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Guidelines for Monitoring Child Participation & Protection Activities

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Abstract.

Child participation has been defined as a process of listening to the child, taking him/her seriously and turning his/her ideas and suggestions into reality. This author strongly believes that children should have the right to participate in decision making, especially over policies that affect their health, wellbeing and development. But this opportunity often eludes the children because they are denied the right of fair hearing and fair participation. This is because the rights as contained in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child are seen as mere ceremonial provisions by African member countries.

The objectives of this review therefore are among others, to do the following:

To act as a reminder to individuals, organizations and governments that these rights actually exist and need to be respected, to act as a reference resources for organisations(both government and non-government), and to ensure self-assessment with compliance.

Children for this purpose are defined as persons between the ages of 5-17yrs. Children's rights can be protected through so many ways including; by involving children in any activity concerning them. Involvement means ensuring that they are present at the venue of the event and that they actively contribute to the proceedings, and also by giving them the right of fair hearing in any activity concerning them.

Child Participation must exclude Child "manipulation", Child "decoration" and Child "Tokenism." During child participation, staff and volunteers should be properly trained to work with children, adults should ensure a safe and child-friendly atmosphere, venues should be clean, with healthy snacks or meals, children should be separated by age groups, and in the event that a child becomes injured, extremely upset or reveals information that requires follow-up support, the organizers must have the proper resource-contracts at hand.

When children feel they are taken seriously and their opinions respected by others; they gain more control over their lives and they develop hope for their future. In order to make participation simple, provide as much information and explanation as the child needs, use a range of ways to provide information; using simple language or graphics and give plenty of notice of meetings to everyone involved.

The major challenge facing any child participation program and indeed any USAID supported program during reporting is the ability to convince them beyond doubt that the target children/audience actually participated in that program. This is the duty before the monitoring and evaluation officer. This he accomplishes through what is called evidential reporting. The M&E Officer should be able to accurately complete the appropriate project forms, appropriately capture pictures related to the project events (with informed consent), and progressive pictures of the condition of the child or project; before, during and after intervention. There should be proper documentation of progressive observation of the child's or project's condition; before, during and after intervention, if possible with video coverage.

Finally, during an assessment process, the children should be involved also. Using qualitative method often yields a better result for the researcher. Once a good discussion guide is developed, an older child should be properly trained on how to conduct the group sessions, while an adult watches as the activity director from the background.

Key words: Child, participation, manipulation, decoration, Tokenism

1. Introduction

According to Aileen Ashford (2011)¹Children's participation is more than just asking them for their ideas and views. It's about listening to them, taking them seriously and turning their ideas and suggestions into reality. It is also about providing them with the ability to influence some of the things that affect them and at the same time helping adults understand children's issues through their lens.

This author strongly believes that children should have the right to participate in decision making that affects their health, wellbeing and development. This belief is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that the views of children and young people should be taken into account in any decision that is likely to affect their wellbeing (UNICEF 2013)². The right to Child participation as practised in Nigeria today was adopted from the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which is one of the cardinal issues in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Unfortunately, these rights are often broken with impunity. Government all over the world, especially those of the third world countries have never respected the right of the children. Children are regarded as minor and therefore incapable of taking their destinies in their own hands. Therefore the adults must reason, decide and implement policies for them. The rights as contained in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child are seen as mere ceremonial provisions by African member countries. This makes it difficult for these same countries to monitor and enforce their violation even by same international organizations operating in Africa. This is the crux of the matter. It is the belief of this author that if the governments of African countries begin today to monitor the violation of the provisions of the Rights and Welfare of the Child as contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the place of the child in all aspects of policy formulation, implementation and assessment will begin to have respect.

2. The Objectives of This Participation Guideline Are

- To act as a reminder to individuals, organizations and governments that these rights actually exist and need to be respected.
- To act as a reference resources for organisations, both government and non-government, to ensure self-assessment with compliance.
- To act as support for children's participation in the planning and development of their communities;
- To act as support for children's participation in decision making that may impact them;
- To encouraging organisations to deliberately seek participation of children and young people
- To provide organisations with a toolkit of best practice models.

The involvement of children, as part of the community and users of services, can make sure agencies and organisations are relevant to them. Their participation ensures what is provided is what is needed, and children are more likely to support the outcome if they have been involved in developing it. Steinitz quoting FHI (2009)³ stated that Nahas Angula, Prime Minister of Namibia said that we have been listening to the voices of children who are vulnerable because of their different life experiences. They are children haunted by uncertainty brought about by HIV and AIDS. "How do we as adults assure them of hope? Simply by giving them love, care and understanding and by listening to what they say."

- **Who are children?** Children by the definition provided by Link for Children Project (Save the Children International, Nigeria) means all persons between the ages of 5-17yrs. These are the vulnerable group.
- **What is Child participation?** It's about listening to the children, taking them seriously and turning their ideas and suggestions into reality during program implementation, especially programs affecting them directly or indirectly via their care givers.

3. The Right to Child Participation Can Be Promoted by

- Involving children in any activity concerning them. Involvement means ensuring that they are present at the venue of the event and that they actively contribute to the proceedings.
- Giving them the right of fair hearing in any activity concerning them. Right to fair hearing means that the voices of the children who are participating in the event are heard. It is not important whether they are making sense by the judgement of the moderator. Their opinion on any issue under discussion should be respected, processed and digested and reflected during the communiqué sessions. They could be guided if in the opinion of the moderator, there seems to be an obvious deviation.
- Adding their opinions into our activity plan. Once an opinion from the child participant is established as relevant, such should be properly documented and should be clearly included in the final activity plan.
- Giving them the opportunity to benefit from the planned activity. The children should be given the right to enjoy the product of their work. The outcome of their input into the planned activities should be given back to them during implementation period. This is the feedback mechanism.

4. The Right to Child Protection Can Be Promoted by

- Giving the child the right to life. Every child should be preserved and protected from avoidable danger. The right to life is a fundamental right for the child.
- Giving the child the right to shelter. Protection from attack by wild animals, from the vagaries of the weather conditions (too much rain, too much heat, too much cold, etc). Putting a child under a protected enclosure with a roof on top is necessary for the survival of that child.
- Giving the child the right to food. Food and water are necessary to sustain life. No child should be denied food or potable water in quantities sufficient to ensure the good physical development of the child.
- Giving the child the right to education. Knowledge is power. Every child deserves the right to basic right knowledge through formal and informal education.

- Protecting the child from discrimination. No child should be discriminated against either because of the colour of the skin, race or status background. In any event, every child should be given a fair chance to compete for the available opportunity.
- Protecting the child from harmful treatment. No child should be subjected to any harmful treatment, torture or brutality.

5. What Constitutes Child Participation?

Quoting from FHI (2009)⁴ Roger Hart's adaptation of Sherry Armstein's typology was used to explain what constitutes Child Participation. According to this typology, Child Participation includes,

- Child "assigned but informed role." Adults decide on the project and children volunteer to become involved. The children understand the project – that is, they know why they are involved and who decided to involve them – and they have a meaningful role for which they are respected.
- Child-initiated, shared decision with adults.
- Child-initiated and directed.
- Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children.
- Consulted and informed.

6. Child Participation Exclusion Criteria

According to Hart, R. (1992).⁵

- Child "manipulation." Children don't understand the project and its aims.
- Child "decoration." Adults ask children to perform at an event (e.g. sing, do a drama, or recite poetry), but do not explain the reason for the event, involve them in its organization, or give the children the opportunity to excuse themselves from the performance.
- Child "Tokenism." Children are seemingly given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of what they are communicating, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions.

7. As a Matter of Standard during Child Participation

- Staff and volunteers should be properly trained to work with children,
- Adults should ensure a safe and child-friendly atmosphere.
- Venues should be clean, with healthy snacks or meals.
- Best to separate age groups within a 3-4 year range (e.g. 6-9, 10-13, 14-17, 18+), and aim for older children are trained to facilitate. (Hart, R. 1997)⁶
- In the event that a child becomes injured, extremely upset or reveals information that requires follow-up support, the organizers must have the proper resource-contracts at hand.
- Never do anything to pressure a child, make a child feel badly or manipulated, or result in the child feeling more vulnerable than he or she did before participating. (Cavet, J. and Sloper P. 2004)⁷
- Participation must be voluntary.
- The child should be allowed to withdraw if he/she feels so.
- Every Child must be adequately rewarded.

8. The Benefits of Child Participation and Protection

When children feel they are taken seriously and their opinions respected by others;

- They gain more control over their lives. Once a child feels very protected and sees himself/herself making an acceptable contribution towards a group role, the child begins to be in-charge of his/her own life.
- They develop hope for their future. Being in-charge of your own life means that you can now aspire to achieve success for themselves, their community and the society in general.
- They begin to develop leadership abilities over their peers. Group participation suggests that they must be some persons to lead and some persons to be followers. The ability to emerge a group coordinator is natural. Children with such natural tendencies are identified and encouraged to develop the skill. (National Children's Bureau 2009)⁸
- Program results begin to impact positively in the community. The essence of any development program is to make a change among the beneficiaries. Once a program is accepted by the community, members of that community begin to identify themselves with the success and the challenges of the programs. In this way, they never allow the program to suffer neglect in the long run. This is called sustainability.

9. How do you select the Children to Be Involved?

This is a program decision. However, it is important to state that Children's participation cuts across all programs and should take place at all levels: that is, the home, the community, within organizations, and across the three tiers of government (Local, State and Federal) and by extension as a part of international fora.

The children who are involved should be from the target group that is affected by the work under consideration. However, it is important to make sure that decisions reflect the interests of all the children that are in the target group, for example, children and

young people with a disability, children from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and life experiences, children who are under the care of the state (remind home).

9.1. *The Type of Involvement That Children Take on Will Be Different Depending on the Following*

- Type of decision to be made – whether it is a small decision or a life changing decision.
- Age and ability of the children involved – young children feel safe and secure with familiar surroundings and with adults that they know. Building a trusting relationship with a child is necessary to ensure that children can express themselves openly. Sometimes children's viewpoints may still be represented through advocacy.
- Timeline for involvement – children need preparation before, support during and support after the decision making process.
- Preparation should be in a relaxed environment and with plenty of time to have the opportunity to express their views and concerns about the process.

10. How to Make Child Participation Simple and Participatory

- Provide as much information and explanation as the child needs.
- Use a range of ways to provide information – using simple language or graphics.
- Give plenty of notice of meetings to everyone involved.
- Remind children about the times of meetings for decision making.
- The younger the children are, the more tangible the topics for decisions need to be.
- Younger children are more likely to want to be involved in things they have experienced. (Save the Children 2005)⁹
- Don't use jargon or abbreviations. Make sure the process is open.
- Some children are not very verbal in a group, so it is useful to use a variety of tools to motivate them e.g. art work, discussion and jokes. (Save the Children 2010)¹⁰
- Children need to have a trusted support worker, access to relevant information, access to decision-makers and ways to provide feedback about their life experience (National Children's Bureau 2009)¹¹.
- Make sure everyone has a copy of the project plan, something to write with, and to write on.
- Make sure that there are communication tools that will help the child express their views.
- Activities should be appropriate and tailored to the participants and their situations.

11. The Monitoring and Evaluation Officer and Child Participated Program

The major challenge before a child participation program reporting is to convince a donor beyond doubt that the target children actually participated in that program.

How does the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer convince a donor? This question is simple to answer. It is the duty of the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer to ensure that all activities performed in the field concerning a given project are reported very accurately and evidentially. This is called evidential reporting. What it therefore means is that the donor requires some convincing evidences concerning the project activities in the field in order to allay this fear. If sufficient evidences are collated and presented to the donor during activity reporting, the donor will cease to doubt. Evidential reporting is not only required by the donor but also by the Program Managers to assist them in reporting success stories and providing integrity to the project data.

12. Why Must the M&E Officer Embark on Evidential Reporting of Events?

- Data is good but it has to be given a voice. Data interpretation using some pictorials provides the voice. Evidences supporting data provide the voice. Such evidences could be a collaborating report from the concerned subject, or person. This is so, especially if the child is literate or care giver volunteers to collaborate your information.
- Truth in your data can be told convincingly if the person using the data can visualize the scene of event. Evidences provided to support data prove beyond doubt the integrity of the data. This can be made possible through the use of attendance register, police report, doctor's report or video movies.
- Evidences are data themselves and can be processed into information. It is possible to collate the data contained in the attendance register and analysing them into comprehensive information. This analysed information when compared with the service statistics kept by the Monitoring Officer provides justification for the record. This is what we mean by data integrity. Below are long lists of ways the Monitoring Officer can provide justification for the project data.

13. How Do We Gather Evidences for Child Participation or Protection Activities?

The list of evidences provided here can apply to any project. Evidences concerning a project can be collected through any of the following methods:

- Accurately completing the appropriate project form.
- Appropriate pictures taken at sites of events (seek for consent)
- Progressive pictures of the condition of the child or project; before, during and after intervention (seek for consent).
- Documentation of progressive observation of the child's or project's condition; before, during and after intervention.
- Video coverage of kid club activities (seek for consent).

- Video coverage of child participation during program meetings (seek for consent).
- Photocopy of Police report about a reported event.
- Photocopy of Doctor's report about a reported event.
- Reports written and signed by the child himself/herself (if literate)
- Photocopy of School Register (for school attendance).
- Class Teacher's report concerning child's performance (ensure confidentiality).
- Child's performance report card.
- Photocopy of Attendance sheet at meetings.

14. How Do You Use the Evidence Tools

- For every activity conducted and reported on, the Monitoring & Evaluation Officer should ask himself/herself, which of the above tools would I use to substantiate this activity? All that apply can then be used. As a reminder therefore, the M&E Officer needs to carry a laminated copy of the above list of tools as a hand-card (check-list) each time he/she goes for monitoring.
- This list should be produced in a hand-card, laminated and called Evidence card. The copies of the laminated Evidence cards should be distributed to the field officer. The officers should ensure that they carry the card with them as checklist during any field visit.
- Monitoring officers only need to be continuously mentored on the use of these principles. A functional camera must be made available to them during field visits.
- Team leaders and M&E Advisor should actually enforce the use of the Evidence card.
- M&E Officers and Focal persons should be encouraged to buy mobile phone with camera to facilitate their job. This should be used when necessary but with consent from the client.

15. Evaluating Child Participation and Protection Activities

There are two ways to conduct an evaluation for child participation or protection activities, viz. Qualitative or Quantitative methods.

15.1. Qualitative Method

Using qualitative method often yields a better result for the researcher. Once a good discussion guide is developed, an older child should be properly trained on how to conduct the group sessions. The adult remains as an observer and only makes contribution by way of mild suggestions. (Commissioner for Children Tasmania 2011, Federal Ministry of Women Affairs (2007)¹²⁻¹³)

15.2. Quantitative method

This is not very effective method in evaluation child participation or protection activities. The "yes" or "no" answers do not provide sufficient opportunities for the researcher to explore the extent of participation, contributions made and concerns of the participants. So also, the child whose right is violated cannot adequately express himself/herself through a "yes" or "no" answers.

16. Note

A community based study is often required to conduct an effective research concerning child participation or protection activities. The results achieved by the researcher in using any of the methods, is however dependent on the skill of the researcher in designing an effective tool. Your objectives must guide your choice of method. (Lucy Y Steinitz et al, 2010)¹⁴

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