however, we need to recognise that there are still barriers and challenges. Adult-centric attitudes still persist in public authorities and leaders of civil society who believe that children should only play and study. There are also practices of tokenism and instrumentalism where children are used by people or organisations for their own interests.

Therefore, it is important to continue supporting this cause, to institutionalise participatory spaces and to take into account proposals put forth by children. Not as a token gesture or a one-off but as a part of a process to strengthen democracy, because at the end of the day there is no sustainable development or progress without the participation of children.

About the author

Mauricio Otasevic's responsibilities include the development and implementation of local public policy advocacy projects, including lobbying to local governments in order to generate normative, political and budgeting frameworks to promote and strengthen child rights. One of his priorities is to open spaces for the inclusion of girls, boys, adolescents and youth in decision-making processes.



6. The opportunity to participate and have a voice

By Maia Woodward, Community Voice Manager for Global Field Communications Team, World Vision International

Let me begin by sharing a story.

Before participating in a photo project called Able Voices in Albania, Matthew² used to sit outside his home and wave to the children as they passed by his house on the way to school, year after year. As a boy who has suffered with muscular dystrophy from the age of 3, and from a poor family, there were many reasons this 10-year-old was missing out on his education and opportunities for his own growth and development.

Matthew joined a photo project and grew in confidence daily during the course; he took photographs of what inspired him and shared his feelings about his life. His father was so encouraged by Matthew's experiences that he physically carried him on his back, half an hour a day there and back home, to make sure his son could continue on this new journey he had started. After the project ended, Matthew registered at the school and has physical help to get there. He is also continuing to take photographs.

The 25th anniversary of the CRC is an opportunity to celebrate the important changes that the CRC has made in the life of millions children like Matthew. This commemoration should also help to remind us that children have the right to participate, which is granted to all children without discrimination of any kind.

We all know that children with disabilities experience systematic segregation and are often excluded from participating in social life. However, the CRC clearly guarantees that children with disabilities have the same rights for participation and equal opportunities for developing their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities.

Another participant in the Able Voices project also proved through the project, not only to herself but to her family, that she had a lot to offer to the world and is at this moment preparing to speak at a European conference this summer entitled Young Advocates for Change. This young woman has not only transformed her life but is determined to change the lives of other young people living with disabilities.

² Not his real name.

For me, witnessing how the opportunity to participate and have a voice has affected the lives of the most vulnerable children in society inspires me beyond any other aspect of my job. And seeing how children who are empowered through participation raise their voice for others fills me with hope for the future.

There are so many examples to share. In India, when children became child journalists, they asked other children to list the most challenging things in their lives. They then filmed short skits demonstrating what the challenges were and had a community screening with parents, teachers and local community leaders to share their findings. Youth in Brazil chose to create their message using music and video to spread the word that they and other young people can be citizens of change.

I never failed to be humbled, energised and continually inspired by the children we work with through World Vision. The 25th anniversary of the CRC presents a unique occasion to honour children across the world, so many in desperate circumstances are challenging us to make sure they are part of the solution to improving conditions for children in their own communities for today and for generations to come.

About the author

Maia Woodward's role includes creating training modules for building digital storytelling communications skills for children and youth engaged in youth programming across the World Vision Partnership.



7. Children working together, changing the world

By Alexandra Newlands, Policy and Advocacy Officer, World Vision Brussels Office

The right to be heard and taken seriously is one of the fundamental values of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This right has also been one of the most challenging to implement. However, as I discovered while attending a recent child participation conference in Caux, Switzerland, when children are given the opportunity to make their views, experiences and perspectives known, they can have a radical impact on decisions affecting their rights and well-being.

The Children as Actors for Transforming Society conference offered an occasion for children to express their fears and concerns as well as their hopes and expectations for the future. It also allowed them to present their own ideas on how to ensure a world fit for children.

Most important, the conference was a place where adults listened. The aim of the conference was not only to shed light on children's issues but also on the solutions they bring to improve their own lives and the lives of their peers. All children possess gifts and talents that go beyond their difficulties, their scars and their actions.

Children's testimonies from around the world filled the room with courage, hope, activism, joy and passion. Junior (age 16) shared his experience as a street child in Cusco, Peru. He now works as a carpenter, thanks to training provided by a local organisation.

Andrei (age 17), Emma (age 18) and Paul (age 18) explained their relentless fight against child trafficking in Romania through World Vision's ART (Aware, Raise their voice and Take action) project.

Benjamin (age 6), raised in a foster-care institution in France, presented his experience of child-to-child education as he helped younger children find their own interests and skills. Aarushi (age 11), from India, explained the simple social accountability monitoring activities she carried out with her peers to rate the services delivered in her community. Nizam (age 17), from Bangladesh, who has been advocating for child rights since an early age, explained how he lobbied his minister for women and children to prevent a number of child marriages. Nizam also worked with the minister for education to ban corporal punishment in all educational institutions. We were also presented a case from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the Children's Parliament in Kinshasa worked over a five-year period for the adoption of a law protecting street children.

These children are not exceptions. There are countless young advocates around the world just like them who long to be listened to. Despite their cultural differences, these young activists have a common dream. The young people who attended the conference in Caux said during their presentations that they want: 'A world of peace and security ... where children's voices are taken seriously ... where all children have a perspective ... where children can grow in a healthy and safe environment ... and where all children's rights are recognised and fulfilled.'

Yet, too many adults still assume children cannot make informed choices. A lot needs to be done to change attitudes and shift norms towards the creation of safe spaces for children to participate.

The place for these conversations cannot remain within the walls of the Caux Conference Centre. Meaningful child participation must become a reality in all instances where decisions for and about children are taken. Children's voices should be heard wherever and whenever their rights are at stake.

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – and work towards shaping the development framework to replace the Millennium Development Goals – we need more than ever to recognise that children are citizens of today and genuine actors of change.

When children work together, they change the world for better.

About the author

Alexandra Newlands advances the understanding, quality and practice of child participation through the European Union institutions and Brussels-based child-focused organisations, and is responsible for integrating child participation in EU legislation, policy and decision-making processes. She is also responsible for gathering evidence of children's participation through World Vision's social accountability mechanism 'Citizen Voice and Action.'



8. We have been called to take children's views into account

By Anita Delhaas, National Director, World Vision Lebanon

This year we are commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For children to participate and express their own views is an essential component of the CRC. As national director of World Vision Lebanon, I encourage my team to listen to children and youth, to value their contributions and to include their points of view and opinions in our work.

How do we listen to the children at World Vision Lebanon? One way to listen to children is through the Children's Council, a body of children and youth set up at the community level to provide a space to participate in grassroots advocacy initiatives and to promote effective and responsible citizenship.

Children and youth have conducted a series of impressive initiatives at the local, national and global levels. However, we noticed that there was a gap in our accountability to children: giving them a space to participate in our internal decision-making processes and governance system.

In order to address this gap we organised a Children's Council meeting with children and young people, both Lebanese and Syrian refugees. In this meeting I was accompanied by my senior management team as part of our efforts to ensure accountability to children and youth. Since we cannot claim to be accountable to children if we do not create spaces for them to participate, our approach is to empower children and youth and give them a voice.

I was so impressed, as always, by children's confidence, articulate speech and sharp ideas. Shehab pointed out the responsibility of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as World Vision, to make the world a better place for children. Mariam, age 14, presented her experience in writing the child-led report on the Syrian refugee crisis. I was so proud of them, because they have developed great communication skills as a result of a very well developed methodology for strengthening child participation.

I was personally touched when the young man next to me told me: 'Lebanon has many problems'. One of the issues he pointed out was the discrimination between Lebanese and Syrian children. He added that he had 'no problem with the Syrian refugee children' and had purposely joined the Children's Council to interact with Syrian refugees, because he realised they will be growing up together in his hometown.

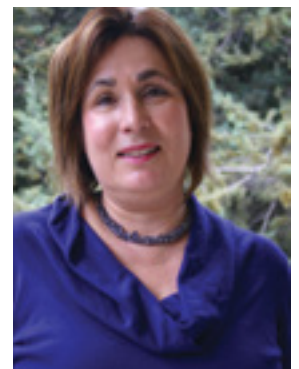
Children and youth expressed their interest in continuing to participate in this type of meeting; they appreciated the opportunity to help us hear their voices. They considered participation to be an empowering experience that helps them to bring their views into World Vision's programmes, policies and practices.

Indeed, Elias, age 14, told me that he wanted to work at an NGO such as World Vision when he grows up. What a privilege to be a role model for the next generation!

Throughout this year marking the CRC's 25th anniversary, I would like to see more initiatives like this one. I believe that when adults, such as UN officers, government officials or NGO staff, meet children and take them seriously, they start changing their own mind-set as to the value of children's opinions. It is our responsibility to create conditions that foster child and youth participation and to promote a decision-making process that is more collaborative and inclusive for them.

About the author

Anita Delhaas previously served as national director at World Vision Romania and initiated World Vision in the Netherlands, France, Spain and Denmark as well as the European Union Liaison Office in Brussels, joining the organisation in 1988. She is an outspoken advocate for children's rights, especially the right to participate. She leads World Vision Lebanon's strategy, which emphasises child and youth participation as one of the best approaches to achieving the organisation's goals and targets.



9. Children should be heard as well as seen

By Gavin Crowden, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, World Vision UK

The Convention on the Rights of the Child turns 25 this month. It has reached its mid-twenties. It is not often I choose to light candles to celebrate a convention, but this one is different – it is an 'unconventional convention'.

Why? Because it sets out that all children are created equal – a child born in Lilongwe, Malawi, has the same rights as a child from Linlithgow, Scotland. It says that all children have the right to a childhood – to go to school, to be healthy, to play. These were things that I took for granted when I was 11 and the CRC came into force.

This year I have kept coming back to one of the rights set out in the CRC – the right for all children to say what they think in everything which affects them and to have their views taken seriously (Article 12, if you're legally inclined).

In the UK this summer the Government has held two huge international summits: Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Girl Summit to tackle child marriage and female genital mutilation. These are issues we care passionately about at World Vision UK, and my team works tirelessly to learn from our programmes and advocate to those in power who can make a difference on a truly global scale.

One striking thing from both of the summits was unlocking the opportunity for World Vision youth delegates from Sierra Leone, Kosovo and the DRC to come to London and get involved in the summits. These were real opportunities for them to say what they think.

Joining others from around the world, they were able to question UK Foreign Secretary William Hague directly – including asking why the Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict summit was being held in London and not in Africa. Great question. The answer: 'The next one could be!' So far, so good.

But from both of these summits I was left with questions: Were the youth delegates' views really taken seriously? What changed in the policy process because of their involvement? Did politicians who welcomed the youth delegates' 'energy and enthusiasm' dismiss what the youth were calling for?

The children themselves questioned the extent to which they were being listened to and their influence on the outcomes. They were frustrated because they believed they had so much more to add. They are the ones who will live longer with the consequences of what is being decided than those making the decisions. And if they are not being listened to, why are we doing this anyway?

At World Vision UK we are clear that we will walk alongside our youth delegates. They have unlocked access and engagement for us; we will be with them in their communities as they advocate for change. We are committed to their involvement. This is a journey, not an event.

We will continue to enable children and young people to speak directly to those in power. It is their right. Our task – which is much harder – is to make sure that they are listened to.

About the author

Gavin Crowden leads the team that develops WVUK's child rights policy; manages programmes on health, social accountability and child protection; and engages with the UK government. The team also leads WVUK's input into the post-2015 process.



10. Children have much to contribute to justice

By Charles Badenoch, Partnership Leader, Advocacy and Justice for Children, World Vision International

This year is an important time for child rights advocates to celebrate and reflect on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which turns 25 in November. The CRC has had an enormous impact on the lives of millions of children worldwide and has recognised civil, cultural, political, economic and social rights for all children. Countries have made considerable efforts to embed this international normative framework in domestic legislations, policies and institutions.

It is crystal clear to me that these major advances are contributing to improving the well-being of children; however, often I wonder how these international laws and policies are affecting the daily lives of children, especially around the CRC foundational principle of participation.

I have been to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) several times, and I have met many children who live in fear due to the long and deadly conflict that affects the Great Lakes region. Children experience ethnic, religious and political violence, and also face broken relationships and a lack of space to participate and have their voices heard. Girls particularly experience systematic segregation based on traditional attitudes that discourage equal participation based on gender bias. However, despite the stereotypes and obstacles, some girls are already leading their communities towards a better future. One example is Jennifer, president of the Children's Parliament in Kinkole, outside of Kinshasa, a girl that I was honoured to meet in one of my visits to DRC.

Jennifer says, 'What makes me believe things will change for children is the rapid change the Children's Parliament has already brought to the mentalities, beliefs and customs within [my] community. The members of the community now know that the rights of children, moreover of girls, are applicable.'

I never cease to be impressed by how children like Jennifer are able to point clearly to core issues. Evidence to this is the many World Vision consultations where children are asked about the situation in their communities and how to improve it, and their response is very concrete. They have the passion and drive to exert influence with their peers, community or country.

I personally believe that we can promote peace and reconciliation in the Great Lakes region by ensuring that children and young people have a space to participate and contribute to peace processes. My personal experience has shown me that children have much to contribute to justice, peace and reconciliation. Children should be encouraged and enabled to participate, and by doing so, they will regain control of their lives and develop life skills and confidence.

If we do not include children and youth in the process, we will never be able to contribute to conflict transformation in this volatile region. I am not saying that all problems will be resolved by including children, but it is an important factor that could contribute to the process. Nevertheless, I am aware that children experience enormous limitations to their right to participate and to be listened to. These limitations affect children from different countries, cultures and backgrounds, not only those from the DRC.

Let us use the 25th anniversary of the CRC to celebrate the space that children have gained and look ahead to create more frameworks to empower children to speak up for their rights and equip them with the tools and skills required to participate actively in decisions that affect their lives.

About the author

Charles Badenoch, previously chief executive at World Vision UK, joined World Vision in October 2003 following an extensive commercial career. He is passionate about increasing World Vision's emphasis on advocacy and justice for children and is focused on ensuring that the voices of children are heard and acted upon in the post-2015 process.



II. Children are changing the mind-sets of decision makers

By Patricio Cuevas-Parra, Senior Policy Adviser, Child Participation, Advocacy and Justice for Children, World Vision International

Recently, there have been many exciting opportunities opening up for children and young people to participate in high-level events around the world and to have their voices heard. With the advent of the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is important to take stock and celebrate the progress of child participation.

There are so many exciting examples from around the world. Recently, Carolina, age 13, from Colombia, was one of the speakers at the seventh World Urban Forum in Medellín, Colombia, and Nour, age 15, from Lebanon, participated in the launch of the Inter-Agency Guiding Principles for Youth Participation in Peacebuilding in New York. We also have experiences from Uganda, with Johnson, age 17, participating in the launch of the World Vision report *Europe Can Make the Difference: How Social Accountability Improves the Lives of Children* in Brussels, and Anton, age 17, from Indonesia, attending the Asia Pacific Open Government Partnership Conference in Bali.

This impressive list of bright and inspiring young World Vision delegates highlights that children are interested in contributing to policy debate and influencing decisions that affect their lives. These four events also demonstrate how opportunities for child participation in different levels of decision-making processes are increasing. We are witnessing a profound change in paradigms related to child participation, with decision makers changing their perception of children as objects of protection to agents of change and rights holders.

These changes are the result of perseverance and determination of children and young people to participate in decision-making spaces and to have their voices heard. They are also the result of the development of frameworks and policies that seek to empower children and ensure the implementation of the principles contained in the CRC.

Over the past few years I believe we have established a solid foundation from which to promote decision-making processes that are more collaborative and inclusive for children. However, it is important to remember that children will be prevented from having their voices heard unless we adults provide the conditions and support needed in order to make it happen.

Carolina, Nour, Johnson and Anton have demonstrated that children and young people are in a position to create participation spaces despite the limitations of beliefs, values and practices. However, it is important to highlight that child participation is still seen as a novelty or a foreign concept to many cultures and societies. I am convinced that the CRC, which has been signed by almost all countries in the world, is the best normative framework to challenge the cultural barriers, traditional patriarchal values, gender inequality and age-based discrimination that prevent girls and boys from participating.

The 25th anniversary of the CRC is a significant opportunity to stand up and demand a greater voice and more participation spaces for children. We are not asking for immediate and absolute changes but a progressive and sustainable implementation of the CRC articles and principles.

About the author

Patricio Cuevas-Parra leads and develops the cross-organisational implementation of resources to carry out child participation initiatives at the local, national and international levels. He also leads broader efforts to ensure the development of policies, practices and programmes in order to strengthen child participation in advocacy.



12. Five things you should know about children's right to health

By Thiago Luchesi, Adviser for Child Health Policy and Rights, World Vision International

The Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees every child's right to health. But what does that mean in practice? It has too often been misunderstood as an unattainable commitment by governments to keep all the nation's children healthy. In 2013, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee) took a major step towards addressing this misunderstanding when it published General Comment 15 on what a child's right to health looks like.

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, I would like to share with you the main points of this General Comment:

The life cycle approach: Understanding our life cycle is essential for addressing health problems in childhood, which is a period of continuous growth from birth through infancy and early childhood to adolescence. Each phase is significant – with important developmental changes occurring in terms of physical, psychological, emotional and social development, expectations and norms. The stages of the child's development are cumulative, and each stage has an impact on subsequent phases, influencing children's health.

1. *What is the child's right to health?* A child has a right to timely and appropriate prevention; health promotion; and curative, rehabilitative and palliative services. Governments need to show a commitment to put these services in place and, irrespective of resources, have the obligation not to take any retrogressive steps that could hamper children's right to health.

2. *The obligation to diminish child mortality:* Under the obligation to reduce child mortality, governments must strengthen health systems to provide the required interventions in the continuum of care for maternal, newborn and children's health, including safe delivery services and care for the newborn. Particular emphasis should be put on scaling up simple, safe and inexpensive interventions that have proven to be effective, such as community-based interventions.

3. *The double burden of malnutrition:* Children around the world are facing a double burden of malnutrition – both undernutrition and overweight. Since undernutrition still accounts for a great number of deaths in children under 5, interventions to improve the nutritional status of pregnant women and malnourished children must be undertaken. Given its importance for human development, adequate nutrition in early childhood should also be treated as an absolute priority. To address child obesity, governments should work to limit children's exposure to 'fast foods' and drinks that are high in fat, sugar or salt; energy dense; and micronutrient poor.

4. *The Action Cycle to improve children's health:* Countries need to engage in a cyclical process of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to inform further planning, modified implementation and renewed monitoring and evaluation efforts. This requires appropriately disaggregated data across the life course of the child, with due attention to vulnerable groups. Children must be given the space to participate actively in the whole Action Cycle according to their age and maturity.

About the author

Thiago Luchesi is a human rights and public health expert. In his current role, he closely collaborates with United Nations agencies and other non-governmental organisations on the intersections between child rights and maternal, newborn, and child health.



13. Child refugees and the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

By Olivia Pennikian, Advocacy Manager, World Vision Lebanon

As a child rights advocate, there are two important celebrations this year that are very relevant to my work and to the people with whom I work. This year marks the 25th anniversary of Convention on the Rights of the Child, and World Refugee Day was held on 20 June this year.

Honouring the anniversary of the CRC cannot be complete without acknowledging the terrible situation of millions of refugee children throughout the world, especially in the Middle East, where I work. As one of the consequences of the war in Syria, children have fled to neighbouring countries and currently make up more than half of the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon. Children are in fact the largest group of stakeholders in terms of the humanitarian response. There is growing evidence of the devastating circumstances that these refugee children experience and the violation of their rights under the CRC.

A recent child-led report written by Syrian refugee children living in Lebanon and Jordan shows us that most children are not in school.³ Furthermore, those children that are 'privileged' enough to be in school live in constant fear of bullying, humiliation and violence. In the report children also expressed their concern about increasing cases of early marriage. Children explained that they face poverty at home, and many of them are being forced onto the streets to generate an income for their families.

Violations to basic rights is a daily reality for these children, despite the fact that the CRC explicitly recognises in Article 22 that refugee children have the right to receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance.

Throughout my professional life I have engaged with many children and young people, and it always astounds me how children are able to advocate for child rights regardless of their race, ethnicity, nationality or religion. The CRC has given children a powerful tool to advocate for their rights based on the universal principles granted to all children, and this child-led report is further evidence of how children can exercise their right to participate.

Interestingly, 83 per cent of children who participated in the development of the child-led report said that they would participate in the relief efforts if given the chance.⁴ This demonstrates that children are asking for an opportunity to help other children, children of their generation, a generation that is at risk of being lost.

I was particularly touched by the desire of many of the children to convert their suffering into advocacy for justice in the future. It is evident that they want peace and justice to triumph over the sectarianism, hatred and violence in their home countries.

The 25th anniversary of the CRC should remind us how important it is to adhere to its principles and to take into account the reality of millions of refugee children. It is important to keep this in mind when developing programmes for children to ensure they benefit from physical, mental and emotional development.

About the author

Olivia Pennikian leads the WV Lebanon advocacy strategy, which prioritises children as the catalysts for policy reform on issues affecting them in order to address the causes of inequality and injustice. Olivia also oversees the Peacebuilding and Faith and Development strategies.



³ World Vision (2014), *Children's Report: Stand with Me: Our Uncertain Future*. <http://www.wvi.org/syria-crisis/publication/our-uncertain-future>.

⁴ Ibid



14. I was privileged

By Mario Stephano, Child Participation and Advocacy Officer – World Vision Lebanon

This year we are commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Right of the Child, and this milestone gives us the chance to reflect on both the successes and challenges in the implementation of child rights. I would like to reflect on an issue that is extremely relevant to me, that is, the intersection between the right to participate and the emergency situations.

I consider myself a very fortunate person because I was one of the facilitators who had the privilege of helping a wonderful group of Syrian refugee children research and write a child-led report.⁵ These children have the talent and the determination to make their voices heard, particularly when we mark the third anniversary of the Syrian crisis.

Syrian refugee children have suffered enormously in their own country, and unfortunately they continue to suffer in the countries that host them. However, they have faced up to the challenge to raise their voices, despite their concerns and fears, through a unique report that tells their stories. The children also provide a number of recommendations that we hope are going to be heard.

As lead facilitators of this child-led report we worked to ensure that children were involved in a meaningful, safe and ethical way in this initiative. We, as World Vision employees, have the mandate to provide an environment of comfort, respect and acceptance of others. We made sure that the children expressed their views, experiences and dreams in their own way, and we developed methodologies to avoid 'token' child participation.

At the end of the meetings that we conducted in Lebanon and Jordan, I was pleased to see that the child participants were very happy for the opportunity given to them to participate and to be listened to. They hope that their voices will reach the whole world and that their ideas and demands will be addressed.

I can only express satisfaction for this tremendous learning experience that has affected me at both professional and personal levels. I was touched by the children's feelings. I felt a mix of emotions ranging from sorrow, hardship and pain to determination and hope for a brighter future. I saw twinkles in their eyes that showed me that despite their tragedies, they still are optimistic.

This experience showed me that we adults often think that children are not aware of the problems and difficulties they suffer from under the brunt of society. But this child-led report process has taught me that every child has a clear understanding of reality according to his or her age, experience and evolving capacities. I was amazed how they were able to observe and analyse the conditions of their current lives and the consequences of the war.

I hope this child-led report will encourage us to listen to children and take their opinions into account. We have the responsibility to give spaces to them to participate, but we also have the duty to make ourselves accountable to the children's contribution.

On the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, I would like to invite everyone to listen to the voices of these children. It is to be hoped that their future will be brighter, full of life and pulsing with hope.

About the author

Mario Stephano's role includes promoting meaningful and rights-based child participation and providing guidance to field staff to conduct child-led initiatives by using peer-to-peer approaches. Mario's primary motivation is to equip children with the skills needed to achieve their optimal development and to exercise their rights guaranteed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.



⁵ World Vision (2014).



15. A place for the global

By David Westwood, Head of Programme Effectiveness and Country Engagement, World Vision UK

The statistics are shocking enough, let alone their impact on each and every life: According to the International Center for Research on Women, 'one-third of the world's girls are married before the age of 18'.⁶ And UNICEF statistics report that 'more than 125 million girls and women alive today have been cut in the 29 countries in Africa and the Middle East where FGM/C is concentrated'.⁷ How on earth do we go about addressing challenges such as these?

The UK government hosted, at the end of July, the first Girl Summit aimed at mobilising efforts to end female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and child early and forced marriage (CEFM) within a generation. The summit ended in a charter in which participants publicly stated their commitment to address the issues. We might easily ask ourselves, so what? Is this really the most effective way to make a difference?

Alice Farma (age 16) and Alfred Williams (age 16) from Sierra Leone – having participated in the summit – think they have an important role to play.

Both Alice and Alfred have been working hard within their own community as part of the local Children's Club to speak up against FGM/C and early marriage, two of the biggest fears amongst them and their peers. Last year they achieved something remarkable: at 15 and 16 years of age, in front of district chiefs, community elders, their peers and community members, Alice and Alfred spoke up. Their community leaders listened, implementing laws against early marriage and FGM/C. Children in their community are now – as a result – feeling safer and living free from the fear of early marriage and FGM/C.

For Alice and Alfred, however, the challenge does not stop there.

Alice says: 'I never knew other people around the world – adults as well as children – had as much concern as I do about female genital mutilation and early forceful marriage. ... I have been challenged to do more than what I have been already involved in at the local level. I have to mobilise and network with my peers to influence national level legislation against

both practices to save thousand of children who are at risk of going through FGM and early marriage in order to save our generation.'

And Alfred: 'I started to reflect how our advocacy in our community could form a global agenda to end an ages-long practice that is [commonplace] not only in my country but also in other parts of world. ... This event served as an inspiration to me and opened my mind to how we would work as youths in my community to mobilise a mass of children across Sierra Leone to gather as much evidence as possible and put pressure on our government to enact a national law that would protect children from FGM, child marriage and other forms of abuse to ensure that our generation gets as much protection as possible.'

Addressing complex issues such as FGM/C and CEFM effectively involved working at a number of levels. Global standards and declarations often create an environment within which positive national and local action can flourish. The CRC has shown us that over the past 25 years of its existence. Let's hope the Girls Summit also has long and lasting effects.

In Alice's own words: 'May I thank the UK government through DID, UNICEF and Plan for organising this very important event and to World Vision UK for its continual support to children in Sierra Leone and helping us to be part of this great learning event. My sincere [request] is for all governments in the world to rally behind the call to end FGM and early forceful marriage on in our generation.'

About the author

David Westwood is responsible for leading the WVUK's geographical and programmes strategy, its evidence and accountability work, and overseeing relations with partner offices worldwide.



⁶ International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), 'Child Marriage Facts and Figures'. <http://www.icrw.org/child-marriage-facts-and-figures>

⁷ UNICEF, 'UNICEF Data: Monitoring the Situation of Children and Women'. data.unicef.org/child-protection/fgmc



16. Educating girls equals exponential growth

By Kerin Ord, Strategy Adviser, Education and Life Skills, World Vision International

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is encouraging to note the world has made great steps towards the achievement of universal primary education and in closing the gap between enrolment levels for boys and girls in basic education. However, Article 28 of the CRC not only acknowledges the right of all children to a free primary education but adds that children should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education they are capable of.

For many girls, this is still a right that seems a long way from being realised; retention remains a key issue to be addressed. UNICEF's 2014 *State of the Child* reports that across sub-Saharan Africa fewer than one in three girls attends secondary school; less than one in ten will graduate.⁸

So what are the major barriers to girls' staying in school and completing their education? The quality of education at all levels is a factor – one that affects both girls and boys. In many countries rising enrolment rates have resulted in a drop in the standard of education. As governments lag behind in meeting the demand for schooling, underqualified teachers struggle to teach in overcrowded classrooms.

The biggest barriers to girls' education are those that affect females in particular, such as violence, attitudes towards girls and harmful traditional practices. For example, girls are more likely to be taken out of school to carry out domestic roles in supporting their families. The International Center for Research on Women reports that one-third of the world's girls are married before they are 18. One in nine girls in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia is married before she is 15 years old.⁹ For these girls, school is thought to be irrelevant to their roles in their communities.

UN estimates state that 'every year, 60 million girls are sexually assaulted at, or on their way to, school'.¹⁰ Violent actions targeted at school girls in Nigeria and Pakistan have highlighted how threatened some groups feel about the idea of girls gaining a broad-based education.

Why should we care so much about education for girls? Girls' education is the single most powerful development multiplier. Educating girls can accelerate the fight against poverty, inequity and gender discrimination. Educated young women are six times less likely to be married as children. They have smaller families. A child born to a mother with a secondary school education is 50 per cent more likely to survive beyond the age of 5. In sub-Saharan Africa in 2008, this would have amounted to 1.8 million children's lives saved – a 41 per cent reduction in child mortality in this region.

Research conducted by the World Bank shows that an extra year of primary school boosts girls' eventual wages by 10 to 20 per cent,¹¹ and returns to female secondary education are in the 15 to 25 per cent range.¹² There are direct links between increased rates of girls' school enrolment and increased GDP. The economic development of a whole country can be influenced positively by educated women – powerful stuff!

The CRC 25th anniversary is an opportunity to reinforce our commitment to the right to education and to work within the CRC as a normative framework in order to ensure that girls are equipped with the knowledge, tools and skills to develop, grow and take control of their lives.

There is surely nothing more effective in multiplying development interventions across maternal and newborn child health, economic development, good governance and child protection and rights than educating girls. This is why some feel so threatened; this is why we should care.

⁸ Cited in Catherine M. Russell (Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues), 'Remarks at Brookings Institute Girls' Education Summit' (17 June 2014).

⁹ ICRW, 'Child Marriage Facts and Figures'.

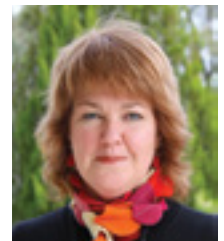
¹⁰ United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe (UNRIC), 'Key Statistics on Violence against Women and Girls' (2014). <https://www.unric.org/en/uk-a-ireland-news-archive/28258-key-statistics-on-violence-against-women-and-girls>

¹¹ George Psacharopoulos and Harry Anthony Patrinos (2002), 'Returns to Investment in Education: A Further Update', World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 2881 (Washington, DC: World Bank), cited in Barbara Herz and Gene B. Sperling (2004), *What Works in Girls' Education* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations), 22.

¹² T. Paul Schultz, 'Why Governments Should Invest More to Educate Girls', cited in Herz and Sperling (2004), *What Works in Girls' Education*, 22

About the author

Kerin Ord's role includes ensuring World Vision's programming in education aligns with broader World Vision strategy and with global trends in the sector. Kerin also has a special focus on gender and education, education technology, advocacy and evidence-building around World Vision's work in education and life skills.



17. Children fleeing violence in Central America: A major regression for the CRC

By Amanda Rives, Regional Advocacy and Mobilisation Director, Latin America and the Caribbean, World Vision

As we come upon 25 years after the passage of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, there is much to reflect on in Latin America, a region that championed and led the way on children's rights. Within one year of the CRC being available for signature, 21 countries in the region had already ratified it, representing both one-third of the region as well as one-third of the total ratifications at that point. Civil society movements and coalitions for child rights were formed; the convention was codified in national legislation and constitutions; children and adolescents claimed their places in decision-making; and an inspiring commitment to child rights was born that continues today throughout the region.

Though progress has been made in the past 25 years, most children in the region are far from having their rights realised; in some ways they are much more vulnerable and marginalised than their parents were. While advances have been made in terms of child-focused legislation, policies and even budgets, increasing violence and debilitating inequality has led to serious setbacks in child protection and well-being, and even in the advancement of rights such as education and health, which should have been areas of great achievement in this region.

In Central America raging violence has stopped the advancement of the CRC in its tracks. Spiraling organised crime and gang violence in countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have resulted in an exodus of children from their communities, many running for their life. In their home countries the lack of protection in their communities leaves them vulnerable to violence in all aspects of their lives, ranging from extortion on the street to domestic and sexual abuse. As the crisis has deepened, more and more children are deprived of their right to education, right to health, and right to grow up in a loving, secure environment.

While migration north and within countries in the region is not a new phenomenon, the recent flood of unaccompanied child migrants can be directly attributed to the violence epidemic and the lack of state response. The governments at hand fail to protect them the way they committed to by ratifying the CRC 25 years ago. They have the unequivocal responsibility to make ending this violence a priority regardless of the inherent difficulties and dangers.

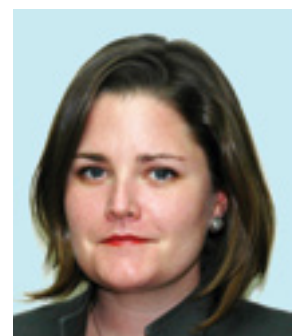
By fleeing, children often face even worse fates; the terrible irony of their plight is that these children attempting to reach a safe haven often face even worse trauma on the migrant trail, even falling into the hands of human traffickers and disappearing into forced labour and sexual exploitation rings. On the migrant trail they experience sexual abuse, extortion and even death. These children have been failed by the international community, the United States (US), Mexico and their home countries in realising their rights under the CRC.

In this type of crisis the failure of the United States to ratify the CRC becomes particularly debilitating. It weakens the ability of this government to pressure Central American governments to prioritise child rights and has allowed an additional crisis to form, namely, that of overwhelmed border shelters where arriving children are kept for long periods of time in confined, crowded spaces, deprived of the rights guaranteed by the CRC.

As the 25th anniversary of the CRC approaches and many countries plan celebrations and commemorations, we should critically reflect on where we are failing children in the region and globally. We need to hold governments to account to the commitment they made in 1989 to protect and prioritise children's rights. We need to look at the factors that not only prohibit the realisation of children's rights but are also creating serious setbacks in child protection and their well-being. The current situation in Central America and on the US border is a stark reminder of the unspeakable violations children still face today 25 years later.

About the author

Amanda Rives's responsibilities include the development and implementation of the regional advocacy agenda, including campaigns and public engagement, communications and building capacity in 14 national offices. Her technical areas of expertise include children's rights, maternal and child health, child protection and participation.



18. Making child rights relevant

By Paul Stephenson, Senior Director, Child Development and Rights, World Vision International

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most rapidly ratified human rights convention in history. There was almost universal endorsement for a convention that protected the rights of the most vulnerable citizens in any country – its children. Why, therefore, has it been so hard for rights activists to convince a broad cross section of the public that child rights are important or even necessary? Why do so many parents and institutions show ambivalence or even downright disdain for this most worthy of human rights conventions?

Whilst the responsibility for the fulfilment of children's rights lies with the signatory states, in the early years following its ratification many non-government organisations took on the challenge to educate children about their rights. I recall travelling to several post-Soviet Union countries in the mid-1990s. Many of the child-focused, rights-based organisations believed that the best approach to helping to create a new generation of civic-minded citizens was to teach children their rights. There was almost an evangelical fervour about this approach – a sense that if only children knew their rights, and their rights were upheld, this would lead to a new moral and just society.

The children, however, found the exercise frustrating. At worst, it raised false hopes that fulfilling rights would be a magic bullet to resolve all their and their societies' problems – a kind of 'entitlement Christmas list'. But when they pushed for change or discussed these rights at home, they were met with a governance system barely able to establish a rule of law, and parents who felt threatened by new language that clashed with cultural and family values.

I also observed the use of child rights as a blunt instrument to raise awareness in some Latin American countries. Posters and literature posted around one town in the Dominican Republic set an accusatory tone, blaming parents for abusing children and violating their rights. In the UK, a child rights advocacy organisation pushed copies of the CRC into the cots of newly born children in hospitals, rather like street evangelists forcing tracts into the hands of passersby.

Any new field of endeavour and advocacy takes time to mature. Whilst these activities were well intentioned, they tended to marginalise parents and confuse children. Whilst the CRC specifies the fundamental role of the family and rights of parents, groups in opposition to the CRC see it as

a Trojan horse through which the state can gain access to and control of children, undermining the role of parents and families.

Rights language sits uncomfortably in the vocabulary of many parents, unless these are spoken of in the context of social justice and upholding the rights of others. Parents don't tend to talk to their children about their rights; rather, they try to help them develop a sense of identity within their family and often faith community, and teach values of service, responsibility, delayed gratification, character and caring for others.

Over the years the child rights community has shifted course and begun to talk about rights within a broader understanding of child well-being. The early days spent trying to convince parents to uphold rights has shifted to a dialogue about what's best for their children. Upholding children's rights then becomes part of a conversation related to how to gain access to quality education and health services, or how to improve mechanisms that protect the rights of the most vulnerable children. Local-level advocacy or social accountability approaches can help to expose gaps in the fulfilment of children's rights and begin the process of improving services that they have a right to enjoy.

Where parents and children see the application of rights leading to change, and that this change results in a better life for their children, then the convention becomes relevant and useful.

About the author

Paul Stephenson heads the Child Development and Rights team, which focuses on child protection, child participation, gender equality, disability inclusion and children's spiritual nurture. Paul has worked in humanitarian relief and development for 25 years in Latin America, Africa and Asia, specialising in education, child rights and community development.



19. Youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner

By Paul Newnham, Global Youth Engagement Director, World Vision International

Every day we see people leading in our world – some leading for good and some for bad. Despite how challenging we find the world, there are leaders fighting for hope, for life, for opportunity. It is inspiring to see of late that so many are so young.

Today, I woke to see a message on my phone from CNN that 17-year-old Malala Yousafzai was recognised as the youngest ever Nobel Peace Prize winner for her work speaking out on education. At great cost to herself, Malala has spoken out and used the situation she was in to raise awareness of the terrible plight of girls in parts of the world. Her award recognises her work and in doing so also sends an important message to other young people – to children and youth like her – who are advocating for their communities and to create better opportunities.

Malala has shown that even though children and youth experience disadvantages in terms of their social relationships, networks and participation due to cultural barriers, traditional values, gender imbalance and age-based discrimination, they are still eager to contribute to society and influence their peers, community members and stakeholders to build a better community for everyone.

Malala has shown us that when young people are empowered they can take greater responsibility for the exercise of their own rights, as they gain confidence and competence to make informed choices. Malala, as many other child advocates, has an interest in participating in activities that tackle issues that matter to her and her peers. We are very proud of her commitment to girls' education.

As we move toward the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is great to see a young person recognised with such a prestigious award for her fight to bring these rights into reality.

Malala, we applaud you. To other young people tirelessly fighting for your communities and rights, we encourage you to continue the fight.

About the author

Paul Newnham helps to connect, catalyse and convene World Vision's work with young people around the world. This includes working with young leaders inside and outside World Vision on a variety of issues and projects. His team also creates dynamic content to help engage youth in World Vision mission and vision.



20. Building a child-friendly nation

By Shintya Kurniawan, Media Relations Officer, World Vision Indonesia

Twenty-five years ago world leaders agreed on one convention to protect children's rights globally. Today, the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by 194 countries, making it the most widely endorsed human rights treaty in history. As a child-focused organisation and in line with the national Child-Friendly City policy, World Vision Indonesia has established and fostered more than 400 children's groups to build on our children's thousands of ideas for a better nation. These ideas are accommodated and addressed to regency and/or municipal government officials. The results are truly beyond words.

Through these forums the children in Cilincing, Jakarta, changed the face of their slum neighbourhood by leading a movement to install 1,000 waste bins and by creating a street mural that was painted and funded together with the community and the sub-district government. In Pontianak, West Kalimantan, children earned a seat on the Musrenbang (provincial development planning meetings). Thus, child representatives are now invited to share their insights on all government-led development plans. They have also become advocates for both their peers and adults alike on reproductive health issues.

In Nias, young people have effectively helped numerous parents by taking up organic gardening, with the aim of providing vegetables for villagers and reducing levels of malnutrition. In Sikka, East Nusa Tenggara, children suggested that the school build a dormitory for teachers. They came up with this idea after complaining about the teachers' absences and late attendance due to the distance between the teachers' homes and the school. The students also suggested creating a better sanitation facility by building more toilets segregated by gender.

By providing meaningful participation opportunities for children, we help them as they prepare to become thoughtful, independent future leaders. Children can even turn into advocates for us adults with their unpredictable solutions that rarely cross our cluttered adult minds.

When we support children to make decisions from an early age, we help them to become responsible decision makers when they grow up. More important, we let them realise the consequences of these decisions. If they grow up to become members of parliament, their choices will affect millions of citizens. If they become voters, their voices will affect the nation. And once they become parents, their decisions will affect their own family and descendants. The impact of our decisions, first as children and then as adults, does not stop with us. It goes on for months, years, even generations.

When we fulfil children's right to speak up and act, we are leaving our world in good hands. The next time we interact with children, let us remember that we may very well be interacting with a future president, a parliament member, a CEO, a professional athlete or a UN ambassador, and that what they say really does matter.

About the author

Shintya Kurniawan is responsible for amplifying the voices of marginalised children and communities. She also has a special focus on promoting children's rights in mass media.



21. Innovative partnership for child rights

By Deepesh Paul Thakur, Public Engagement Director, World Vision Mongolia

As the world celebrates the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is vital to remember that child rights are not just the responsibility of organisations working with children. They are the responsibility of everyone – government, businesses, the civil sector and ordinary citizens like you and me.

To protect children's rights, a deliberate effort will be required to draw in and focus these varied parts of society. We know this is possible. One example is an initiative in Mongolia, where the government, alongside World Vision and Mobicom (a mobile phone service provider), is working on a child protection programme.

Prime Minister of Mongolia N. Altankhuyag has taken a personal interest in this new initiative – a free nationwide child help line – explaining at the project's launch that it represents an important step for the country and a positive example of partnerships among the government, private sector and civil sector.

The number of calls to the project – called Child Help Line 108 – shortly after its launch has exceeded all expectations. In fact, within its first six months more calls had been received than over the two-year period of the previous attempt at a child service line, which had been largely confined to Ulaanbaatar (calls from outside the capital were charged).

Taking heed of the popularity of the help line, the government increased human and financial capacity to support the smooth functioning of call centres and also strengthened referral mechanisms in order to meet the needs of children reporting abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation.

Experts believe the child help line is already serving as a catalyst to further strengthen child protection systems across the country. For example, children can now easily report cases of abuse, domestic violence, peer pressure – and seek advice and proper treatment in turn.

This improved ability for children to document and report human rights abuses is particularly significant, given that the government of Mongolia recently signed the Third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This protocol gives children the ability to report particular instances of rights violations directly to the UN. The UN will investigate their claims and can direct a child's government to take action.

As the world celebrates the 25 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, let us not forget the value and importance of innovative partnerships and continue to work to identify ways in which we can capitalise on the strengths of diverse parts of society to address the needs of vulnerable children.

About the author

Deepesh Paul Thakur provides strategic leadership and works to raise awareness and understanding of World Vision Mongolia's mission and vision. This includes working with the government and private sector in Mongolia in order to explore opportunities to improve child well-being.



22. Children's rights to be protected – most needed in the emergencies

By Makiba Yamano, *Child Protection in Emergencies Specialist, World Vision International*

As we celebrate and commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, I cannot help thinking about the children who face dangers and survival risks now.

More than one billion children live in conflict-affected areas, of whom 300 million are under the age of 5.¹³ Children constitute approximately 50 per cent of the world's refugees (of 16.7 million), which is the highest figure for the decade.¹⁴ More than 28.5 million children are out of primary school in the conflict-affected areas, and there are 250,000 child soldiers.¹⁵

While we made great progress in realising children's rights worldwide, unfortunately these facts and figures show the hard reality for children affected by conflicts today. Through my deployments in emergency responses, I witness and listen to their fears, sadness and anger. Like Teresa and Simon, who shared their story in the report 'Sounding the Alarm: The Urgent Needs of Children in South Sudan',¹⁶ many children fled their homes to avoid the danger of attacks; they face uncertainty in their life as they rely on aid supplies for their survival and do not have any place to learn, play and meet with their peers.

The CRC, which has near-universal ratification across the world, should be used to leverage the better protection of children affected by conflicts. Governments and parties to the conflict need to be held accountable, and key stakeholders, such as donors and humanitarian organisations, must be urged for their commitment to ensure children's rights are protected in the most devastating situations.

At the same time the CRC can also provide a platform for children to share their views, voices and desires for their future, recognising that children have a right to participate and to be involved in their own development and protection. Though children face indescribable hardships, I was stunned to witness their great resilience and desire for a better future. Children want to go to school to better equip themselves with knowledge and skills. Children want to contribute in their families and communities to make their situation better. Children have a strong desire to have a safe, peaceful country where they can live happily with their families and friends without fear.

Children are capable, according to their age and maturity, of contributing with their own resources, skills and knowledge to bring about positive changes in their peers, families and communities. These children will be the next generation to change and reconstruct their nations with peace and hope.

As we commemorate the 25th anniversary of CRC, it is my prayer that people remember and recommit to protect the rights of the children in conflicts, who are trying their level best to survive and desire to build better future for themselves and everyone else.

About the author

Makiba Yamano has been working for children affected by natural disasters and conflicts across Asia, Africa and Middle East for over 10 years. She spends half of her time in the emergencies responses and the other half in programme quality assurance and capacity building for child protection in emergencies across the World Vision Partnership.



¹³ European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO), 'Children in Conflict Fact Sheet' (2014). http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/thematic/children_conflict_en.pdf

¹⁴ UNHCR, 'War's Human Cost: UNHCR Global Trend' (2013). http://www.unhcr.org/5399a14f9.html#_ga=1.116936707.425434296.1416203810

¹⁵ 'Children in Conflict Fact Sheet' (2014).

¹⁶ World Vision, 'Sounding the Alarm: The Urgent Needs of Children in South Sudan'. <http://www.wvi.org/south-sudan-crisis/publication/south-sudan-hunger-crisis-sounding-alarm>



23. Something to talk about

By Brian Jonson, Regional Communications Director, World Vision Middle East and Eastern Europe Regional Office

Over the past several years I have been encouraged to see the growth of meaningful child participation across our region. The improvement is in part a natural, though long in coming, outgrowth of the fact we are a child-focused organisation. More significant, perhaps, it has been an outgrowth of our commitment and increasing focus on the participation and protection of children as captured in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

There are a number of examples of World Vision's commitment to child participation in the Middle East, Balkans, Caucasus and South Asia region. The ART (Aware, Raise their voice and Take action) youth network, the regional child and youth forum, the contribution of children and youth to our regional strategy and our child participation learning hub are just a few of the examples of empowering children and youth to advocate for themselves and their peers.

As a communications person and a child participation supporter, I have three observations from my experience of watching children's rights being shared and embraced by children in our region.

First, I especially value the significance the convention places on a child's right to self-expression in diverse ways. Article 13, which speaks to this right, could almost be thought of as the communicator's article. As the role of communications in World Vision shifts increasingly from doing communication to enabling others to communicate, it is exciting to see what happens when children are included in that shift and are given the tools, skills and opportunities to speak for themselves. Beyond that, for children who do want to engage with their family, community and government, the convention provides an excellent framework and strong content for meaningful participation.

Second, while the purpose of the CRC is to provide the framework for defining and defending children's rights, I have been excited to see how it also has inspired children to take on the responsibility to protect one another. Almost inevitably as I have watched children learn about the full scope of their own rights, their conversation has moved naturally to a desire to extend that protection to other children that they are now able to identify as not being protected.

Finally, watching the impact that learning about rights has had on children in countries where the gaps are large has led me to believe in the value of teaching and speaking about it more explicitly even in countries where the gaps are smaller. No country can claim to have fully implemented the convention for all children in its jurisdiction, though certain countries come closer to ensuring it applies more completely for more children.

As with the second point, learning about the CRC specifically enables children, wherever they live, both to be more aware of children in their own context who may not be experiencing the full range of rights as outlined in the convention and to participate in a global discussion about why these rights need to be enshrined. In doing so, the convention could be used as a tool for its own fulfilment.

About the author

Brian Jonson has worked with Children's Clubs and youth leaders across the region, providing media and communications skills training.



24. The right to associate freely: Networks for positive change

By Paul Stephenson, Senior Director, Child Development and Rights, World Vision International

'We want to change the way people in our country view young people,' Tatiana and Elvis told me. They co-lead a young communicators' group in Limon, Costa Rica. To promote its work, the group manages a Facebook page and creates programming for a local television station that gives them an hour each Friday to broadcast.

'We deal with local issues that are of interest to adolescents and young adults', continued Elvis. 'It's often about sports and issues that are of interest to us and show young people contributing positively to their communities and volunteering with World Vision.'

As the 25th anniversary for the Convention on the Rights of the Child approaches, children, adolescents and youth across Latin America are finding ways to connect and express their ideas, promote causes they care about and act in their communities to improve services and safety. Over 160,000 of them are involved in the evolving networks facilitated by World Vision in 14 countries. Many more are involved in movements and networks across the continent facilitated by peer agencies or led by young people.

However, forming, nurturing and sustaining networks isn't an exact science. The challenges are arguably greater when these networks are formed by children and adolescents. Whilst Article 15 of the CRC proclaims the right of children to associate freely, making this work in practice in a safe and meaningful way can be challenging.

I write this blog at a meeting of child participation practitioners from the Latin America region. World Vision in Latin America has a clear cause and set of priorities – the protection of children and the empowerment of millions of children, adolescents and youth.

The primary portal to achieve this is through the establishment and growth of child, adolescent and youth networks. As the networks begin to find their voice and identity, they naturally begin to prioritise issues that are of concern to them. Some of these may not match up with World Vision's cause. 'We need to recognise', argues a colleague from Bolivia, 'that the children and adolescents will have their own priorities. We can't force them to adopt our advocacy agenda.'

These moments provide opportunities for growth. The networks need to own and drive their agendas and look for partners to provide support to and sustain their efforts.

World Vision's desire is to see these networks create a movement that shapes the future democratic, spiritual and cultural spaces within the region, whilst at the same time focusing on specific issues that World Vision wants to address.

There are no guarantees. Some networks will fail. Undoubtedly, there will be surprises along the way. A movement may never coalesce, or perhaps different issue-based movements or campaigns may arise. Some networks could be hijacked by political ideologies or autocratic leaders.

So where will it all end, and what does success look like? Fulfilling the right to associate freely is a step in the right direction. Other successes include partnering with the children and adolescents as they muddle through tough decisions, create democratic structures and exhibit pro-social behaviour that upholds the rights of others.

Sustaining change and network vitality includes developing a strong portfolio of partnerships and support; becoming recognised within their families, communities and society for what they contribute; and knowing when to stop. Participating in networks can also lead to personal development and cultivating active, creative and courageous citizens working towards the common good.

My colleagues here believe that these networks can operate democratically and sustainably: 'Some of the networks who have not been around long define success in material terms ... finding somewhere to meet, building a playground and so on. But those who've been functioning for a while, and who have matured in their leadership, define success as being recognised by their neighbours, or when the mayor or other local organisations "come to us rather than us going to look for them".'

About the author

Paul Stephenson heads the Child Development and Rights team, which focuses on child protection, child participation, gender equality, disability inclusion and children's spiritual nurture. Paul has worked in humanitarian relief and development for 25 years in Latin America, Africa and Asia, specialising in education, child rights and community development.



25. The Third Optional Protocol: A huge step ahead

By Alejandro Cartes, Operations and Advocacy Director, World Vision Chile

It was gratifying to follow the Chilean media's coverage of an important announcement made recently by the president of the republic, Michelle Bachelet. What was the announcement? She had sent to the National Parliament for ratification the Third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This action confirmed the commitment of the Chilean government to advance the rights of children in the country.

The news is encouraging, especially in a country that does not have a comprehensive national child protection law that provides a protective environment to all children who live in Chile. Civil society organisations have strongly advocated for two clear demands: the urgent need of a child protection law and the appointing of an ombudsman for children.

The media covered this news positively – largely as Chile has been working to foster a strong culture of rights and alignment to international conventions. The Chilean constitution makes all human rights treaties automatically part of the Chilean legal system, and courts must consider human rights conventions as a primary source. Due to this, the CRC has strongly influenced the Chilean laws and the courts' decisions. Lawyers and judges deal with the CRC daily, and most court sentences include references to the rights granted in the CRC.

However, serious child rights violations are still reported. Recently, the newly established National Council for Childhood and Adolescence released a statement condemning the arrest of two indigenous children who, besides reporting physical abuse, were detained and handcuffed by police.

The Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure, called the Third Optional Protocol (OP3), is the culmination of seven years of persistent advocacy work from civil society organisations, including World Vision, to allow children to seek justice at a high level.

In Chile, the OP3 will open new avenues for children, individuals and NGOs, among others, to look for restoration when children's rights have been violated. However, there is a limitation; it requires that the domestic remedies are exhausted before a complaint is examined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. In this matter the State of Chile has a debt with the children, given the fact that the rights of children have no full legal protection in the country. Despite this restriction, we still believe that the OP3 is a huge step forward in the realisation of children's rights.

It also signals the end of discrimination against children, who were only the group of citizens who did not have a complaint procedure to claim the violation of their rights into the UN system.

In order to make the OP3 a reality for all children, countries need to sign and ratify the Third Optional Protocol. Chile has been one of the 46 countries that have signed it to date. In Chile, the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Latin American Integration Interparliamentary at the Chamber of Parliamentarians prepared a report concerning the OP3, and this was approved with 69 votes in favour and one abstention. This initiative is now in the Commission of Foreign Affairs of the Senate as part of constitutional procedural.

We welcome this achievement; however, we still have a long way to go. As civil society organisations we need to continue promoting action in order to enable national legislation and other measures to respect children's rights. We need to continue creating awareness about the OP3 to ensure wide dissemination of this protocol. We are also challenged to make it accessible to children, and child-friendly versions need to be developed and distributed.

In the year of the 25th anniversary of the CRC we all should call governments to ratify the OP3 this year. This will show our commitment to children by ensuring that all children in my country and in the world enjoy the rights set out in the Convention.

About the author

Alejandro Cartes's professional experience has been oriented towards human rights, child rights, development and community empowerment. He played a central role in the establishment of the Advocacy Department in his country office and ensured that the national office advocacy strategy is child focused, with strong components on child participation, empowerment and child protection.



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