



Celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the Adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 8-9 October 2009, Geneva

“Dignity, Development, Dialogue”

Theme III: Dialogue

**Sub-theme 1: A new democratic dynamic:
child participation in the public sphere**

**“Creating opportunities for child participation in society:
The example of CISV-International”**

Introduction: The Right to Participation (art.12 CRC)

The right of children to express their views and participate in all matters affecting them is legally recognised in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 12.1¹), and is identified as one of the four general principles of the Convention. This means that this right should be an integral part of the implementation of the other articles of the Convention.

This right is also often on the agenda of international conferences and meetings addressing children's issues, and various commitments have been made to take it forward. Thus, the 2006 Day of General Discussion of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was devoted to the child's right to be heard (“Speak, Participate and Decide- The Child's Right to be Heard”). As part of its recommendations², the Committee urged States parties “*to move from an events based approach of the right to participation to systematic inclusion in policy matters*” (Para. 25).

Likewise, the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Children in 2002 adopted the resolution “A World Fit for Children”³, which expressed the State's commitment to “*listen to children and ensure their participation*” (point 9), as “*children and adolescents are resourceful citizens capable of helping to build a better future for all*”. In addition, child

¹ Article 12.1 of CRC: *States Parties shall assure to 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 Available at:

http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/discussion/Final_Recommendations_after_DGD.doc

³ A/RES/S-27/2



representation is increasingly sought in any relevant high-level event, through children's forums and panel discussions with child representatives.

The various steps taken so far show the progressive recognition of children as *rights-holders who are not only entitled to receive protection but also have the right to participate in all matters affecting them*, as defined in the Preamble of the Recommendations by the CRC on the 2006 Day of General Discussion.

Yet, on the eve of its 20th Anniversary the main challenge for the Convention remains how to translate this right into effective and participative dialogue between children and other members of society, as reflected on the objectives of this event. The challenge of bringing it down to the local level and give it real significance in the child's everyday life in its community; that is where actual change comes about.

Several policies and practices have been developed since the adoption of the Convention in 1989, in view of promoting child representation and participation in the decision-making process of governing bodies. Children's parliament, councils and committees at the national, regional and municipal levels have been created to take this forward. **However, are children being prepared to truly take up their role as active citizens in society, hence meaningfully realising their participation in the development of society?**

The underlying point of this paper is that in order to effectively encourage child participation and get them to meaningfully engage *in all matters affecting the child*, children need to be given the opportunity to develop certain key '**Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge**' (*ASK*) that enables them to become *resourceful citizens* committed to bring about positive change in society. For that, children need to be provided with safe, stimulating child-centred spaces where they can gain awareness of the issues affecting their communities and how each of them can be agents of change, while strengthening their own personal capacities.

Hence, the provision of such spaces and acquisition of such attitudes, skills and knowledge are considered a pre-requisite to facilitate children's dialogue with the different members in their societies and, thus, realise their full participation in the development of society.

This paper aims to succinctly describe CISV-International's educational approach and analyse how its Programmes and activities – developed with a peace education focus- are contributing to providing such stimulating spaces where children⁴ can gain valuable attitudes, skills and knowledge for their roles as Active Global Citizens.

⁴ For the purposes of this paper, the term "children" refers to all individuals under the age of 18, as defined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child. This means that all CISV participants under the age of 18 will be included under this category, with no differentiation from adolescents and youth.



ASK for Active Global Citizens - CISV's educational approach

Driven by the aim of preparing individuals to become active and contributing members of a peaceful society, CISV-International was created in 1951 as an independent, non-political, volunteer organisation promoting peace education and cross-cultural friendship.

CISV was founded by Dr. Doris Allen, a child psychologist at the University of Cincinnati (USA) who believed that in order to build a peaceful world “we must start with the children, and look at them as potential agents for social change”. Thus, CISV was born upon the conviction that children and young people from different nations could learn to live together amicably and would later successfully utilize that experience in working to create a culture of peace. With initially only six participating countries, CISV is now present in over 60 countries throughout all continents.

Since its inception, CISV has been offering a range of local activities, international camps, family-hosted exchanges and community-based projects. These are known as CISV's “Programmes”⁵ and every year these programmes provide opportunities for thousands of participants to meet and develop friendships with people from different countries, backgrounds and cultures, as well as with people from their own communities. Initially targeting children through the Village Camp Programme, CISV currently offers eight different programmes for a wide range of age groups, starting at 11 years-old and reaching out to those above 18. CISV's Programmes are specifically designed to meet the development needs of participants according to age.

All **CISV Programmes** are guided by CISV's educational principles⁶ and have an ‘Education for Peace’ focus, embracing one or more of its four main content areas: diversity, human rights, conflict and resolution, and sustainable development. Drawing from these content areas, a theme is identified for each Programme.

Every Programme uses a variety of **Activities**, which are related to the theme, to help participants achieve the educational goals. These Activities are concrete experiences, using a variety of methods, such as games, role plays, discussions, practical or creative sessions. Using **experiential learning** methodology, CISV participants are put into new, often prearranged situations that are similar to those they may or will experience in their everyday lives.

⁵ In addition to its Programmes, CISV-International also contributes to research and works with other organisations worldwide with similar goals, including UNESCO and various local NGOs in different countries.

⁶ CISV's educational approach is guided by the following four educational principles: “We appreciate the similarities between people and value their differences”; “We support social justice and equality of opportunity for all”; “We encourage the resolution of conflict through peaceful means”; “We support the creation of sustainable solutions to problems relating to our impact upon each other and the natural environment”.



Through their participation in this kind of learning experiences, participants get to discuss in a group a certain topic related to one of the four main content areas of CISV's educational principles. By sharing their views and personal experiences on the topic with others, participants learn more about themselves and about their communities, get to analyse how they think and act, and gain self-perspective and self-awareness, which in its turn makes it easier for them to put themselves in another's shoes.

This is the way CISV's Programmes and Activities contribute to equip children with a range of **ASK** that will be of value for their development both as individuals and as members of a community. Moreover, through **CISV's community-based projects and local activities** children (and any participant, whichever age) are empowered to be agents of change, as they engage in specific projects related to a local need and addressed to different target groups. By taking part in projects with local communities, participants are given the opportunity to put into practice and further develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge gained through other programmes, while starting to contribute to positive change in their communities.

This is how CISV's 'Education for Peace' goal is made real and concrete.

CISV's contribution to realizing child participation

Through its Programmes and Activities, CISV-International provides children with the opportunity to successively develop awareness of the issues affecting their communities, while gaining a sense of responsibility towards their actions in both their personal life as well as in their role as members of society. The acquisition of democratic leadership skills and a constructive approach to problem solving is a common goal for all its Programmes.

By actively participating in activities addressing human rights, sustainable development, diversity and conflict resolution, where personal development is gained through experiential learning, children are empowered with a number of key 'Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge' that will help them to grow as resourceful individuals.

Talking to, communicating and experiencing situations with people from different backgrounds also helps CISV's participants naturally feel a shared sense of responsibility for the development of the community they live in, and prompts them to voluntarily get engaged in actions leading to change in their own lives and society as a whole.

This unique combination of **ASK**, experiential learning and peace education focus makes of CISV's Programmes an inspiring space where children are given the *opportunity* to grow as resourceful individuals with the capacity to critically examine the world they live in, explore the cause and effects of these situations and reflect over how they can contribute to changing or developing those situations towards the better for themselves and their communities.



Only by providing such opportunities for development of valuable attitudes, skills and knowledge will children feel empowered and have actually the *resources* to take up their role as active global citizens committed to building more just and peaceful societies. This is, to our mind, the valuable contribution of CISV-International - and surely that of like-minded organisations active in this field- to the translation of article 12 and the participatory approach of the Convention of the Rights of the Child into children's daily actions as active global citizens.

Contact details

To find out more about CISV's educational goals and its different programmes, you may contact the International Office at international@cisv.org or visit www.cisv.org

On our website, you will find a good range of resources on CISV's approach to Peace Education, including key educational documents (*BigEd, The Passport*) and a database of activities developed within our Programmes. You will also find the description of the overall structure of the organisation, both at international and national/local level. Interested in joining? Check out if there is a CISV National Association your country and contact them!