



**Maximising children's engagement  
in the reporting process for  
the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

**Research Report**

**September 2009**

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## **Introduction**

In recent years, children<sup>1</sup> have taken an increasingly active role in the reporting process for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). In several states, children have contributed their views to State party reports and NGO reports; they have submitted their own evidence to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and attended meetings with the Committee in Geneva. In addition, they have taken action at national level to follow-up the Committee's concluding observations.

In late 2008, the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child embarked upon a programme of work to maximise children's participation in the reporting process for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In order to determine how best to support children and NGOs to enhance the experiences of children and extend the impact of their involvement at national and international level, different methods were used to obtain the views of the main stakeholders: children, NGOs who support them and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Coinciding not only with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CRC but also with the publication of the Committee's General Comment on Article 12, this programme of work offers an opportunity to move forward the debate on children's participation in international human rights monitoring and to institutionalise the participation of children in the CRC reporting process.

This research report presents the findings from the international survey of children and young people<sup>2</sup> who have previously been involved in the CRC reporting process, and of the NGOs that have supported them to take part. This paper also considers several ways in which the Committee's working practices might be developed to enable children to participate more easily and fully in CRC reporting.

## **Methodology**

The first task was to analyse evaluations undertaken by national NGOs that had involved children, in order to identify common barriers to children's full and meaningful participation and to consider ways in which these barriers might be addressed. Following the presentation of this analysis to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in January 2009, an international advisory group was established to take forward this work. The advisory group was composed of members who had previously been involved in preparing a children's report, had met with the Committee, had used different methodologies to prepare children's reports and who represented different regions of the world. The group brought together the diverse experiences of children and adult members from Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Kenya, Peru, the Republic of Moldova and Wales.

Drawing from their diverse experiences, the members of the advisory group developed two questionnaires to capture both the experiences of children who had engaged in different aspects of the process and the experiences of NGOs that had supported them to do so. One questionnaire was developed for children and young people and another for NGOs, covering all aspects of the CRC reporting process – knowledge of the CRC, gathering and submitting evidence to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the pre-session and State party examinations, visits of country rapporteurs, concluding observations, and children's rights campaigning and

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper, children are defined as every human being below the age of eighteen in accordance with the CRC

<sup>2</sup> It was also sent to young adults who had participated in the process when they were children.

awareness-raising activities preceding and following the UN examination. The questionnaires were made available online and in electronic format in English, French and Spanish. These questionnaires were disseminated worldwide to all NGOs that had involved children in CRC reporting since 2000.

### **Survey respondents**

Thirty-seven children and young people aged between 10 and 22 completed the questionnaire, all having been involved in the CRC reporting process. Twelve were from the United Kingdom, nine from Uganda, seven from Peru, two from Hong Kong, one from China, one from Bangladesh, one from Kenya, one from Latvia, one from Mozambique, and one from Moldova. Out of this sample, three children stated that they had a disability. Just under two-thirds of the children who completed this questionnaire (64%) had visited Geneva for the CRC examination; while the children who had not been to Geneva (36%) had been involved in the reporting process in other ways. The vast majority (84%) had been involved in children's rights before getting involved in the reporting process.

Twenty-six NGOs also took part in the survey. Respondents were NGOs from Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Chile, England, Hong Kong, Kenya, Latvia, Moldova, Mozambique, the Netherlands (four NGOs), Netherlands Antilles, Paraguay, Peru (three NGOs), Scotland, the South American region, Sweden, Uganda, Uruguay and Wales, all of whom had experience of supporting children to engage in the CRC reporting process.

The majority of NGOs had been involving children in their work for significant periods of time. All but two had over eight years experience in working with or facilitating projects led by children, and six had been doing participatory work with children for almost 20 years. Many had been involving children in the CRC reporting process since the 1990s.

## **Involving children in the reporting process**

Between them, the NGOs that responded to the survey have supported over 43,000 children to engage in activities related to the CRC reporting process. The numbers of children engaged varied considerably between NGO (presumably depending on the type and extent of funding available and the depth of experience of the NGO concerned).

On average, NGOs involved 2,500 children in their reporting process activities (the smallest number of children involved was six and the largest 15,000). Typically, a core group of children led the work (with numbers ranging from three to 45 children), with larger numbers taking part through research projects to inform children's submissions to the Committee (with research participants varying from 100 to 12,000 children).

The ages of those involved in such activities varied from four to 20. Responses from children showed that 15 year-olds were the most likely to become involved. Thirty three per cent of NGOs only worked with adolescents (those aged 12 to 18), and five involved young adults (over-18s) in their children's rights work. Broadly, both boys and girls participated equally in children's rights activities, although overall there seemed to be a slight over-representation of girls engaging in the CRC reporting process.

Most NGOs had taken positive steps to include children from all ethnicities and backgrounds in their work. Particular effort had been made by some to involve disadvantaged and socially excluded groups of children. These included children in the care system, young travellers, young refugees and asylum seekers, children without parents, national minorities, children that had experienced abuse or neglect, trafficked children, children with special needs, those from underprivileged families, street children, working children, indigenous children, children with mental health difficulties, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children. About half of NGOs explicitly mentioned involving children with disabilities in the reporting process, and for two, this had included supporting the participation of children with disabilities in the delegation to Geneva. Comments from NGOs included:

*We looked for the statistical representation of the population.*

*As the bulk of research was done online we took care to talk to vulnerable children face-to-face in focus group interviews. We keep a record of children's ethnicities to ensure that the children involved in the project are as representative as possible, though we do not prevent children from getting involved on this basis.*

*We worked with a group of young people with disabilities who...were interested in participating in the workshops on the rights of the child.*

*...we also involved young people who are part of current participatory structures such as youth parliaments...and youth councils.*

NGOs actively used member organisations (where they were coalitions) to ensure children from a diversity of backgrounds were involved in their work:

*Since we have over 40 support groups...we have many members and volunteers working as pedagogues in pre-school, schools, institutions, even in*

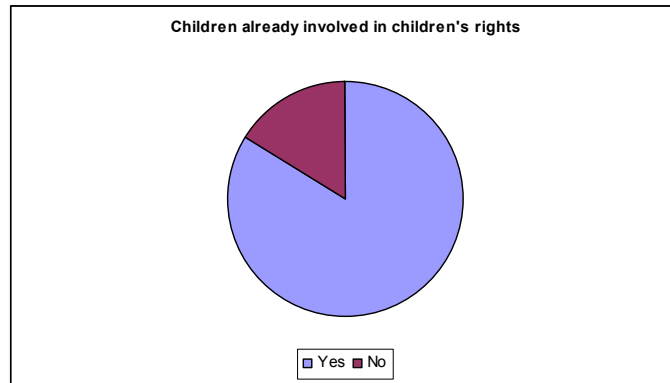
women's prison where there is an orphanage. Many members work in social institutions, custody courts, the police, and in local governments of rural areas.

...the children's group that I worked with was already coming from a variety of backgrounds, schools and districts...

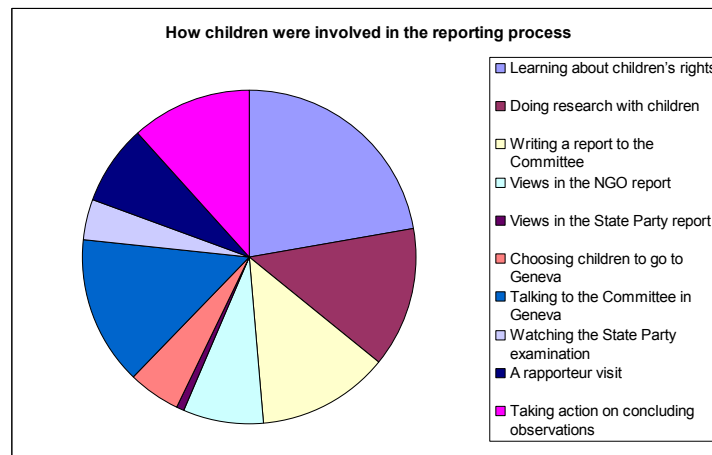
Only one NGO did not actively seek to engage with children from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds, as a result of limited time and funding.

### Children's roles in the CRC reporting process

84% of children had already been involved in children's rights in some way prior to engaging in the CRC reporting process.



Children told us that the two most common ways for getting involved in the CRC reporting process were either through an organisation they already worked with (55%) or through a child-led organisation (48%). None of the children that responded to the questionnaire had become involved in the CRC reporting process through their governments, and only 3% had become involved through schools or parents/carers.

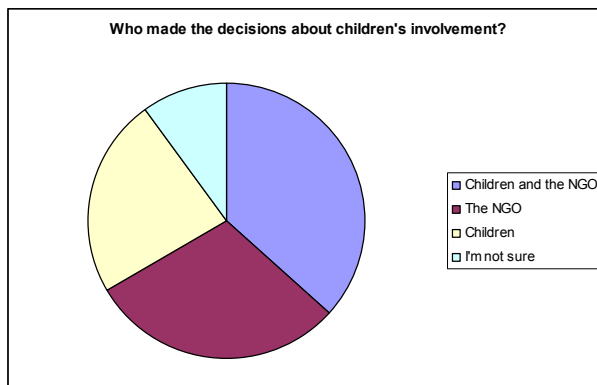


Children said they most commonly took part in the following reporting process activities: learning about children's rights (77%), talking to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva (55%) and taking action on the concluding observations (39%). We found that children were particularly unlikely to contribute to the State Party report (only 3% had been involved in this way) or to observe the State Party examination in Geneva (only 13% experienced this).

When NGOs were asked how they had involved children in the CRC reporting process, the most common response (91% of NGOs) was in supporting them to learn about their rights, and in facilitating meetings or consultations at a national level. Eighty one per cent had supported children to gather evidence for submissions to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and 67% had supported children to prepare a report. Fewer NGOs had experience of engaging children in meetings in Geneva – 62% had supported children to attend and participate in the pre-session, and 33% had taken children to observe the State Party examination. Only 19% of NGOs had been involved in a rapporteur visit. Encouragingly, however, almost half of the NGOs responding (47%) had supported children to take action on the concluding observations.

Almost a third of NGOs had also supported children to undertake other children’s rights activities, including participating in Days of General Discussion and engaging with national and local media to promote and debate children’s rights issues.

Decisions about how children should be involved in these activities tended to be made jointly between children and the NGOs supporting them – over one-third of the sample (38%) cited this as their preferred method. Twenty eight per cent of children said the NGO they worked with had decided how they should be involved in the reporting process, while a further 25% said that children themselves had made these decisions.



### **Supporting children’s participation**

Children reported that they were given a wide range of support to enable their participation in the reporting process. The most common forms of support they received were being offered opportunities to learn about and better understand children’s rights (84%) and the reporting process (63%), and support to work with other children (59%) and to attend meetings to talk about their rights (56%). It seemed that children were least likely to get support with developing their writing skills (28%), and that the use of websites to provide information to children about their human rights was relatively limited (28%).

NGOs were asked how they ensured children could take part meaningfully in children’s rights activities. Most NGOs (81%) provided children with training and information on children’s human rights and the reporting process. Seventy one per cent also focused strongly on children’s personal development, helping children to develop a wide range of skills. The majority of NGOs financially supported children to take part in meetings, and there was also evidence among some NGOs of actively

building capacity of their member organisations to support children’s ability to advocate for their rights.

**Table 1: Support from NGOs to enable children’s participation**

Type of support given	%
Training on children’s rights and the CRC	81
Providing information about the reporting process	81
Personal development	71
Financial support for children	67
Providing information about key decision-makers	62
Support for children to manage the project work	48
Developing research and campaigning skills	48
Information and advocacy tools through a dedicated website	38

NGOs felt that it was important to provide children with information and training to ensure they fully understood the scope of the CRC reporting process, and its role in protecting children’s rights:

*[Name of NGO] volunteers worked in schools and institutions to explain the reporting process and its importance to children, as well as the benefit which will follow the reporting process...in the form of recommendations from the Committee to the...government.*

*Children were informed about the objectives of the consultation. Parents’ consent was also solicited. Before the first stage all children received, as general information, an adapted version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the [previous set of] concluding observations...*

Over two-thirds (67%) of NGOs developed their own tools to support children to take part in the reporting process. These included:

- “Child-friendly” information on the CRC and the reporting process
- “Child-friendly” versions of key documentation, including the concluding observations (available in various languages)
- Accessible information on the national legal and policy context
- Research tools for use by children
- Training and materials to help children develop research and campaigning skills
- Online resources to support child-led research and campaigns
- Use of theatre and video production
- Information to support children in local and national children’s rights activism
- Regular meetings to give children the opportunity to identify and discuss children’s rights issues
- A child participation guide for other NGOs highlighting existing tools for engaging children in research and consultation.

*To take account of age and varying learning styles and needs we engaged in a variety of methods such as online surveys, Skype meetings, workshops and presentations utilising our UNCRRC peer education resource....*

## **Evidence on the implementation of children’s rights**

### **Gathering evidence on children’s rights**



There were several different methods used by children to decide which issues they would present to the Committee. These varied depending on the country. For example, although the most popular method involved conducting research with other children to obtain a wide cross-section of views and experiences, this form of evidence-gathering was most common among children living in the United Kingdom.

*We carried out research by talking to a wide range of young people and children across the country and the points that came up most, we decided to put them to the UN.*

*We were given the research results, and as a group we chose the issues we felt most strongly about.*

The second most common method involved hosting a “discussion day” where children gathered together to share their experiences. Although it was not clear from children’s responses how these events fed into the reporting process (i.e. whether they formed the basis of a stand-alone children’s report, informed children’s discussions with the Committee, or provided children’s views for inclusion in the NGO alternative report), children considered this data-gathering exercise to be instrumental in enabling them to get their voices heard.

*Before our friends’ trip to Geneva, we had a day of reflection...attended by different children’s organisations such as working children, street children, domestic workers, school councils. In addition, institutions also took part. This was developed in order to work on the important issues that the...government had not considered in its report or in the alternative report of [the NGO], for instance, working children, the wave of suicides among children, street children, the death penalty, etc. The dynamic was through groups and each one debated the expectations of their reality and development...The participants in this meeting represented their different groups.*

The third most common method, particularly used by children in Peru, was an exercise to compare the State Party and NGO reports to highlight issues that affected children but were not covered in either report:

*We evaluated the State Party report and the NGO report and found a lot of gaps and that the voices of children were not reflected in the report. We discussed the issues that were not in the report of the State and which were important to us. All this took place...with children as well as adults.*

Two NGOs reported that they had reviewed the questions they would be asking children with professionals working with children (such as teachers and specialist support workers) to ensure they were appropriate and relevant, taking care to limit the potential emotional impact of the questions on young participants. Several NGOs noted that children themselves had developed the questions. When undertaking interviews (whether led by children or adults), NGOs emphasised the importance of ensuring all children had the opportunity to contribute their experiences in order to capture the widest possible range of views. Children’s views were always reported anonymously to safeguard children’s privacy.

*Facilitators guaranteed equal opportunities for all participants to express themselves in order to capture all the perspectives, sometimes even contrary ones on the same subject. The research team made efforts to include the whole range of children views in the report.*

### **Submitting evidence to the Committee**

Children felt that it was extremely important to submit their own evidence to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in addition to the evidence provided by adults. Fifty-two percent of NGOs reported that children had written their own report for the Committee. One noted children's motivation to do so: '*Children's views were included in the NGO report but [children] did not think this was enough.*'

Children told us that they used a variety of methods to present their evidence to the Committee. The most popular was to submit a report written by children, including pictures taken by and quotes from children, along with a series of recommendations about issues children felt the Committee should prioritise. Children thought their reports should present information in a manner accessible to other children, and should look visibly different from the State Party and NGO alternative reports.

*It was like a written booklet with pictures, views and recommendations. We wanted it to look interesting as well as been taken seriously, so we added pictures...With all our recommendations, we added evidence such as children and young people's views.*

*We decided to include photos and drawings because many children who participated in the report preparation could not read or write. They could express their opinion through drawings and photographs. We also used video and theatre for collecting information.*

*It was a 25 page report...full of colour, pictures and lots of information. It was designed and written by young people... It had quotes from the young people who took part in our research throughout...[and] it had the list of our 20 recommendations [to the Committee]...*

Children told us that another common method for submitting evidence to the Committee was preparing a '*written presentation*', although it was unclear from their responses whether this presentation took the form of a full report or a summary of issues children had raised during debates in their home countries.

A minority of children used videos and posters to submit evidence to the Committee; a typical example of this method was:

*My project was a video for schools and a research poster to show the difference between children's situation here and other countries. I also helped with writing reports to [the] UN...*

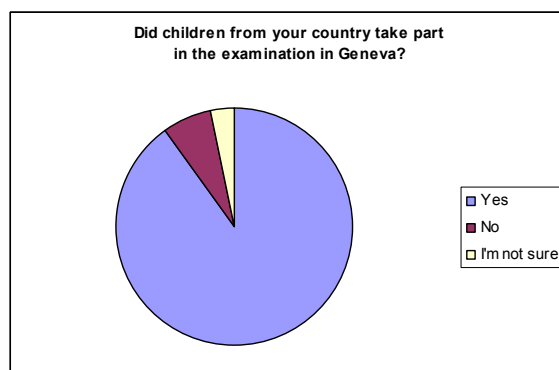
A similar number used an '*addendum*' to the NGO alternative report to highlight children's concerns:

*Our report was not an alternative report but an addendum and a document of questions that we presented to the Committee so that it could consider the points of views of [children] on childhood in our country. It had proposals on working children, children living in the street, commercial sexual exploitation of children, children affected by laws that affect their conditions of poverty amongst others. We decided to do it this way due to the information we had and the lack of time. It was also politically acceptable to have a good meeting with the members of the Committee and [to address] the objections of the State.*

Ninety per cent of NGOs said that children’s views had been included in their alternative reports; however, only 44% reported that children’s views had formed part of the State Party report.

### **Meeting with the Committee in Geneva**

Ninety one per cent of children noted that children from their country had met with the Committee in Geneva. Seventy-two percent said they spoke to the Committee in a children-only meeting. Participants from Hong Kong, Peru, Uganda and the United Kingdom were especially likely to give this answer. A further 28% of children had participated in the formal pre-session hearing – with children from the Republic of Moldova, Uganda and the United Kingdom responding in this way.



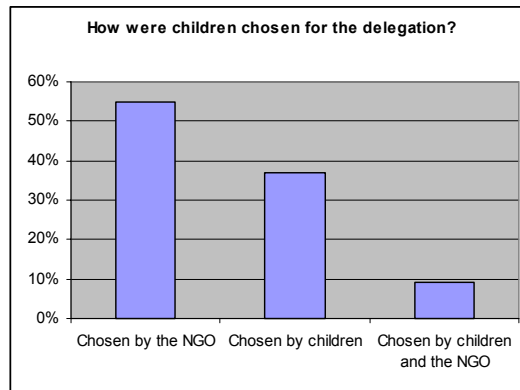
Of 21 NGOs responding to a similar question, 17 (81%) had supported children to attend the pre-session in Geneva. Interestingly, only seven (35%) had supported children to attend the subsequent State Party examination. Where NGOs had not taken children to Geneva, all had explicitly shared children’s views with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in the pre-session working group.

It appeared that children’s delegations to Geneva were most commonly comprised of two children (six NGOs), although delegations of five had been supported by three NGOs. The smallest delegation was one child, and the largest 14 children. Four of 14 NGOs had taken delegations made up of all males or all females, although the majority of NGOs achieved relatively balanced gender representation in their delegations.

### **Selecting delegates**

Most children (56%) told us that young delegates were selected to attend the pre-session in Geneva through some form of competition. Children from Uganda and the United Kingdom were especially likely to give this answer. In contrast, children from South America and Kenya said delegations were usually drawn from the cohort of children already involved in the work of the child-led NGO, and elected through existing processes within their organisations.

NGOs approached the selection of children for the delegations to Geneva in three main ways – through decisions taken by the NGO, through voting by children, and through competitions. Delegation members were most commonly selected by NGOs rather than by children (55%), although a significant number of NGOs either supported children themselves to make this decision (37%) or made this decision in partnership with children (9%).



Criteria used for selecting delegation members usually included having good presentation skills, experience of representing the views of other children, and being passionate about children's rights. Children did not always have to have been involved in children's rights work prior to being considered as a delegation member. Two main approaches were evident among NGOs – selecting children to represent the views of their peers, and selecting individuals to share their own experiences:

*The child that was present in Geneva was chosen by the NGO and is a member of [the] Child Parliament...With the adults' support, the children legitimised his participation.*

*As per the guidelines on the involvement of children and young people in the reporting process we opted to send older young people as advocates to the evidence giving sessions.*

*Four of the children [that attended the pre-session] were from the war affected regions of [the country]...and another that attended...was a former child prostitute who was then undergoing rehabilitation while another had survived being trafficked. These children were able to share their issues [and] views with the Committee members.*

### **Meeting with Committee members**

When children were asked why they had wanted to meet with the Committee, 82% of children said that it was 'to tell the Committee about the experiences of children in my country'. None had gone to talk about their own personal experiences.

Almost one in three children said they liked how the Committee's room was set up and 28% said it made them feel 'important'. One child commented that:

*I felt like I was surrounded by friends.*

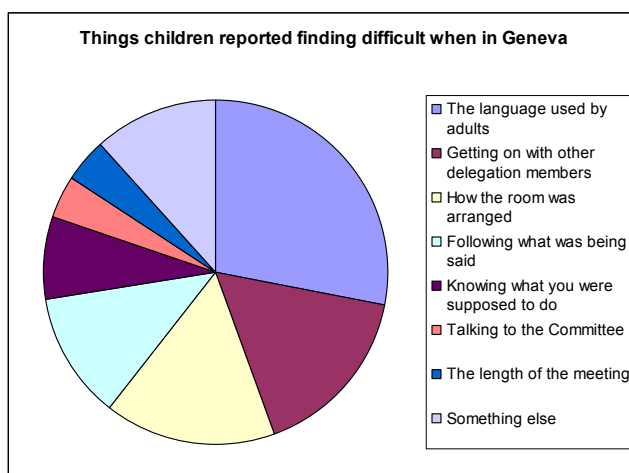
However, 28% of children said the layout of the room made them feel uncomfortable, reporting being intimidated by the formality of the room. Children also did not like not being able to see Committee members:

*The room of the Committee is very formal and intimidates the participants, especially if they are children like me (when I took part in Geneva). They should have a more friendly atmosphere.*

*I felt like I was being a bit rude as there were people sat behind me.*

*I believe it could have been more conducive if the Committee members sat among us instead of in the seats around us.*

The things children found most difficult when participating in meetings in Geneva were the language used by adults – 50% cited this as problematic, how the room was arranged (29%), and getting on with other members of their delegation (29%). Fourteen per cent said they weren't really sure what they were supposed to do or say.



Relationships between children may have been difficult where they did not know their fellow delegation members especially well; it may also have been due, at least in part, to the priority each individual delegation member placed on a particular issue or the actual issues prevalent in the regions delegates came from. This proved a particular challenge for children from the United Kingdom (in relation to the system of devolved government there):

*Competing with the two devolved nations – for time, and with different issues to talk about. It would have been difficult for the Committee to see the different levels of research and actual fact-finding that went into the presentations for the English, Scotland and Welsh delegations, meaning that - even though we...could back up our points with solid facts and research - the Committee were left confused...*

This confusion may be a reflection of the effects of different legislation and policy on the lives of children living in different jurisdictions.

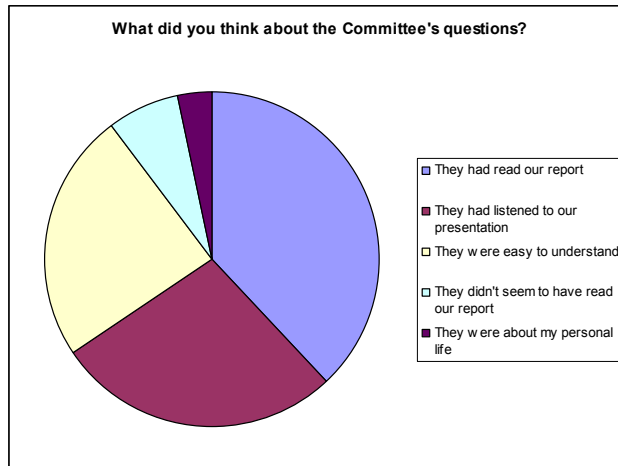
Language barriers also proved problematic for children (noted by respondents when asked if there was something else they found to be difficult):

*The official languages of the presentations and interventions was in English which made it difficult for us as we are...Spanish-speaking. This happened in Geneva with members of the Committee and other delegations.*

### **Being heard**

The vast majority of children (95%) said they felt the Committee had listened to what they had to say while in Geneva. None felt the Committee had not listened to them. Seventy-one percent felt the Committee's questions showed that they had read the children's reports (although 12% felt they did not); a further 53% felt that the

Committee had listened to their verbal presentation. Over half of children thought that the Committee’s questions were easy to understand.

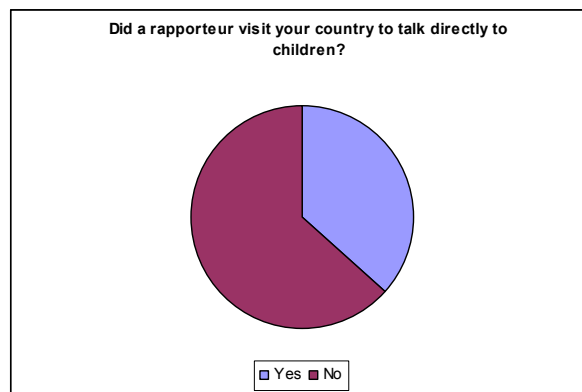


When children were asked to tell us what best described how they felt about meeting the Committee, the majority (59%) said their views had been *'listened to and respected'*. A further 29% said that *'people really wanted to hear what I had to say'*.

Almost two-thirds of children (65%) felt that they had enough time to talk to the Committee, and 63% that they had had the opportunity to say everything they wanted to. However, 37% felt that they had not been able to cover all the issues they wanted to tell the Committee about, and most attributed this to a lack of time available for children to speak directly to Committee members.

### **Rapporteur visits**

A country rapporteur<sup>3</sup> from the Committee on the Rights of the Child visited the countries of almost two-thirds (61%) of the children responding to the questionnaire. 38% of NGOs (eight out of 21 respondents to the question) had experienced a visit to their country by a country rapporteur from the Committee.



The 17 children who gave more detail about the rapporteur visit had different levels of understanding of the work the rapporteur was engaged with during their time in the country. Children from Peru appeared to be the best informed about the purpose of a

<sup>3</sup> The Committee has one or two country rapporteurs per country under review.

rappporteur visit and the resulting local and national meetings. In their comments, they said that the rapporteur visit provided a chance to reflect on the major opportunities and threats to children's rights in relation to the progress the State Party had made towards meeting its obligations under the CRC. The visit also provided children with the opportunity to share information with both the rapporteur and national and local organisations about children's rights:

*Children's organisations organised a national event which [the rapporteur] came to, where we presented the advances, regression and challenges of the Committee's recommendations. [The rapporteur] provided more details about the work of the Committee and the State which is responsible for sending the reports.*

*...it was very important that [the rapporteur] visited our country. It was a concrete measure that made us feel that we were taken into account and important. Her participation in the public event motivated the children's organisations to work in relation to the defence and promotion of child rights.*

There was also reference from children in Uganda to a competition organised by the rapporteur to allow children to 'give their views on the state of children's affairs'.

During their visits, country rapporteurs engaged in activities such as Parliamentary events, meetings with children, discussions with key NGOs about emerging and existing human rights violations, and accompanying children to meetings with government officials and civil society organisations. In one case, the rapporteur visit was arranged by the State Party. One NGO noted that the planned rapporteur visit did not go ahead because of difficulties in obtaining visas.

NGOs felt that facilitating a visit by the rapporteur enabled the Committee to have '...direct contact with a large number of children and young people rather than the few who...attend Geneva'. There was an emerging consensus among both children and NGOs that the rapporteur visit is a fundamentally important part of the reporting process for children, particularly with a view to hearing directly from marginalised groups of children about their experiences. All of the NGOs that experienced rapporteur visits felt that these had had a significant impact on the content of the concluding observations.

### **Concluding observations and national action**

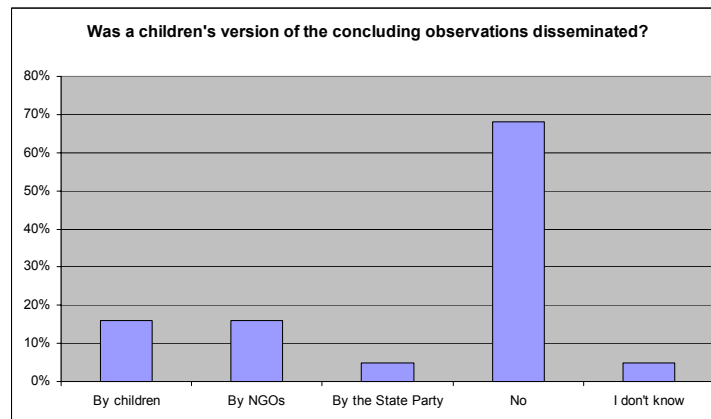
When NGOs were asked how they shared information about the pre-session and State Party examination with children, they reported the following activities:

- Sending information to children through update reports, news bulletins and letters
- Sending the concluding observations and/or a report to all children and organisations that had participated
- Creating blogs, podcasts and films (including updates while in Geneva)
- Providing information through a website
- Organising national conferences (funded by the State Party or by NGOs) and meetings for children
- By using the media, with examples including articles in adult and children's newspapers and 'a talk show at the national television [channel] to present the experience of children reporting to the Committee'
- Disseminating information to children through member organisations.

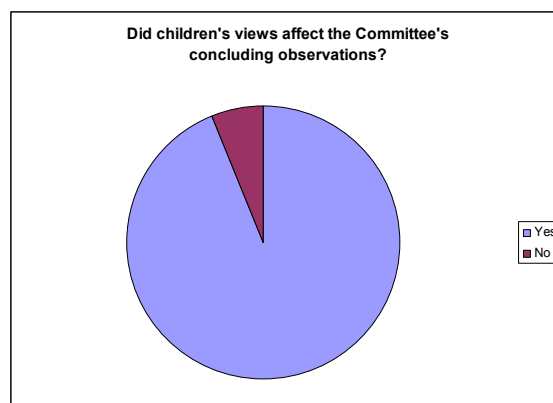
### The concluding observations

Almost two-thirds of children responding to the questionnaire (63%) had seen the concluding observations relating to their country, most receiving a copy through the NGO they were working with. Children said that concluding observations were also made available by e-mail and through the websites of NGOs and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Fifty five per cent of children said that they had seen a version of the concluding observations written especially for children. Thirty six per cent of NGOs said that a “child-friendly” version of the concluding observations was created and disseminated; however, 68% said such a document was not available. “Child-friendly” versions of the concluding observations were usually produced by either NGOs or by children themselves.



NGOs overwhelmingly felt that, where children had been engaged in the reporting process, their views had influenced the concluding observations. (Only one NGO felt that children’s views had had little or no impact on the recommendations.)



This coincided with what children told us - encouragingly, 72% felt that the issues they had raised with the Committee were reflected in the concluding observations.

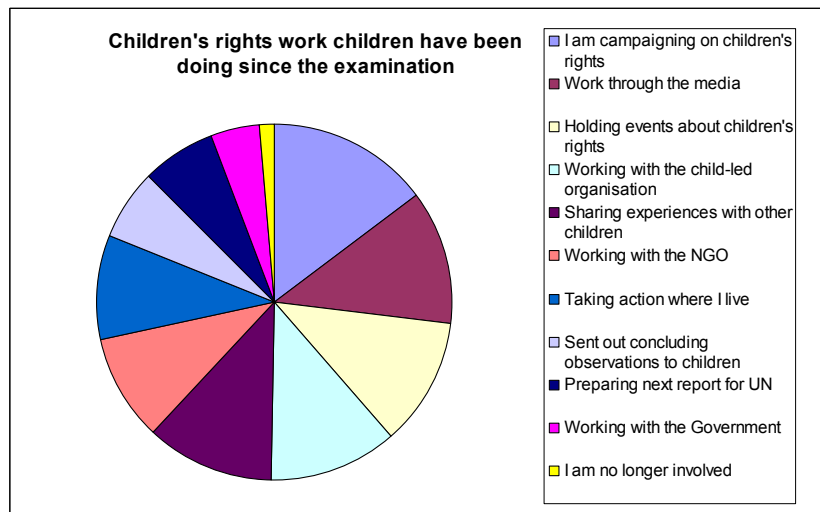


Eighty seven per cent of NGOs had explicitly demonstrated to children how their input had influenced the concluding observations. Examples given of the ways in which they had done this included face-to-face work and the use of new media:

- “Translating” the concluding observations for children
- Supporting children to see how their input had been incorporated by the Committee through workshops and discussions
- Through formal hearings at a national level with children
- By highlighting the recommendations in the concluding observations that were mentioned in the children’s report, for easy reference
- By encouraging member NGOs to share this with the children they work with
- By creating podcasts to show how children’s concerns were reflected in the concluding observations.

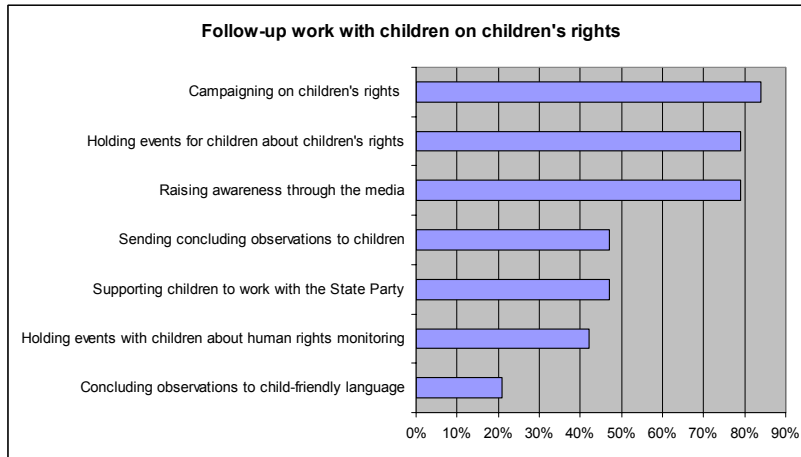
**Children’s rights work following the concluding observations**

Children appeared to remain active in promoting children’s rights following their involvement in the CRC reporting process.



As noted in the chart above, 63% of children have continued to campaign on children’s rights issues. A further 58% are working to promote children’s rights through the media, and many are sharing their experiences of campaigning on children’s rights with their peers. Thirty two per cent are already helping with work to prepare for the next CRC examination. Unfortunately, very few children (19%) appear to be working with the State Party to address the Committee’s concluding observations.

When NGOs were asked how they are continuing to engage children in children’s rights monitoring, 84% said they are actively supporting children to campaign on children’s rights. Seventy nine per cent of NGOs are also concentrating efforts on raising awareness about children’s rights by using the media and by holding events for children.

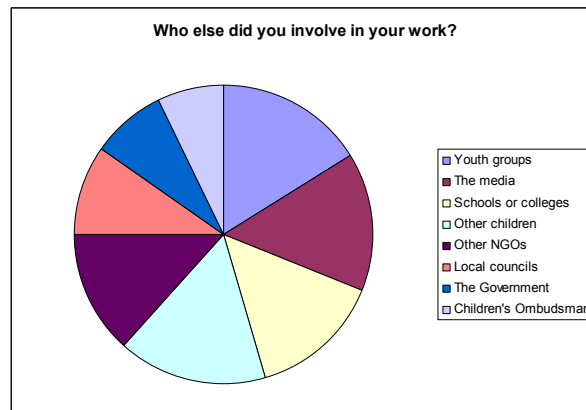


Over half of NGOs were also carrying out other related activities, including running children's rights outreach sessions with children in schools, youth clubs and other settings, and establishing a child monitoring group to allow for permanent child-led monitoring (with indicators developed by children, and children tasked with collecting information on their rights in their communities).

Two NGOs noted that a lack of sustainable funding has hampered their ability to do any significant follow-up work to children's involvement in the pre-session and State Party examinations.

### **Engaging with key partners**

The majority of children said they had involved other organisations and individuals in work related to the CRC reporting process. Children were most likely to engage with other children and with local and national youth groups (both answers given by 56% of the sample) and to approach newspapers, radio and television (53%) to draw attention to the reporting process. As shown in the chart below, children appeared to be very successful in engaging a range of organisations and individuals in their work, including media, other NGOs, and schools and youth groups.



NGOs were also asked what links they had established with national bodies and institutions as a result of the CRC reporting process. It was most common for links to be made with other NGOs (particularly those working with children), followed by government and the media (56% mentioned these). Parliaments were also seen as a useful tool for encouraging State Parties to listen to children's views and to engage

meaningfully in the reporting process (44%). Some NGOs established relationships with Children's Commissioners and schools (31%). Interestingly, only three of 16 NGOs had made links with local authorities, and only one had established explicit links with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, albeit through a former Committee member.

Typical approaches NGOs described included:

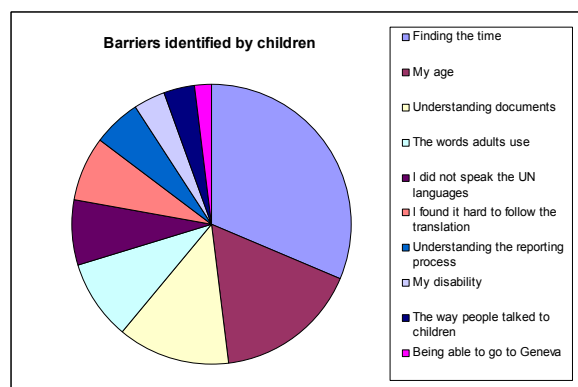
*We linked up with other NGOs and local authorities through our membership (including organisations such as UNICEF), schools (on an ad hoc basis), the Children's Commissioner, adult and youth-led NGOs across the UK, key media contacts (primarily the BBC, national newspapers, some local), and work with government officials to engage children in reporting and human rights monitoring at a national level.*

*We give our commentaries for the government's report, discuss and inform about our work through the media, regularly remind the government that they must submit the next report, and most of the time we had to use pressure on the relevant government institutions. As tools we used links with Parliament (especially human rights and judicial commission and children's rights sub-commission), [the] Prime Minister's office, [the] President's office, and [the] mass media.*

*The children who represented the network in Geneva have been in direct contact with [the media]. We [also] have regular contact with the Children's Ombudsman...government officials, Parliament (the working group on children's rights)...Above all our member organisations have regular contact with Parliament, government officials, international NGOs, etc.*

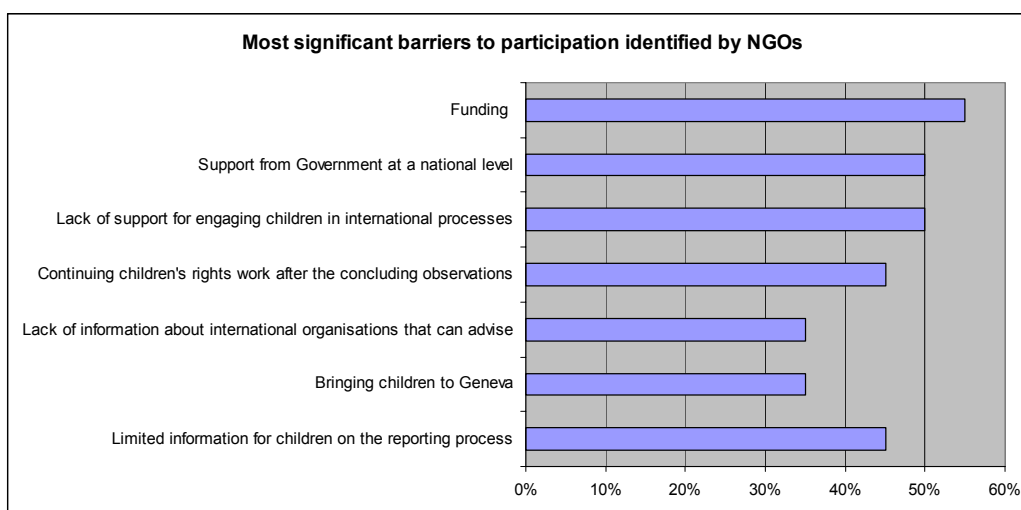
### **Barriers to children's participation**

When asked what made it difficult for them to take part in the CRC reporting process, a significant majority of children (68%) cited 'finding the time', on account of responsibilities relating to school, family or employment; a further 36% said their age made it difficult for them to participate. Thirty two per cent also noted understanding relevant documentation as a barrier. 'Being able to go to Geneva' was not considered to be a significant barrier to children's involvement, suggesting a good understanding among children of the scope of the CRC reporting process, and a recognition of the importance of work at a national level to monitor and advocate for children's rights. One child noted that 'lost earnings' could be a problem for working children that wanted to get involved in the reporting process.



Drawing from their own evaluations with children, NGOs were asked to identify barriers they encountered when supporting children to engage in the CRC reporting process. Funding was unsurprisingly identified as the most significant (55%), but half of NGOs (50%) also highlighted a lack of support from State Parties and a paucity of advice about how to engage children in international monitoring processes.

Other barriers identified by NGOs were structural (for example, the need to take into account the democratic processes of child- and youth-led organisations), and logistical (for example, the need for information to assist with hotel bookings and transport when in Geneva). Particular concerns were raised by one NGO in relation to the lack of government support for activities surrounding children’s rights monitoring and the need for action at an international level to address this. Another NGO elaborated on the need for sufficient and longer-term funding for staffing and resources to support children’s activities and engagement.



## **Lessons learned by NGOs**

### **Logistical considerations**

NGOs were asked to share their processes for facilitating children’s participation in the CRC reporting process. NGOs noted that they gave particular attention to ensuring parents and carers were well-informed about the activities children would be involved in while in Geneva, and all had obtained parental consent for children’s participation. NGOs took care to pre-arrange travel, accommodation and meals; to ensure children had the appropriate travel insurance and could obtain visas where required; to hold briefings for children before going to Geneva; to obtain information about children’s medical and support needs, along with emergency contact details; to identify appropriate adults to support children while in Geneva; and to ensure everything was carried out in accordance with their organisation’s child protection policy (including any referrals where historic incidents of abuse were uncovered in relation to participating children). Several NGOs noted the importance of the accompanying adult being well known to the children participating.

Typical responses included:

*Risk assessments are undertaken for all meetings in the UK and abroad, and consent gained from children (and from parents if the children were under-16)*

*for their participation in all events and meetings; children are asked to make the organisation aware of any health, dietary, religious and support needs. In addition, with regard to Geneva, detailed information was provided to parents, carers and children regarding the itinerary, including emergency contact details; a ratio of one adult to every four children was applied for the pre-session, and one-to-one for the State Party examination. The delegation for the pre-session also included three additional adults needed to support children who had particular needs. Travel and accommodation is always pre-booked and paid for by [the NGO].*

*Before the trip to Geneva we informed all the attending children's parents...We had a pre-meeting for all the attending children, where we provided information about Geneva, the pre-session meeting, and the accommodation.*

One respondent noted the need to ensure that children were properly equipped while they were in Geneva, and noted that:

*All the children were provided with a kit containing basic personal items such as soap, towel, toothpaste and brush. The children who went to Geneva had warm clothing, shoes and a travel bag purchased for them. .*

### **Evolving practice**

In order to capture evolving practice, NGOs were also asked to share the things that, in retrospect, they would have done differently to maximise children's participation in different aspects of the reporting process.

There was a genuine desire to do more to engage more, and younger, children, and for children to write their own reports rather than simply giving their views for inclusion in an adult report (whether produced by the NGO or the State Party). One common suggestion for doing this was to place more emphasis on the need for, and importance of, visits by the country rapporteur. Even where children had played a significant role in leading the work, there was a desire among NGOs to develop further tools to engage marginalised groups of children. Many also wanted to do more to involve children in planning and developing their own human rights monitoring systems.

Awareness-raising – both among children and among the general public – was generally seen as an area which needed to be developed much further by NGOs. This included disseminating reports written by children much more widely, and circulating accessible versions of the concluding observations to children and other stakeholders. The role of the media in this was deemed particularly important.

Some NGOs reflected on the importance of recording their experiences by documenting each stage of the process. They felt this would enable children to be more easily engaged in the future, and to be aware of the potential impact and limitations of their involvement. They also recognised the need to develop activities in partnership with children to take into account the *'first hand experiences'* of children and the different elements in their lives that can limit their involvement in children's rights advocacy.

Most NGOs noted the need to obtain specific project-funding for work to engage children in human rights monitoring (including financial support from key partners), with sufficient time and human resources to capacity-build partner organisations and to support children's own development. This was particularly important when NGOs

were considering the extent of their follow-up and ongoing work in relation to CRC implementation. The importance of sustainable funding is illustrated by the ways in which NGOs have financed their work to engage children in the reporting process:

**Table 2: Funding sources for engaging children in the reporting process**

<b>Funding source</b>	<b>%</b>
Funding from UNICEF and / or Save the Children	27.8
Project funding from foundations / private companies	22.2
Core funding (NGOs own funds)	16.7
Government funding	16.7
Funding from other NGOs	16.7

The majority of funding seemed to be for specific projects to engage children in the CRC reporting process – submitting a report, going to Geneva, and in some cases disseminating the concluding observations – rather than for sustained work on children’s rights monitoring and awareness-raising.

### **Actions to maximise children’s engagement**

Children put forward several suggestions for maximising their participation in the CRC reporting process. They felt very strongly that children’s voices should be taken into consideration in all research and reports on children’s rights, on the basis that listening to the child and ensuring that the child’s best interests are at the centre of decision-making processes are two of the general principles of the CRC:

*...the participation of children [should] be institutionalised and that children feel that their voice is listened to and taken into account, respecting the best interests of the child as mentioned in the CRC.*

There were also calls for more to be done to publicise the CRC reporting process and the progress State Parties are (or are not) making towards meeting their international human rights obligations to children:

*It should be advertised more - through national media, although I guess that's not very practical or likely to be taken on. I think if more children knew about it, they would contribute.*

Equally important to children was having adequate time to talk to the Committee about the issues that really mattered to them:

*There should be more time for the children-only meetings, a greater emphasis on insight and explanation rather than simply conveying the report during those meetings...*

Children felt that some of these things might be addressed by holding meetings in individual countries with Committee members (for example, through rapporteur visits) as a formal part of the evidence-gathering process. They felt this would give Committee members a first-hand account of what life was like for particular groups of children, and would also allow more children to actively participate in the reporting process.

*UN can have regional hearing sessions held in the region. It helps children from poor countries [to more] easily be involved in the reporting process, rather than hindered by the heavy financial burden of travelling to Geneva.*

To ensure children's views are routinely taken into account within the CRC reporting process, children suggested that there should be a stronger focus on establishing well-funded local and national NGOs that work specifically on children's rights. They also felt that State Parties should do more (and be made to do more) to prioritise the voices of children in their reports to the Committee. Typical comments included:

*...For me it is important to involve children's organisations in all the processes and decisions that the Committee can take.*

*That governments should listen to the children as possible as they can. [They should] help children and young people [to] take part in the next process.*

When asked the same question about what could be done to maximise children's participation in the CRC reporting process, NGOs suggested the following action should be taken:

- The Committee Secretariat should produce information especially for children, including "child-friendly" versions of concluding observations and General Comments, and easier forms to enable children to report to the Committee
- A guide for involving children in the CRC reporting process should be provided, including advice for NGOs on achieving meaningful and representative participation
- The approach should be more flexible to accommodate children
- Children should be able to present material in formats determined by children
- Children should be allowed to observe the pre-session working group
- Children should have dedicated time with the Committee as part of every examination, and not just a meeting in the lunch-break
- The Committee should work on a new "format" for the meeting with children to ensure it is suitable for children of all ages and levels of understanding
- The meeting with children should be structured by theme, instead of all questions being asked at one time
- Committee members should sit with, rather than behind, children in the children's meeting: *'it was very difficult to speak to someone you cannot see'*
- Positive action should be taken by the Committee Secretariat to address the language barrier by providing translation support for all children that need it
- A willingness from the Committee to engage with bigger delegations of children
- More use should be made of rapporteur visits as a method for encouraging children to engage in the reporting process
- The Committee should put pressure on State Parties to ensure children's meaningful participation in the reporting process
- There should be a formal recognition of children's input in the concluding observations, for example by highlighting which recommendations have been prompted specifically by children's concerns
- The Committee should formalise its feedback to children, for example in a written statement to children: *'Children's participation will be greatly encouraged if their views are listened to and respected.'*

## **Additional thoughts from children**

When asked if they had anything else to tell us about their involvement in the CRC reporting process, two main points emerged from children. The first concerned the need for sustained monitoring by children of the progress made on implementing concluding observations, and for this to be a priority for both State Parties and NGOs:

*It is important to follow up this experience of involving children's organisations, NGOs, the state and the media on social communication for the dissemination of the recommendations.*

As part of the follow-up process, children suggested that more effort should be made to disseminate the concluding observations at a national level and to raise awareness about the reporting process itself:

*In our country, the state did not disseminate the recommendations either to children or to civil society...our experience consisted of the dissemination in 21 departments in our region. Our experience was led by us, the children, which is why we prepared a "child-friendly" version of the recommendations. We carried out work together with adults based on the co-operation. The experience was initiated by organised working children, but the process involved other children's organisations from different realities.*

The second related to children's appreciation of the time taken by adults to involve them in the reporting process. Some children wanted to thank the Committee for genuinely listening to what they had to say:

*Thanks to the Committee for making possible that the children's participation be easier.*

Others wanted to recognise NGOs' role in supporting their participation. In particular, they highlighted the skills and knowledge they had gained as a result of their involvement in the reporting process:

*It was an important experience; it helped me to change and look different at some things and helped me to be ready to listen to and to provide support children that have problems.*

*Going to Geneva has been the most amazing event in my life... Thank you to the amazing...staff who made our trip to Geneva possible!*

## **Conclusion**

The international advisory group met with the Committee on the Rights of the Child during its 52<sup>nd</sup> session (September 2009) to share the research findings and to discuss the measures needed at international level to ensure children's meaningful engagement. Guidelines are now being developed for children and NGOs to facilitate the involvement of children in the whole scope of the reporting process – at local, national and international levels, as well as to follow-up the Committee's concluding observations. The international advisory group is exploring ways to continue to work with the Committee, NGOs and children around the world to address the barriers, structures and practices that continue to limit children's involvement, in order to enhance the meaningful engagement of children with the Committee and to achieve the genuine participation of children in all aspects of the CRC reporting process.