

CHILD PARTICIPATION POLICY

Title: Child Participation Policy

Target Group: Terre des Hommes (TdH NL) staff, TdH NL Board members, Executive Team, staff, volunteers, consultants, trainees, partners, suppliers, institutions, companies, and all other stakeholders including children and young people associated with TdH NL or partner programmes.

Owner: TdH NL Executive Team

Function Delegated To: TdH NL Child Participation Lead

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Approved By: TdH NL Supervisory Board

Related Documents:

- TdH NL Listen Up! Strategy 2023-2030
- TdH NL Core Principles
- TdH NL Safeguarding Policy
- TdH NL Procedure for Safe Engagement of Children and Youth in Events
- TdH NL Ethical Content Policy
- TdH NL Thematic Programme Documents (SEC, CL, HA)
- TdH NL Child Participation Guidelines (in development)
- TdH NL Research Guidelines (in development)
- TdH NL MEAL Standards
- TdH NL Programme Accountability Framework

This document replaces: —

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1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

During the development of our Listen Up! Strategy in 2022, we consulted 189 children and 53 youth (under 24 years old). Two-thirds of the children surveyed voted that *'listening to children'* was the most important quality of a child-focused organisation.¹



242 Children and youth consulted

2/3 say **'listening to children'** is the top quality for child-focused organisations.

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)⁴, encapsulates the fundamental right of children to participate in matters concerning them. Child participation is more than just letting children speak. It is also about recognising them as the experts of their own lives, genuinely listening to them and supporting them to influence decisions that affect their lives - both in public and private spaces.

The MISSION of TdH NL
is to protect children by preventing and stopping child exploitation and by empowering children to make their voices count.

Their priorities were incorporated and reflected in our Core Principles², Theory of Change and the Listen Up! Strategy 2023-2030³. For this reason, child participation is of strategic and operational importance to TdH NL.

The purpose of this Child Participation Policy is to establish clear principles for promoting meaningful child participation in all we do at TdH NL, to ensure that we work together with children to contribute towards achieving our mission.

¹ TdH NL, *Your Views on the Future Children's Survey* (2022)

² TdH NL, *The Core Principles* (2022)

³ TdH NL, *Listen UP! Strategy 2023-2030* (2022)

⁴ UNCRC (1989)

2. SCOPE AND TARGET GROUPS

This Policy is primarily developed to guide TdH NL in programming, research, influencing and communication. In all our partnerships, this Policy will be communicated and approaches to learn together and support our partners to achieve meaningful child participation will be sought.

This Policy has a global geographical scope/ coverage and is applicable in all TdH NL countries of operation, directly or indirectly.

Direct target groups of this Policy include children engaged in TdH NL work and/or activities in any way and adults who directly or indirectly engage with children in the context of TdH NL work, including:

- TdH NL management
- TdH NL staff, volunteers, interns and consultants
- Partner organisations and their staff
- Institutions and companies partnering with

TdH NL (including but not limited to academic institutions, research institutions and private sector companies)

- Donors and benefactors
- Like-minded organisations in alliance or partnership with TdH NL
- Suppliers of goods and services in various contexts.

Where necessary, TdH NL will provide technical support to ensure understanding of our commitment to child participation to any of the groups listed above (see Section H of this Policy).

WHERE TdH NL WORKS

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Hungary, India, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Madagascar, Mali, Moldova, The Philippines, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Republic of Tanzania, Ukraine and Uganda.

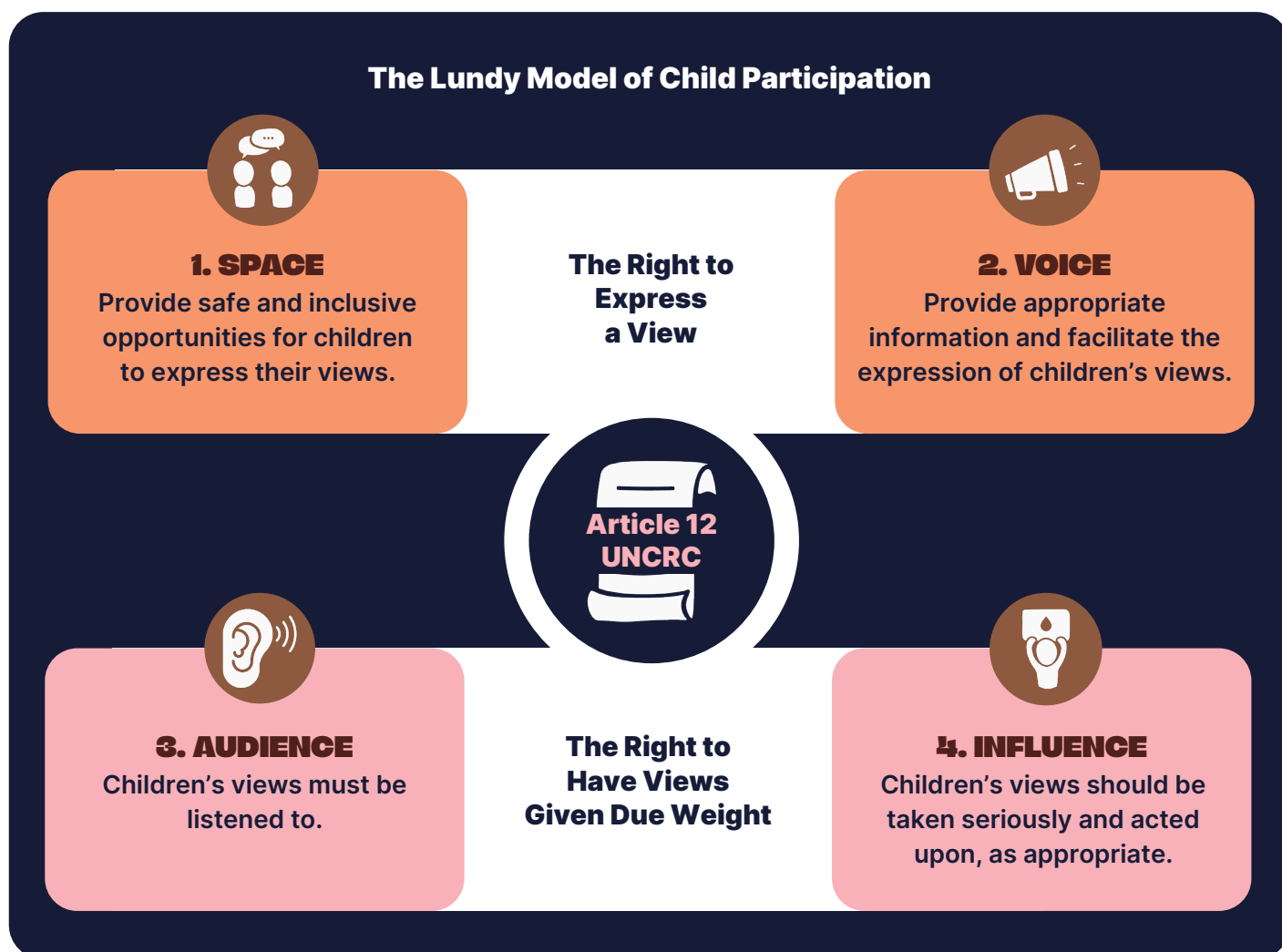


3. POLICY STATEMENT

At TdH NL, we put children at the centre of our decision making and actions, ensuring that **meaningful child participation** is always safe and inclusive of children with different intersecting factors that affect their participation.

We consider child participation an ongoing process that is informative, voluntary, inclusive and aimed at influencing decisions and decision making.⁵

We adopt the **Lundy Model**⁶ of children's participation that focuses on four elements:



⁵ TdH NL (2017)

⁶ Lundy, L. (2007)



1. SPACE

We provide safe and inclusive spaces for children to express their views. Providing spaces here implies both creating new and facilitating access to already existing spaces. These spaces include child rights clubs, networks, children's project or programme advisory groups and influencing. Making spaces safe for children means ensuring that all voices (in their diversity) are heard and respected and that children are safeguarded throughout the participation process. This includes children feeling emotionally and physically safe. We also ensure that risks to abuse, exploitation or harm are anticipated and managed.



3. AUDIENCE

We ensure children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate. This means connecting children with decision makers and those with power to bring about change. We also facilitate children's access to platforms nationally, regionally and globally where decision makers are present to make their voices heard in decision making processes.



4. INFLUENCE

We make sure that children's voices are heard by those with influence and the responsibility to act to bring about change. We monitor how young peoples' views/ideas are used to inform and influence decisions and shape policies in both public and private spheres. We systematically provide feedback to children on how their views and recommendations have been used to influence decisions or not, and if not, why. Where outcomes are not immediate, we inform them when or how they will see the impact of their participation. Ultimately, for influence to be achieved, those with the responsibility to bring about change must understand and acknowledge the centrality of child participation in decision making. For this reason, TdH NL advocates and seeks to influence the establishment, funding and strengthening of institutionalised child participation mechanisms to ensure children's voices are heard and that their views influence policy and legislation.⁷



2. VOICE

We provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views freely. Appropriate information and resources are shared in languages and formats that children can understand, internalise and form views about. Processes, sessions and moments are organised for children to share their views, they are also supported by adults (where need be) to organise these views into messages using various mediums (like stories, documents, podcasts, videos or drawings) to be shared.

4. LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD PARTICIPATION

The UNCRC is the most universally ratified treaty.⁸ Most of the countries where TdH NL programmes are implemented are signatories to the UNCRC. Child participation is a human right that is stipulated in international and regional human rights instruments and, importantly, is one of the four principles of the UNCRC (1989).

ARTICLE 12 states:

1 States Parties shall assure the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2 For this purpose, the child shall, in particular, be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law’.

Although Article 12 is considered the main article on children being heard, it should be considered in conjunction with:

Art. 13

FREEDOM of EXPRESSION: Right to finding information, internalising it and sharing ideas using different channels or media.

Art. 16

RIGHT to PRIVACY: Every child has the right to privacy even at home and should be protected from attacks on their reputation.

Art. 14

FREEDOM of THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE and RELIGION: Right to think and believe what they choose, respecting others’ beliefs and, that parents shall have the responsibility to guide children in their development.

Art. 17

MASS MEDIA: Every child has a right to find information and materials from different media sources, and mass media shall provide information to children that promotes their well being and development.

Art. 15

FREEDOM of ASSOCIATION: Children have the right to meet others, join groups or organisations, and respect the rights of others.

Collectively, all these rights are generally referred to as the **PARTICIPATION RIGHTS**.

⁸ Ratified by 196 countries.

To promote the full implementation of the right of the child to be heard, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2009, provided guidance (through General Comment No. 12)⁹ on Article 12 of the Convention to state parties and all actors working with children. The guidance outlines the nine basic requirements of safe, ethical and meaningful child participation (see Section 6).

There are several other legal instruments that guide children's rights to participate. These include, but are not limited to:

- The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000), Article 24 on the rights of the child (which is aligned to Article 12 of the UNCRC).
- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), Article 7 (freedom of expression), Article 8 (freedom of association) and Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion).

- The Lanzarote Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Against Sexual Abuse, Article 9 (child participation).
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Communications Procedure (2011).
- Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Elimination of Violence Against Children in ASEAN (2013), Article 3 references the importance of child participation in addressing violence against women and children.

In some countries where TdH NL programmes are implemented, national laws support the participation of children and provide policy and/or programmatic frameworks and platforms for children to participate in matters that concern them. All these legal, policy and programmatic frameworks support the active, deliberate and meaningful engagement of children and should be taken into account when planning and implementing initiatives with children.



9 CRC/C/GC/12 (2009)

5. IMPORTANCE OF CHILD PARTICIPATION

There are many benefits to having children participate in matters affecting them. These benefits extend to children, governments, communities and child-focused organisations, like TdH NL. The following list summarises some of the benefits:¹⁰



Increased **realisation of children's rights**; acting individually and collectively to defend their rights and reduce vulnerability.



Increased **empowerment of children** and their confidence to speak up, access information about their rights (including information on child exploitation), laying the foundation to be responsible citizens and enabling more equitable relationships between adults and children.



Child participation ensures that children with **intersecting identities** are not left behind (by removing barriers and creating safe and inclusive spaces).



Increased **accountability to children** where they are part of the solutions and see the outcomes of their involvement.



Increased **programme quality** and more effective programmes based on a better understanding of children and young people's views and suggestions.



Policies are shaped and informed by children's lived experiences, therefore making them more responsive and effective. Governments must therefore invest in child participation mechanisms for **responsive and effective policies and national frameworks**.



Increased **child-centric advocacy/influencing** to bring about change.



Increased **protection** as children are more able to speak up about abuse, violence and exploitation; they are also able to identify and prevent risks.



Better **understanding of child exploitation** and knowledge generation through researching with children.



Sustainability of results/outcomes influenced by change in attitudes and behaviour.

¹⁰ TdH IF, *Position on Children's Participation* (2020)

Achieving meaningful child participation is also important for TdH NL. Strategically, it is critical to the four outcomes in our Theory of Change, because our work strives to ensure that:

“

‘Children are empowered, have access to and utilise spaces where they feel safe and their voices are heard’.¹¹

Children’s environments ‘put in place structures that support children to be heard and protected from exploitation’.¹²

‘Duty bearers actively create spaces where children can be heard and contribute to coordinated action that prevents and responds to exploitation of children’.¹³

and finally, that

‘Professional bodies, intergovernmental organisations and human rights accountability mechanisms ensure that duty bearers effectively fulfil their commitments and obligations to protect children from exploitation and take their voices into account in all matters affecting them’.¹⁴



¹¹ Outcome 1, TdH NL Theory of Change (2023)

¹² Outcome 2, TdH NL Theory of Change (2023)

¹³ Outcome 3, TdH NL Theory of Change (2023)

¹⁴ Outcome 4, TdH NL Theory of Change (2023)

6. MEANINGFUL CHILD PARTICIPATION

There are many benefits to having children participate in matters affecting them. These benefits extend to children, governments, communities and child-focused organisations, like TdH NL. The following list summarises some of the benefits¹⁰:

The safe and meaningful engagement of children is a key principle for TdH NL and as such, is guided by the **nine basic requirements for meaningful and ethical child participation**. These requirements shall guide the participation of children in TdH NL

and be applied at all times. This section provides guidance for all undertaking work with children on how to engage children while upholding the principle of safe and meaningful engagement.

1. TRANSPARENT AND INFORMATIVE

Children who are engaged in programme design, implementation, evaluation, research and influencing in the context of TdH NL work should understand why they are being involved, who else will be involved, and how their views will influence decision making. They should have access to information that will contribute to increasing knowledge on the issues affecting them. They should be encouraged to ask questions and make recommendations. At the same time, the limits of their participation should also be explained to them in terms of what they can change/influence and what they cannot change/influence.

2. VOLUNTARY

Children should have enough knowledge about the issue at hand and choose whether or not to participate or engage. If they choose to engage and later change their minds, there should be no consequences for this decision. The opt-out processes should be explained to children so that they know how to remove themselves from an activity. Opting out is their decision and it does not affect other programmes or initiatives they are involved in. For example, if they decide not to participate in a research study, there should be no consequences to their engagement in other project activities.

As much as participation is voluntary, adults have a responsibility to encourage children to participate and check that lack of clarity on what they are involved in is not their reason for opting out. Where children do not want their opinions shared without their permission, this should be upheld.

Consent and assent are not only ethically necessary but also part of creating a safe space for children's engagement. Voluntary consent from parents and caregivers should always be sought hand-in-hand with children's voluntary assent. The [TdH NL Ethical Content Policy](#) (page 10-11), provides guidance on the consent-seeking process as a dialogue, and this should also be applied in the process of child participation.

3. RESPECTFUL

Children should know that they can express their views without fear and that their views will be heard, valued and respected. They should never be humiliated for sharing their views, dismissed or considered unimportant. Adults have a responsibility to create an environment that encourages children to speak up, feel safe and engage openly.

4. RELEVANT

Children should be able to contribute their ideas, views and thoughts on issues that are important and relevant to their lives, experiences and interests. They should inform and shape solutions for issues that are important to them. Concepts of age, capacity, economic, socio-cultural context and interests are also taken into account to ensure that children are engaged in ways that are suitable and appropriate.

5. CHILD FRIENDLY

Ensuring that the approaches used are simple and welcome children to give their contributions. Language, format, and timing should be friendly for children. Materials provided should communicate clearly, and information should be age-appropriate and inclusive, taking into account children's evolving capacities.

6. INCLUSIVE

Children, in all their diversity, should be included in the spaces created for participation. Children should never be discriminated against (on any basis e.g. sex, gender, race, cultural/social/religious beliefs, disability etc). This calls for recognition that intersectional barriers to participation exist for children, and those who have experienced exploitation face even greater challenges to participate¹⁵. For this reason, the process, methods and language used should not marginalise children facing barriers to participation, but be inclusive and trauma-informed. This requires consultations with children and supporting organisations to understand attitudes and structural barriers to participation, as well as planning and budgeting.

7. SUPPORTED BY TRAINING

Adults working with children should understand why participation is important and should be trained and equipped with relevant skills. To enable children to meaningfully participate in activities related to programme design, implementation, evaluation, research, and influencing they should have access to relevant training and support to develop the necessary skills. There should be enough resources to support training and capacity building.

8. SAFE AND SENSITIVE TO RISKS

Children should be safe and protected from harm through planning and implementing a Child Safeguarding Risk Assessment and Management Plan to anticipate and manage risks associated with child participation in TdH NL activities. The [Safeguarding Policy](#) of TdH NL must be applied along with the accompanying guidelines for the safe engagement of children, including steps to be taken when children disclose and how to report (both internally and externally through the established reporting mechanisms - including legal procedures in the country of operation). At TdH NL safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone.

9. ACCOUNTABLE

Children should get feedback on how their input or contribution has informed decisions. Adults supporting child participation should provide feedback in a timely manner.

Additionally, children should be made aware of the complaints and feedback procedure as outlined in the [Programme Accountability Framework](#) during any of the activities and feel safe using the procedure set in place or other alternatives available to them.

15 Upadhyay (2017)

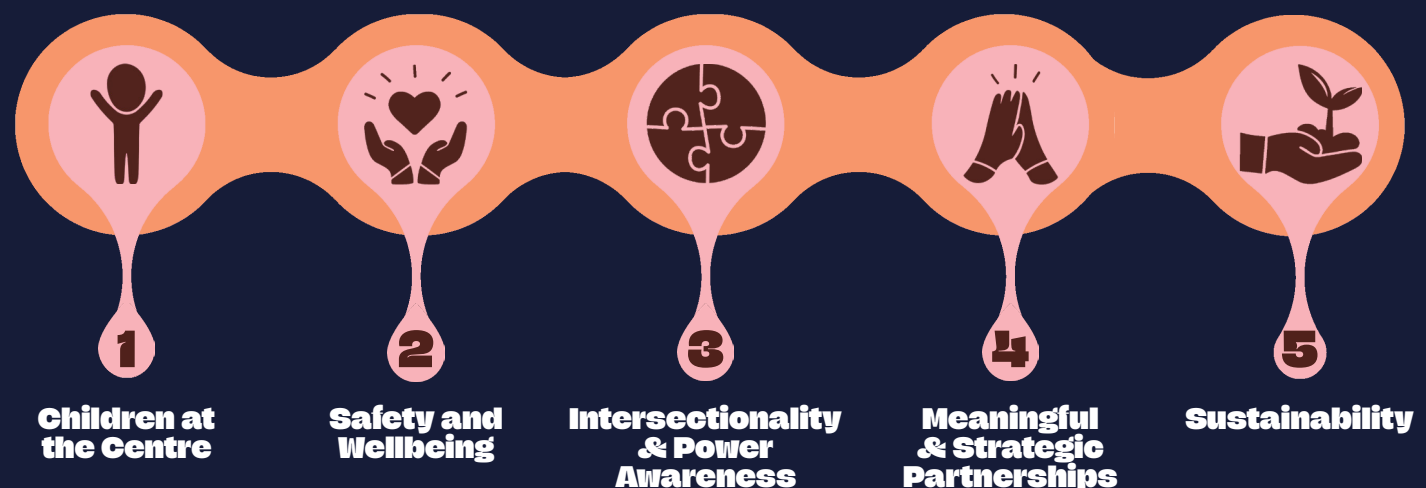
7. CONSIDERATIONS FOR PUTTING CHILD PARTICIPATION INTO PRACTICE

At TdH NL, the following considerations shall always be taken into account when planning and during engagements with children. These considerations are drawn from our organisational commitments, lessons learnt from our work over the years, and good practice in our field.

1. Uphold the TdH NL Core Principles

TdH NL identifies five Core Principles¹⁶ that are at the foundation of our organisation. These Core Principles guide our engagement with children:

- 1** At all times, children will be engaged in our work, **recognising their expertise** in matters that concern them. We will proactively create inclusive spaces and opportunities for children's views to be heard.
- 2** The engagement of children will be **safe**, ensuring **all risks are identified and mitigated** against, especially considering that TdH NL works with children who are both at risk and/or have experienced exploitation. A **trauma-informed approach** will be applied and systematic training provided to staff and partners on trauma informed care.
- 3** We will always be **aware of the power differential** between children and others and how this affects children's participation (and lack thereof) in different contexts.
- 4** We will make children's participation meaningful and **ensure accountability** to children while making the outcomes of their participation known to them.
- 5** We will strive to ensure **sustained engagement of children** through national, regional, and global systems to always have their voices in decision making.



2. Strive for Collaborative and Child-Led Approaches

Child participation approaches range in the extent to which power and responsibility is shared. Consultative approaches only include children's voices in response to consultation, led by adults. At TdH NL, we aim for approaches where children's participation is either to collaborate on activities or where they lead. Feedback from children in TdH NL programmes¹⁷ suggests they like collaborating with

adults, we commit to working collaboratively with children and progressively work towards reaching child-led approaches with adult support.

As we strive towards both collaborative and child-led approaches, we recognise that this may not always be achievable immediately and certainly not in all circumstances and contexts. Consultations with children will therefore be a beginning point, keeping in mind the end goal (of collaborative and child-led participation). The most appropriate approach to use will be determined by the context.



Example of a Child-Led Approach to Child Participation

Recognising the value of education through the initiatives of the GOOD project, the Kishori Sangha members (adolescent group) recently initiated discussions on how to support younger children in the community who were not part of the Kishori or Kishora Sangha. They believed that these children under the age of 12 deserved educational opportunities.

To address this, they approached Ashadeepa Foundation, another non-profit organisation, to conduct tuition classes for these children.

This ensures that the younger ones are not idle but empowered and educated, similar to the Kishoris. As a result, daily tuition is now being conducted for younger children by the foundation. The girls in the Kishori Sangha are very proud of the change they are able to bring to their families, community and village.

The Era of Empowerment: Stories of Change from the Children Good Project in India.



Example of a Collaborative Approach to Child Participation

Chandrika, age 15, has been a member of the Kishori group (adolescent group) since 2019, and was unable to persuade her family of the perils of the devadasi system. When she realised her rights were being abused, she approached the GOOD team coordinators and her fellow Kishoris (girls in clubs). Despite the children's group and the GOOD team's counselling efforts, the family was insistent about devoting their daughter as a devadasi. In May 2022, the situation was brought to the attention of the government by the Kishoris by calling CHILDLINE 1098, something they learnt in the Kishori Sangha sessions. Officials from CHILDLINE and the panchayat (local-level government representatives) confronted Chandrika's family and obtained legal consent from them to ensure she is not coerced into sexual exploitation in the future and is allowed to finish her education. Continuous counselling and conscious effort are assisting Chandrika in overcoming the trauma she had while fighting dedication for months.

The Era of Empowerment: Stories of Change from the Children Good Project in India.

17 See TdH NL, Place of Intersections (2022)

3. Proactively Plan for Child Participation

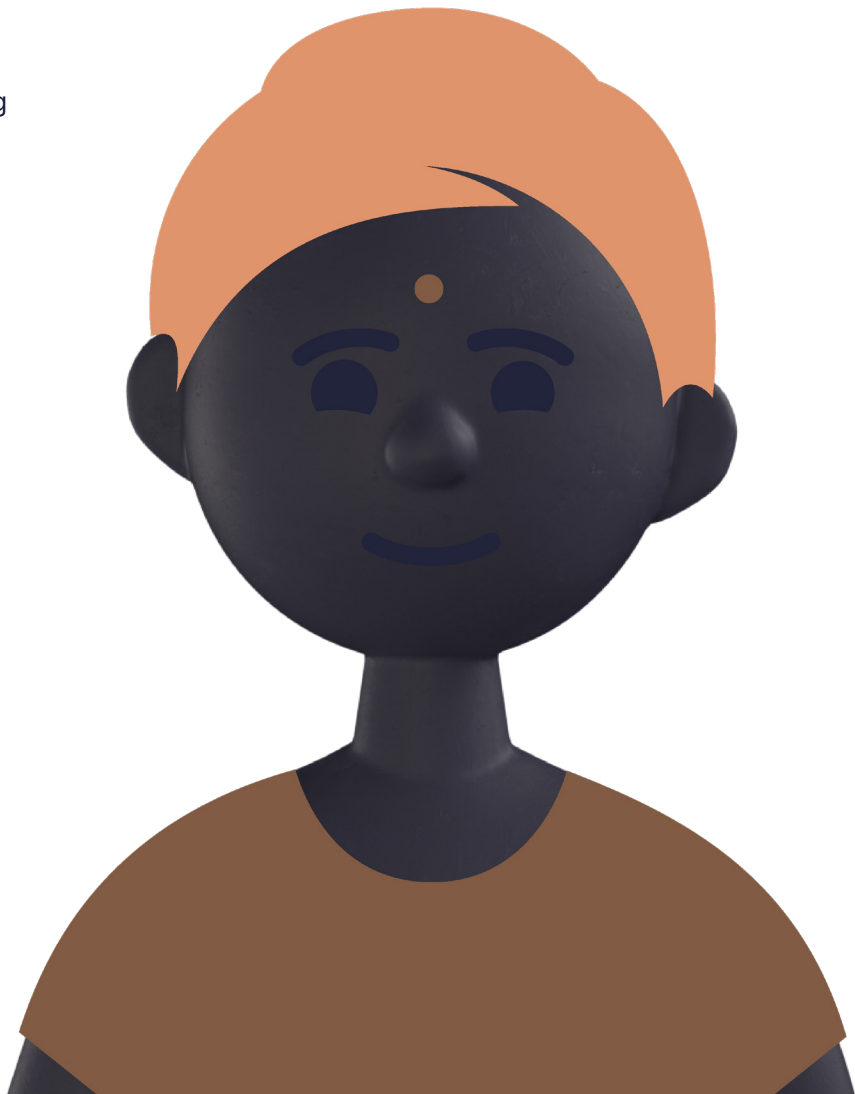
Meaningful child participation will only be achievable if we proactively plan for it in our programmes, research, influencing and evaluation initiatives. We strive to ensure children's engagement is part of ongoing processes as opposed to one time events and moving beyond children's presence to children influencing decisions. Child participation guidelines accompanying this policy will provide operational guidance on "how to" plan and prepare for child participation in the various aspects of TdH NL work. This includes, but is not limited to, use of appropriate language and considerations to take into account when working with children with lived experiences of exploitation and those at risk.

4. Ensure Adequate Resources for Meaningful Participation

To begin with, we must strive to plan and budget for child participation in the co-designing of programmes as well as through our annual planning cycle. Plans and budgets should consider building/strengthening knowledge and skills among our teams to be able to effectively support children in our projects and programmes.

One of the nine basic requirements of child participation is that it should be supported by training for both children and adults, including adults in communities and other spaces, that engage with children to promote respect for the children's right to be heard in matters affecting them. Planning and budgeting should also accommodate inclusion needs of children especially those that face discrimination and other barriers to participation due to intersecting identity factors. We strive to ensure all funding proposals include participation of children including facilitating their engagement in networks.

Besides making the financial commitment, allocating time for child participation focal points and other programme teams to work with children is necessary, especially taking into account children's availability which might not always be aligned with the TdH NL official working hours.



8. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Putting children at the centre is every TdH NL staff member and partner's responsibility. Meaningful child participation is both a goal and a means to protecting children and preventing child exploitation.

When we meaningfully engage children, they build their self confidence to speak up for themselves and others and defend their rights. As such, we all have the responsibility to ensure that our actions and interventions put children at the centre.

Certain groups and individuals within TdH NL and affiliates, have specific responsibilities in ensuring child participation. Responsibility here means attitude, actions and behaviour that supports meaningful engagement of children.

CHILDREN

are the most important stakeholders in this Policy. They will:



Have the **space, voice, and audience** to influence decisions on matters affecting them.



Be engaged in all their **diversity**, without discrimination.



Participate **voluntarily**.



Be provided with **all information** by the supporting adults within the organisation to make informed decisions.



Uphold **respect** for each other's views as they engage with their peers.

Parents/Caregivers

Parents/Caregivers are critical in supporting the participation of their children in matters affecting them. They will:

- Be proactively engaged to support the participation of their children meaningfully.
- Voluntarily provide/give consent for the engagement of their children.
- Be provided with all information to make informed decisions concerning their children's participation.
- Commit to meaningful participation of their children for their best interest.

TdH NL Supervisory Board

TdH NL Supervisory Board is the governing body within TdH NL and will be responsible for:

- Approving this Policy and any other updated versions of the Policy and bringing it to life within the organisation to ensure children's views are heard and that decisions are informed by children's views.
- Ensuring allocation of resources to comply with the provisions of this Policy.

TdH NL Management

TdH NL Management includes the Executive Team, International Management Team, Programme Leadership Team, Thematic Programme Managers, Regional Directors and Country Directors. TdH NL Management is responsible for:

- The overall implementation of this Policy.

- Creating and maintaining an enabling environment for meaningful participation including but not limited to training and other capacity building initiatives .
- Reflecting the inclusion of child participation in strategic documents and processes of TdH NL.
- Promoting and demonstrating commitment to supporting meaningful child participation through integrating it in programming (design, implementation, evaluation and research) plans and budgets.

TdH NL Staff

TdH NL staff have a responsibility to:

- Fully understand this Policy.
- Support children's participation while upholding the participation principles and applying the nine basic requirements for meaningful participation.
- Promote and implement this Policy in all aspects of their work.

TdH NL Partners

TdH NL Partners with day-to-day interaction with children and directly implementing programme activities have a responsibility to:

- Be informed and understand the Policy.
- Create and maintain an environment that proactively supports child participation
- Support training and skilling for staff to work with children.
- Promote and implement this Policy in areas of work agreed upon with TdH NL.

Child Participation Lead

Child Participation Lead is primarily responsible for rolling out Goal 3 in the Listen Up! Strategy. The Lead will:

- Have the delegated responsibility to roll out this Policy and to keep up to date with new developments in knowledge and practice of child participation with a view to update it periodically.
- Be responsible for increasingly integrating child participation into TdH NL's work and take action to promote implementation of the Policy.

- Provide technical guidance to the organisation on child participation in programming, advocacy/ influencing and research in line with the Policy.
- Provide training and other knowledge sharing initiatives to children, TdH NL teams, partners and other stakeholders to increase the understanding of this Policy.
- Collaboratively set up, support and strengthen child participation mechanisms within the organisation.

Child Participation Focal Person(s)

Child Participation Focal Person(s) (in-country) are identified and appointed based on their interest and passion for child participation per TdH NL country of operation, to act as the focal persons. Country child participation focal points will be responsible for:

- Providing in-country training and sharing knowledge on child participation with colleagues, partners and children in line with this Policy.
- Champion child participation practice in programming, influencing and research within the country.
- Collaboratively set up, support and strengthen children's participation networks.

Child Safeguarding Officer

Child Safeguarding Officer is primarily responsible for safeguarding with a special focus on child safeguarding. The Child Safeguarding Officer, working closely with the child participation focal points as well as the child safeguarding focal points in country will be responsible for:

- Providing overall guidance on the safe engagement of children (in keeping with the Safeguarding Policy and other accompanying guidelines) to ensure safety of the children participating in TdH NL work .
- Providing overall leadership (in collaboration with other Integrity and Compliance team members) in case processing and management where safety breaches and concerns are suspected and reported. This will also include application of organisational lessons learned from the cases and the case management process.

9. COMMITMENTS



PROGRAMME DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Goal 6 of TdH NL '*recognises children as experts in their own experiences*'. We embrace a collaborative approach in co-creating thematic programmes to tackle child exploitation. We commit to ensuring safe, ethical, inclusive participation processes that proactively engage children throughout the project cycle (programme design, context analysis, co-creation of interventions, evaluation and learning). We recognise that children with lived experience of exploitation have a wealth of knowledge to share and contribute to the creation of solutions. Protection and safeguarding while they participate in programme design and implementation shall be a core characteristic of child participation in TdH NL.



BUDGETING

We commit to budgeting and resource allocation that support child participation and inclusion of diverse children in the participation process. This means that we will proactively consider children's participation in projects and programmes and therefore include this in funding proposals to ensure and secure funding to facilitate the involvement of children, including those who have experienced exploitation.



EVALUATION, FEEDBACK AND ACCOUNTABILITY

We will seek to be accountable to children and their communities through the rigorous application of our Programme Accountability Framework, whose four main pillars speak to information sharing for informed decision making, consultation with children and communities for their views to influence decision making, promoting participation with a view to increase ownership of interventions, and lastly, providing and acting on feedback to ensure effectiveness and safety of interventions.



INFLUENCING THROUGH ADVOCACY

TdH NL engages in evidence-based advocacy with and for children at local, national, regional and international levels to prevent and stop child exploitation. We do this by strategically bringing the voices of children, families and communities together with our own knowledge into spaces where duty bearers and decision-makers are present. Where there are no existing spaces for engaging with decision-makers, we seek to create them.¹⁸ We are committed to ensuring that children have safe spaces where they access the information they need to inform their opinions and the space to express their views. We are dedicated to empowering

children to voice and articulate their views, and bringing together audiences of people with the power to bring about change to listen to, hear children and act upon children's asks and recommendations. Finally, we commit to working with children so they have influence, and the opportunity to see their contributions impact decision-making and bring about change.



EVENTS

As we plan events with children, we commit to defining the event/opportunity and considering together with children (where possible) the benefits for children as well as the resources available to undertake the event (online and offline). When planning the event, we commit to involving children as early and as much as possible and to undertake a safeguarding risk assessment and risk management plan to ensure safety of children. Where opportunities are limited, an open and transparent selection process/criteria will be used to identify the children to be engaged in the event. Events will be held in coordination/collaboration with the TdH NL Safeguarding Officer and/or relevant Safeguarding Focal Points in-country. We commit to ensuring language barriers are overcome and that children can participate in the language they are most comfortable with. The TdH NL Procedure for Safe Engagement of Children and Youth in Events will be used to guide engagement of children in events.



RESEARCH

TdH NL is guided by the TdH NL Global Research Agenda and has the objective to *'empower them to participate in research, advocacy and learning on child exploitation issues'*.¹⁹ TdH NL is committed to participatory approaches to research *'to capture the diverse voices of children experiencing different intersectional realities'* and generate *'quality research, evaluation and knowledge products'*.²⁰ In undertaking research, we will undertake ethical approvals, use child friendly approaches to data collection and work

with children as co-researchers. All research with children will follow the TdH NL Research Guidelines.



TRAINING

We commit to ensuring that Child Participation Focal Points and other programme teams will always be trained (systematically and continuously) to effectively work with children. We commit to ensuring that children will also have access to training on child rights and child exploitation to be able to be able to give their views, have those views taken seriously and influence decisions and hold decision makers to account and bring about change.



COMMUNICATIONS

We commit to co-creating communication products and other relevant materials/documents with children to produce child-friendly versions so that children have access to information and knowledge in formats and languages they understand. Guidelines to develop child-friendly research and evaluation reports have been developed and we commit to using this consistently.



TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

Working with children who have been victims or survivors of abuse and exploitation can have particular sensitivities (traumatisation, re-traumatisation, triggering etc). Equally, participation by child victims or survivors can be empowering for them, giving them back the power to recover and overcome trauma. We commit to ensuring a balanced approach that does not expose children to harm, but one that promotes their agency and recognises their resilience. Trauma informed care training will be systematically provided to teams to be able to strike this balance. We also commit to providing debriefing support to staff working with children to manage secondary trauma.

19 Goal 3, Listen Up! Strategy 2023-2030 (2023)
20 Ibid.

DEFINITIONS

Child

Child is considered by TdH NL to be any person under the age of 18 years as provided in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).²¹

Child Participation

Child participation can be defined as the right of children to express their views, to be heard and for the views to be given due weight in decisions affecting their lives.²² This right is exercised individually as well as collectively. Children are informed and make a decision to willingly be involved.

Meaningful Child Participation

Meaningful child participation meets the nine basic requirements (extensively discussed in section F of this policy) outlined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in the General Comment No. 12²³ and includes the four elements from the Lundy Model of Child Participation. These are safe and inclusive opportunities for children to form and express their views, the expression of children's views freely voiced, that their views are listened to and acted on as appropriate.²⁴ The model is discussed under section B of this policy.

Child Non-Participation

Child non-participation refers to situations where children's involvement is minimal or superficial and where children have little or no role in decision-making. Forms of non-participation²⁵ include '*manipulation*', '*decoration*', and '*tokenism*'. Manipulation is when children are used to support or promote causes without their understanding of the issues involved or having the chance to give any input. Decoration is when children are present at events, but play no active role. This happens when children are invited, but do not meaningfully participate. Tokenism is where children are present, but their presence is symbolic and there is no real opportunity for children to express their views and influence decisions. While child non-participation is generally discouraged, recent discourse suggests that in some contexts where children are structurally and systematically excluded from decision making processes, forms of non-participation, like tokenism, serve as a learning opportunity and a stepping stone towards meaningful forms of child participation.²⁶

²¹ UNCRC, 1989

²² Ibid., 1989

²³ Ibid, (2009)

²⁴ See Lundy (2018)

²⁵ Hart, R. (1992)

²⁶ Lundy, L. (2018)

Burden of Participation

Burden of participation refers to the cost to children of child participation processes that may not be a priority to them and may not take into account children's other needs and commitments (like school, chores, play and social events). All approaches to child participation (consultative, collaborative and child-led) carry the risk of burdening children. Child participation that overly burdens children does not meet the requirements of meaningful child participation. Thus, it is important to consult with and listen to children individually and collectively to better understand whether and how much they want to be involved in participation processes.

Barriers to Child Participation

Barriers to child participation refers to beliefs, attitudes and/or structural and systematic impediments or hindrances to opportunities to be heard or to participate. These vary depending on the context that children find themselves in, as well as their different intersecting factors.

Child Empowerment

Child empowerment refers to the intrinsic (naturally within) sense of power and ability to act that children have when they get the necessary information and skills enabling them to bring about change in their lives and those around them.²⁷

Youth

Youth is defined by The United Nations as persons between 15 and 24 years old. The UN also recognises that this varies without prejudice to other age groups listed by member states, such as between 18-20.²⁸ The definition of youth within TdH NL shall be applicable based on the UN definition (persons between the ages of 15-24). This overlaps with the definition of a child (persons below the age of 18 years). TdH NL's primary target group is children; therefore, where the term '*youth*' is used, it will be necessary to indicate the age category.

²⁷ TdH NL, SEC TP Document (2024)

²⁸ UNESCO (n.d.)

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