

Introduction

Discrimination often affects children and young people within organisations, in the same way as it affects them in the media, in legislation or in public policy. It is therefore important that discrimination is also tackled in organisations. Organisations that work with children can lead the fight against discrimination and create a culture of participation within their workplace.

This section addresses discrimination in organisational policy and practice, and advocates for children and young people's right to participate as the key tool to prevent discrimination.

Organisations that work with children and young people, including those that advocate for children's rights, can sometimes discriminate against children at institutional and programmatic levels.

This can be as direct as setting an arbitrary minimum age requirement to join the Board of Trustees, or it can be indirect, for example, setting meeting times during school hours so children have to choose between (often compulsory) school classes, or having their say at a meeting. In both cases, children and young people do not enjoy their right to participate precisely because of their age.

All children and young people have the right to be heard and unless we actively seek to realise this, we may end up discriminating against children and young people. There are many reasons organisations should seek to include children and young people's voices and avoid age-based discrimination in practice.

Case study 1: Children as Trustees in England

Children and young people in the UK are under-represented on the boards of charities. England has 11 million children, and there are 180,000 registered charities with nearly 850,000 trustees. Less than 4,500 of these trustees (less than one per cent) are under 25. This is a lost opportunity for English charities¹.

Why involve children?

Firstly, involving children and young people in your organisation helps realise their right to participate in a very tangible way.

Case study 2: Young people participate in climate change talks

Plan International supported eleven 'young journalists' to attend the Copenhagen conference on Climate Change in December 2009. By being involved, and grilling some world leaders, these 'young journalists' ensured that their voices, and questions from other children, were heard at the climate change talks².

Secondly, there are many instrumental reasons why including children and young people can make your organisation 'better'. As the broader success of consumer and client participation has shown, involving 'end users' can lead to better projects. Involving children and young people in all decisions about services and programme delivery can lead to more effective results.

A US study exploring the benefits of children being involved in organisational committees

¹ Charities Commission 2009 *Involving Young People in Running a Charity* (online) <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/supportingcharities/under18scc30.asp> (accessed Jan 30th, 2009)

² Plan International 2009 *Copenhagen Climate Talks: Giving Children a Voice* (online). Available at: <http://plan-international.org/what-we-do/child-participation/child-media/copenhagen-climate-talks-giving-children-a-voice> (Accessed Date Feb 28th, 2010)

found that:

- Adult committee members experience children's abilities first hand, thereby combating internal negative stereotypes.
- The commitment and energy of adult committee members was improved.
- Adults and organisations enhanced their sense of community through the involvement of young people.
- Children and young people help clarify the organisation's mission for everyone
- The organisations may become more appealing for funding.³

More international examples can be found at What Works in Youth Participation: Case Studies from Around the World: http://www.iyfn.net/uploads/what_works_in_youth_par.pdf

³ Zeldin, S., McDaniel, A., Topitzes, D. & Calvert, M. 2000 *Youth in Decision Making: A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organisations* (online). Available at http://www.cpn.org/topics/youth/cyd/pdfs/Youth_in_Decision_Making.pdf (Accessed Date Nov 17th, 2009)

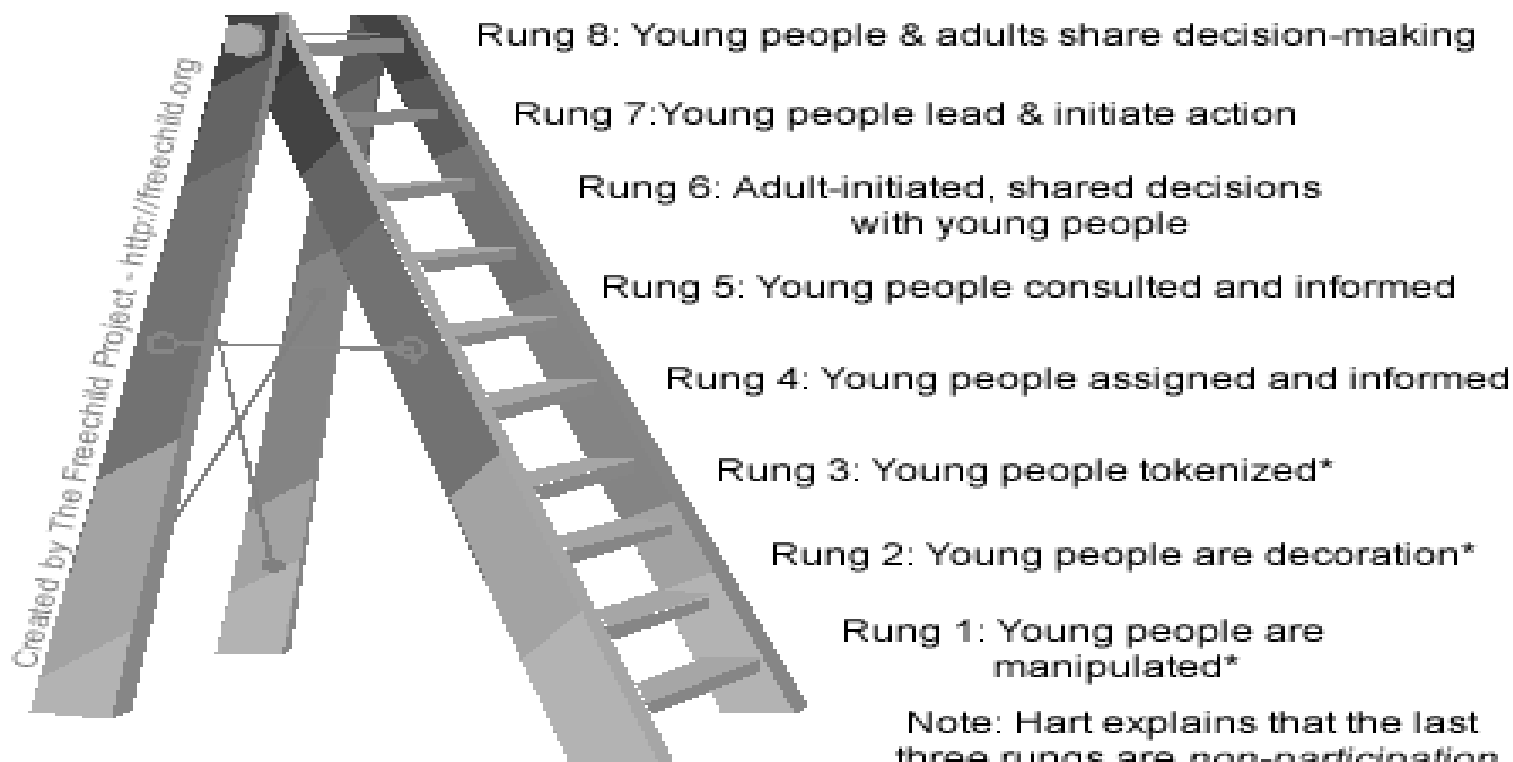
Working in Partnership with young people

Involving young people in your organisation can be done in a range of different ways, from having dedicated children's places on your management committee to including children in your staff recruitment process. The best mechanisms to use will vary from organisation to organisation, and the 'Help' section suggests many guides that can be adopted for your specific organisation.

There are, however, broad models that can explore what children's participation might look like within every organisation. This section explores three; Hart's Ladder, Sheir's Pathways, and Westthorp's Continuum.

The most famous model of participation is Hart's Ladder⁴. Hart's ladder is a rights based approach to conceptualising participation and can be used to explain what participation could look like within organisations. It outlines different levels of participation that reflect the degree of power sharing between children and older people within an organisation. Hart's ladder proposes eight types of participation with an implicit assumption that realising children's right to participate happens only at the top levels – where children and older people share decision making equally.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Figure 1: Hart's model.

Hart's model implies that real participation involves a constant strive towards the top rungs of the ladder through sharing more and more power with children.

⁴ Hart, R. 1992 *Children's Participation; From Tokenism to Citizenship* Unicef, Florence

Shier⁵ builds on this model, proposing a pathway of actions available to organisations to 'climb' the ladder.

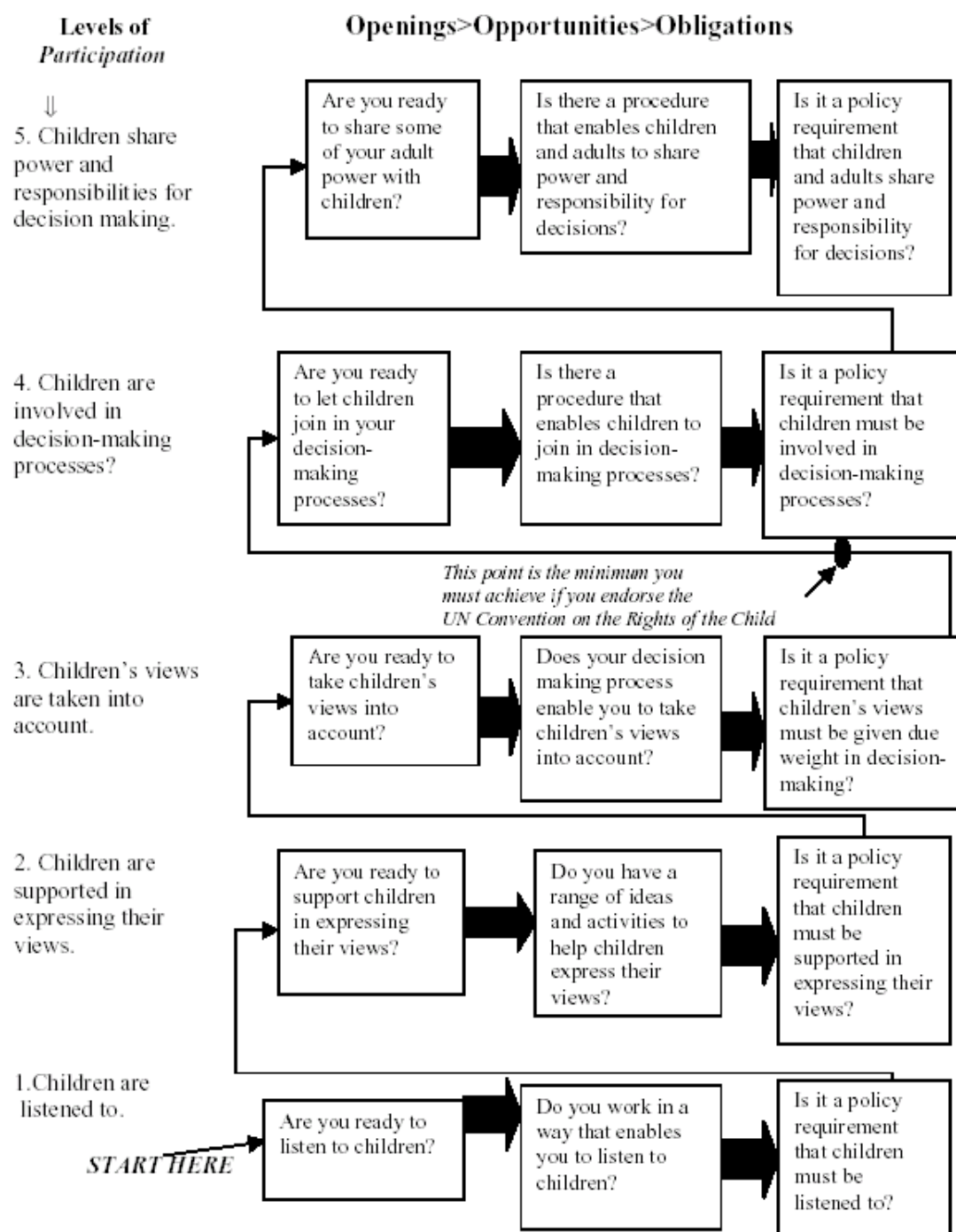


Figure 2: Shier's Pathways

Not all models assume that the best approach for your organisation is achieved through power sharing with children. Westhorp⁶ proposed a model that was developed to explore and conceptualise participation within organisations where children's capacity to contribute fluctuates. Specifically, it was designed to conceptualise participation within health-based settings.

⁵ Shier, H. 2001 'Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations' *Children and Society* 15, pp. 107 - 117.

⁶ Westhorp, G. 1987 *Planning for Youth Participation: A resource kit* Youth Sector Training Council of South Australia, Adelaide.

Westthorp's model proposed a continuum for understanding participation, suggesting that there are six key ways children can participate within organisations. Each of these six approaches may be more or less appropriate in certain situations, and provides a variety of strategies for engagement.

Ad Hoc	Where an environment is established which supports children to contribute their ideas or information about their needs. This could involve strategies like a suggestion box, or seeking informal input into reviews of marketing tools.
Structured Consultation	Involves deliberate development of a strategy to seek children's opinions about what they need or what problems they face, and implies a two-way flow of information and ideas. This could involve processes like a focus group to review a programme, or a conference to seek youth input.
Influence	Involves some formal, structured input in order to ensure at least a minimal level of influence on the organisation. This could involve a workshop designed to generate an action plan, or participating in active reviews of policy / programmes.
Delegation	Where children are provided with real responsibility for undertaking particular tasks within an organisation recognising that there must be a mutual understanding of the extent of power that children have. This could involve being part of a children's action team on an issue, or creating a working group to deliver a particular outcome.
Negotiation	Where children and the organisation each contribute their ideas, information and perspectives and decisions are reached by consensus and compromise. This would involve children being involved in existing decision-making arenas, like 'management' or on the Board.
Control	Children make all or many of the crucial decisions within the organisations, from policy and programming to financial management and hiring and firing of staff (rather than offering advice on this).

While this model suggests that different types of participation are just differently suited to different tasks – the level of participation employed will affect the 'outcomes' and benefits. Working with this model may increase the instrumental benefits of participation for your organisation, however it may not realise children's right to participate fully if power is not shared equally.

Resources

CRIN's Right Now page explores children and young people's right to be heard and collates a range of resources related to Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child www.crin.org/rightnow

Participation Works, a UK based consortium of organisations, provides a number of free resources, from case studies of successful partnerships to 'how to guides' to include young people on Boards of Trustees www.participationworks.org.uk

Unicef have produced a useful website that houses a range of resources; from guides to the basics of participation to case studies in specific areas such as child budgeting www.unicef.org/adolescence/cypguide/index_basics.html

The Commonwealth Association, in collaboration with Unicef, produced four 'How To Guides' about involving adolescents in decision-making http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Document/154211/162033/youth_participation_toolkits/

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria produced a guide to involving young people on boards and committees and consulting with children and young people. www.yacvic.org.au/sector/detail-participation.chtml?filename_num=258084

Translating the Right to Non-Discrimination into Reality (Save the Children Sweden, 2008)
This report is based on information received from Save the Children Sweden's regional and national offices, from partner organisations and from children and young people. It gives an overview of the kind of programming done from which to draw conclusions for improving implementation. It seeks to draw out the key implementing strategies used by Save the Children Sweden and its partners to translate the rhetoric of the right to non-discrimination into meaningful interventions which can improve children's lives in a sustainable and long-term manner.
<http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=18932&flag=report>

Checklist

A rights-based approach does not only have implications for the actions an organisation takes, it also has implications for the way an agency does its work. The organisational culture, systems and procedures should reflect human rights principles and standards: equity, non-discrimination, participation, accountability and best interests of the child.

Save the Children has set forth some questions for exploring a rights-based approach to organisation and management.

Equity, non-discrimination and inclusion:

- Does our workforce (and that of our partners) reflect the diversity of society according to gender, age, disability, ethnicity and religion? For example, employing disabled people sends a strong message to others inside and outside the organisation that everyone has the right to decent work. It challenges discrimination and exclusion.
- Is the office accessible for people with physical disabilities?
- How am I affected by issues of equity, non-discrimination and inclusion?
- Are there people that I discriminate against or that I exclude?
- What is the meaning of equity, non-discrimination and inclusion for our organisation and our work?
- Does our organisation discriminate against or exclude some people? Which people?

Human rights principles, standards and values

- Do all staff and partners have a basic understanding of the principles and standards of human rights? Are they committed to these standards?

Child protection – from abuse by childcare workers, relief workers, etc

- Do we have organisational policies against child abuse and sexual harassment?
- Are job applicants screened to prevent people with a record of abuse from joining the organisation?

Participation and empowerment

- How participatory is our organisation? How are partners and stakeholders (children and adults) involved in organisational decision-making? Who makes the important decisions? How easy is it for information to travel up the organisational hierarchy?
- Are organisational procedures helping or holding back participatory approaches to work?
- Are we listening to and consulting with children and adults in assessments, monitoring, etc?
- Are we providing information about our work to children and adults (transparency)?
- Are we using local resources and are we working with local structures and institutions?
- What work-related decisions am I participating in?
- Where do I feel empowered in my job?
- What does participation mean for our organisation and our work?
- Who should participate? In what?
- What does empowerment mean for our organisation and our work?
- Who should be empowered? To do what?

Internal and external accountability

- Are we accountable to the people we are working for, or just to our donors, the board of directors, our supporters/members and the government?
- What are the organisational accountability mechanisms towards partners and communities? How does the organisation report to partners and communities?

- Are we assessing the situation to understand the needs of children and adults?
- Are we carrying out stakeholder analyses and are we assessing the impact of our work?
- To whom am I accountable?
- Who is accountable to me?
- To whom is our organisation accountable?
- What does accountability mean in our organisation?
- What are current mechanisms for strengthening our organisation's accountability?

Reproduced from "[Promoting Rights-Based Approaches: Experiences and Ideas from Asia and the Pacific Experiences and Ideas from Asia and the Pacific](#)"

By Joaquim Theis for Save the Children Sweden East and South-East Asia (2004), p. 49.