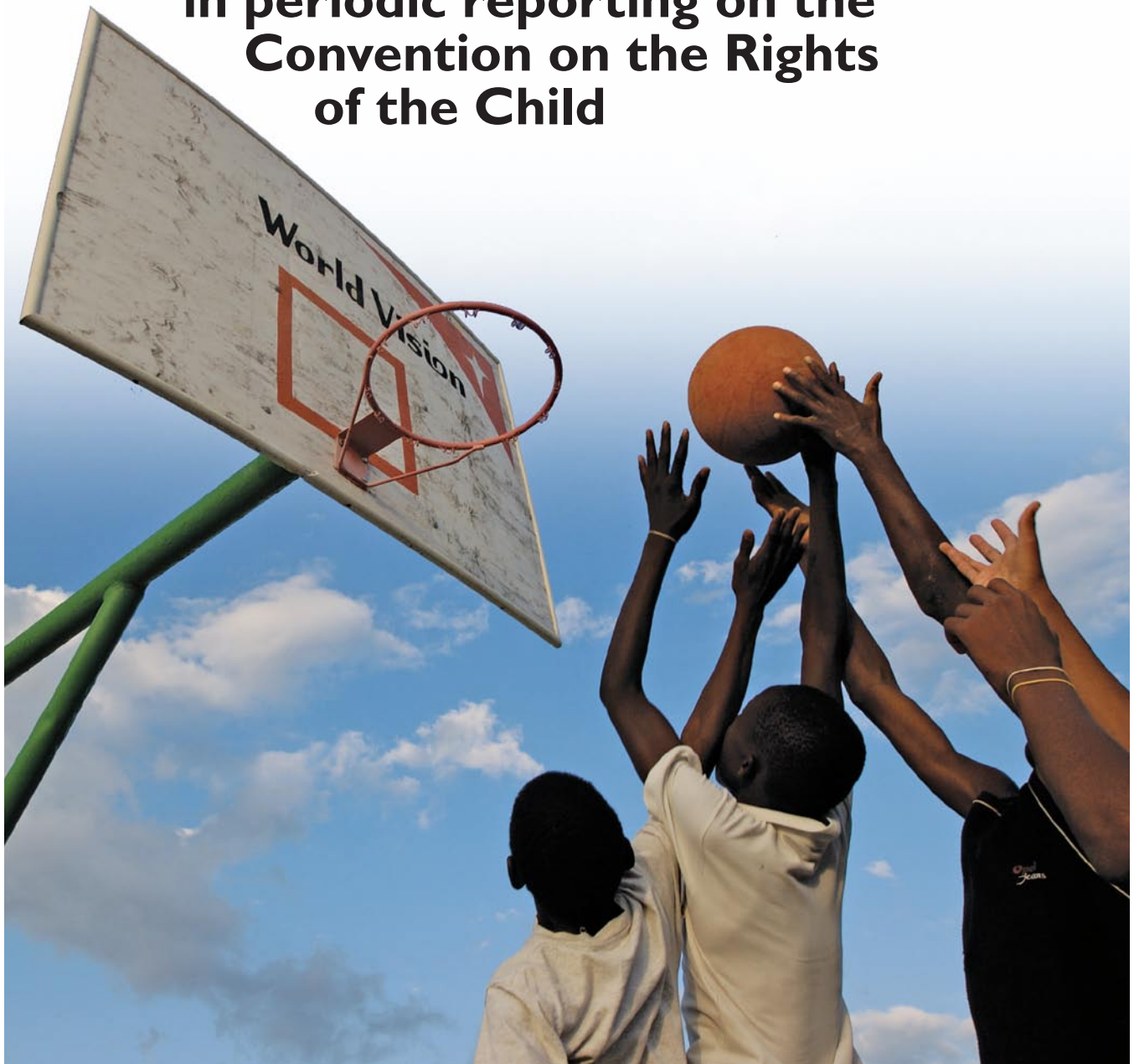




Children as change agents:

**A review of child participation
in periodic reporting on the
Convention on the Rights
of the Child**



Our vision for every child,
life in all its fullness;
Our prayer for every heart,
the will to make it so.

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organization working with children, families and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.

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“Adults continue to assume they know best The Convention on the Rights of the Child demands that we question that assumption. It insists that we listen to children and that their views must inform decisions and actions taken on behalf of children. It also insists that we promote, respect and protect children’s own capacities to take responsibility for those decisions and action they are competent to take for themselves.”

Evolving Capacities and Participation. Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) (Lansdown, G.), 2005.

Acknowledgements

There were many people who contributed to these guidelines. Many thanks are given to those in the field that gave their time to be interviewed: Denise Allen, Susan Bissell, Carla Garnelas, Brent Parfitt and Joachim Theis. As well I would like to thank those who were able to give their contributions through the editing process: Gerison Lansdown, Michael Montgomery and Tara Collins. In addition, I would like to thank Jaap Doek for the information he contributed around the periodic reports.

Foreword

Over the past few years, child participation has become more widespread and encouraged among non governmental organizations and increasingly at international levels, such as the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children and the UN Study on Violence Against Children.

Many are now recognizing that it is a child's intrinsic right to participate and that this participation should not be tokenistic. Organizations often refer to "meaningful" and "ethical" when promoting participation. What does that really mean?

This report will be examining this issue, but essentially, it means that children's participation must be guided by the general principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, namely: non-discrimination, the best interest of the child, the right to life, survival and development, and respect for the child's views.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has been encouraging participation of children and young people in the reporting process, but also by hosting its annual discussion day on Article 12 in 2006 and by preparing a General Comment on Article 12 to be published shortly.

The Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) was created by a number of organizations in order to facilitate

information sharing on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. By working in partnership with many child rights actors, including the CRC and the NGO Group for the CRC, there is now a central place where information about how to contribute to the work of the CRC can be easily retrieved.

CRIN welcomes this report as a useful tool in supporting all those who want to involve children and young people in the reporting process. We will support World Vision's efforts in promoting its use, by integrating it in our existing website in English, French, Spanish and Arabic, and linking it with other CRC-related information.

Promoting children's participation is about fulfilling children's right to be active citizens in our societies. This should also involve giving them tools to make use of existing international, regional and national mechanisms. As we strive to create a more just society, this means improving children's access to justice systems and other channels for claiming their rights; focusing on the CRC is only one part of the puzzle.

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Children as change agents: A review of child participation in periodic reporting on the CRC

Introduction

The United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 20 November 1989. The CRC is a comprehensive instrument that sets out rights that define universal principles and norms for the status of children, and it provides for a broad range of children's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.¹

While the CRC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history,² there are significant gaps with regards to mechanisms for enforcing States Parties' compliance. Currently, the primary mechanism for ensuring accountability of the State Parties to uphold their obligations under the CRC is through the periodic reporting process, whereby States Parties monitor the implementation of the CRC within their jurisdiction, and submit periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. State Parties are required to submit their first report two years after ratification of (or accession to) the CRC, and subsequently are required to report periodically every five years.

The reporting procedure is a valuable process, in that it *“provides a forum for a constructive dialogue between a State Party and an independent group of experts to monitor, in a non-adversarial manner, overall compliance with international treaty obligations”*³

Not only is the reporting process an opportunity for dialogue between the Committee and State Parties, but it is also an invaluable tool for civil society to hold State Parties accountable to their obligations to children.

The Committee has actively encouraged and supported the participation of NGOs in monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the CRC.⁴

Moreover, the Committee has also encouraged children's participation in the reporting process. Children have access to the Committee on the Rights of the Child either through adult-led non-governmental organizations that report to the Committee, or through their own child-led organizations.

While children's participation in the reporting process is not yet common practice, there is increasing interest in and support for children's participation, either independently, or through participation in adult-led NGO alternative reports. For instance, some adult-led child rights organizations have taken the initiative to consult with children in the process of preparing shadow/alternative reports. There are also examples where children have taken the lead to organize their own reports and communicate directly with the Committee.⁵ Some governments have also taken the initiative to include children;⁶ however, for the purposes of this report the focus will be on NGOs and child-led organizations.

1 A Guide for Non-Governmental Organizations Reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, revised 1998, The NGO Group for the Rights of the Child, Geneva.
2 There are 192 States Parties to the CRC; the exceptions are Somalia and the United States of America.
3 Report of the Secretary General: Comparative summary of existing communications and inquiry procedures and practices under international human rights instruments and under the Charter of the United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women, 40th Session, E/CN.6/1997/4, 21 January 1997, para 11.

4 While it is common practice for treaty bodies to consult with civil society in the reporting process, the only bodies that have standardized procedures are the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights.

5 The National Working Children's Movement in India and the Children's Group to Send Our Voices to the CRC in Japan are examples of a child-led alternative reports that have been submitted to the CRC.

6 There has been children's participation in the periodic reporting process from the following State Parties: Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, India, UK, Peru, Thailand, Cambodia (Source: Interview with Jaap Doek, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, July 21, 2006).

In an effort to foster a deeper understanding of children's right to participate, the Committee recently devoted significant attention to this topic. In 2006, the Committee devoted the annual Day of General Discussion to the theme of children's right to participate, which resulted in the Committee issuing recommendations⁷ and initiating a General Comment to elaborate on the duties of State Parties to implement this right. One of the Committee's recommendations from the Day of General Discussion encouraged State Parties and NGOs to include children directly in the monitoring process of the implementation of the CRC.⁸

In response to the Committee's recommendations, World Vision Canada initiated a research project to systematically analyze children's participation in the reporting process, and to develop a set of comprehensive guidelines in order to assist those who wish to facilitate children's participation in the reporting process.⁹

This report is a summary of World Vision Canada's analysis of alternative reports that have included children. This research responds to the gap in information concerning children's involvement in the reporting process, and World Vision hopes that this report will promote and strengthen children's meaningful participation within this area. In addition to the analysis, an outline of each report is also included within this document, along with six brief recommendations for those who wish to include children's participation in future reports.

Systematic Analysis of Alternative Reports

While reviewing numerous NGO reports submitted to the Committee, what was most apparent was the lack of reports written by or with contributions from children or adolescents. For the purposes of this research, World Vision identified 16 reports to be analyzed: Angola, Belgium, Cambodia, Colombia, Denmark, Egypt, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Japan, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Netherlands, Sweden, Uganda, UK. Three of these reports (Belgium, India, Japan) are written by children. These 16 reports were chosen on the basis of a cursory review of the alternative reports that were available electronically,¹⁰ as well as some reports that were specifically recommended by various child participation experts.

The number of children who participated in the reports varied from a few dozen in Uganda to about 9,000 in Latvia. Only 11 of the reports specified the number of children involved (with five of these being approximate numbers), and six reports specified the ages of these children. Consequently these numbers may not be a true reflection of the number of children and ages of those children which participate most often.

The age of the children participating was just as varied, with children as young as 12 months (UK) participating in one report and young adults as old as 20 in another (Belgium). The most common age range was between the ages of 9–17 (Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, Latvia, Netherlands, UK).

The most common method of gathering children to participate was through contacting other organizations that had direct contact with children (Belgium, Latvia, Netherlands, Uganda, UK). This approach was used in order to provide opportunities for children who are often "invisible" or marginalized within their societies to be heard, such as refugees, children with disabilities or children who are not in

7 Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006, Day of General Discussion on the Right of the Child to be Heard, 24 May 2007, <http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/discussion/Final_Recommendations_after_DGD.doc>.

8 *Day of General Discussion on the Right of the Child to be Heard*, Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006, para 31 and 34.

9 Children as change agents: Guidelines for child participation in periodic reporting on the CRC.

10 The Child Rights Information Network provides an electronic database of alternative reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on its website: <www.crin.org>.

school. Five of the seven reports that stated how children were gathered to participate in the reporting process used this approach.

Another method, used by three of the organizations (Belgium, Latvia, Netherlands) was the use of different media outlets such as newspapers and the Internet, and in one report (Netherlands) a magazine that was specifically sent to youth facilitation institutions. The organizations posted the information they were interested in learning about (in the form of surveys, questionnaires, etc.) in the various media outlets and invited the children to reply if they were interested. In the reports reviewed, the organizations that publicized their information through a media outlet also had over a thousand children participate in the reporting process.

Other methods that were used included working with children who were already involved with the organization writing the report (India, UK), and contacting student councils (Denmark). Four of the reports (Belgium, Latvia, Netherlands, UK) used a combination of methods to gather the opinions and ideas of children from their country.

The methods used to collect the children's ideas and opinions consisted of four main techniques: surveys/questionnaires, interviews, conferences and workshops. With the exception of three reports (Angola, Sweden, Uganda), all of the reports used a combination of methods. Six of the reports (Angola, Denmark, Japan, Netherlands, Uganda, UK) provided information on their methodology; however, with the exception of three reports (Denmark, Netherlands, UK), this explanation was very brief. One report (Latvia) included the content of their interviews, while another report (UK) included templates of the workshops and activity sheets that were used to collect the information. Owing to the lack of details provided, and the range of differences within those methods that were recorded, it is difficult to do a comparison. A summary of all the reports reviewed, including the methods each organization used, is included in the next section.

In addition to collecting information from children, eight of the 16 reports (Angola, Cambodia, Colombia, Egypt, Ghana, Kyrgyz Republic, Sweden, Uganda) also gathered information from adults. The opinions of adults were gathered through interviews with government officials (Angola, Colombia, Kyrgyz Republic, Uganda), NGOs (Angola, Ghana, Kyrgyz Republic, Sweden, Uganda), representatives from organizations with relevant experience to the report (Ghana, Kyrgyz Republic, Uganda), religious leaders (Angola, Uganda), and individuals with relevant experience to the report (Angola, Cambodia, Egypt, Kyrgyz Republic, Uganda). Additional secondary sources such as NGO reports (Uganda) and peer-reviewed published literature (Uganda) were also used.

In regard to the focus of the reports, five reports (Egypt, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Sweden) focused specifically on responding to what had been said in the State Parties's Report or on the recommendations given by the Committee. The other reports (Angola, Belgium, Cambodia, Colombia, Denmark, Japan, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Netherlands, Uganda, UK) focused on what it meant to be a child in that country, rather than responding specifically to what had been said in previous reports.

Twelve of the reports (Belgium, Cambodia, Colombia, Egypt, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kyrgyz Republic, Netherlands, Sweden, UK) included information regarding all areas of the CRC (all five reports that responded directly to the State's report also included information on all areas of the Convention).

The other six reports focused on issues specifically pertaining to different groups of children, such as working children (India), children of ethnic minorities (Latvia), children with special needs (Latvia), children who had lost parental care (Latvia) and child soldiers (Angola). In addition to presenting the opinions of children from select groups, these six reports also addressed specific issues such as HIV and AIDS (Uganda), the treatment of children by adults (Denmark), school (Denmark, Latvia, Japan), health

(Denmark), participation (Denmark), family (Japan), and general implementation of the Convention (Japan).

A common theme in all reports was to include suggestions as to how children's rights and access to them could be improved. All but three of the reports (Belgium, Japan, Uganda) included suggestions on how to improve the rights of children, and it was clearly stated in eight reports (Cambodia, Denmark, India, Jamaica, Latvia, Netherlands, Sweden, UK) that the suggestions were given by the children.

Case Studies Used for the Systematic Analysis

Below is a synopsis of each of the alternative reports reviewed. These synopses were prepared based on a review of the written reports; interviews were conducted with NGOs that facilitated children's participation in three of the reports (Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands).

Country: Angola

NGO: Human Rights Watch

Date: April 2003

Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.37/Angola_HRW_ngo_report.pdf

The adult-written alternative report, submitted in 2003 by Human Rights Watch, focused on the topic of child soldiers. Interviews were conducted with former child soldiers in order to gather their opinions and thoughts. The interviews with male children were conducted in private, while the interviews with the female children took place in a group setting. The report, however, does not mention how the children interviewed were selected to participate.

There were numerous suggestions made as to how the issue of child soldiers and the many dilemmas associated with it could be improved within Angola; but it was not indicated whether these suggestions came from the children. However, throughout the report there are numer-

ous quotes from former child soldiers giving their ideas and opinions to support the details being presented. The facilitators of this report also collected information from government officials, religious leaders, individuals with experience in the area of child soldiers and other NGOs.

Country: Belgium

NGO: UNICEF-What Do You Think?

Date: 2002

Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.30/belgium_child_ngo_report_eng.doc

Although adults wrote the periodic report submitted by the UNICEF project "What Do You Think?", children were involved at every stage, from designing the logo, to developing research methods and deciding how the report would be formatted. The "What Do You Think?" project is dedicated to ensuring the children of Belgium have a voice in matters affecting them at all levels of government. However, they have more specifically focused their efforts on preparing alternative reports for the Committee. "What Do You Think?" was originally started by UNICEF in 10 different countries; however, Belgium is the only country where it remains active. Although thousands of children gave their ideas and opinions towards the report, there was a smaller steering committee of approximately 40 children who took the lead. The steering committee was formed by those who responded to the "What Do You Think?" correspondence that was sent out to numerous institutions, asking if they would like to be part of the monitoring process. The children in the steering committee were from various parts of Belgium and from different social locations.

Surveys and short stories were used to collect the ideas of children. The organization published the survey on their website, in newspapers and magazines so that as many children as possible could be included. The "What Do You Think?" team also organized an event call "The March." Held in Brussels, the event was intended to bring children together to meet with politicians and to discuss and share their recommendations and ideas about how chil-

dren's rights in Belgium could be further respected. All of the suggestions collected from this day were incorporated into a report titled "Package of Wishes and Ideas", which was then used to help create the alternative report. The "What Do You Think?" team also sent numerous correspondence to other organizations that had direct contact with children, to ask them if they would like to be involved. These organizations focused on children with disabilities, or who are generally marginalized within their communities.

The process of writing the report began in 1999 and took approximately two years to complete. The steering committee first discussed why they wanted to write the report, as well as what methods they would use to collect the information. After unsuccessfully trying to recruit new members to the steering committee, they decided it would be best to post a survey through the various media outlets.

Summarizing the numerous responses they received proved difficult, as the children who responded were from very diverse backgrounds. To analyze the results, the steering committee entered all the responses into a spreadsheet and tabulated how many times each topic was discussed. The steering committee then gave their ideas and input into the results, and decided which topics should be focused on. Adults assisted in the report by helping to collect additional information where needed, such as contacting specialty organizations, and acting as facilitators for the steering group when developing the views and goals of the project as well as the research methods. However, the report was primarily completed by the children.

One of the challenges that the steering committee encountered was from facilitators at children's institutions. The committee found that the facilitators at the institutions did not think that the children would be able to participate. They were also worried that the suggestions given would reflect badly on them. However, the committee found that sharing success stories of other children who had participated the anxieties of the facilitators were relieved.

To overcome the challenge of communicating with children at different capacity levels, the steering committee developed different methodologies (such as debates, brainstorming sessions, songs and collages) to collect information rather than use the typical survey format. University students were also involved in collecting information; these students followed 25 children who had various disabilities for different periods of time, and created a "portrait" of the children's lives.

The report does not include suggestions about how to improve the status of children within Belgium, but it does place significant emphasis on understanding what the CRC is and why it is important. Rather than asking the children to respond directly to the government's report, the children were asked to comment on their social environment and their daily lives. The "What Do You Think?" teams assessment of the children's participation was that it was successful, because the Committee on the Rights of the Child acknowledged what the children had to say, and incorporated it into their concluding observations and recommendations.

Country: Cambodia

NGO: NGO Committee on the Rights of the Child

Date: 1999

Link: <http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.24/cambodiaNGOreport.pdf>

An adult-written alternative report was submitted by the NGO Committee on the Rights of the Child, in consultation with the Children's Committee and international organizations. In order to gather the ideas and opinions of children, the following methods were employed: surveys were distributed, workshops and interviews were conducted, and outside sources were contacted for children's opinions on their rights. Further information was collected through government ministries and institutions. Children were also given the chance to give their feedback on the final report. The report did not include information on how these children were selected to participate, nor was

information given as to how the surveys were conducted or analyzed.

The report focused on standards of health and health services, adoption, birth registration and data collection systems that monitor the implementation of the CRC. The report also included suggestions that children had given on how to improve the implementation of the CRC in their country. The process of collecting the information, conducting the analysis and the writing of the report took approximately a year and a half to complete.

Country: Colombia

NGO: Coalición contra la vinculación de niños, niñas y jóvenes al conflicto armado en Colombia

Date: 2005

Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/Colombia_COALICO_NGO_Report_EN.pdf

An adult-written alternative report was submitted in 2005 by *Coalición contra la vinculación de niños, niñas y jóvenes al conflicto armado en Colombia*.¹¹

A variety of methods were used to gather the ideas, opinions and recommendations of children. A national meeting with 45 children was held to discuss and analyze the recommendations that had been given by the Committee in the previous report, and to gather the main themes for the current alternative report. Other methods were also used, such as conducting interviews with students and graduates of military schools from around Colombia, as well as by conducting thematic research by and with young people. In addition to collecting information from young people, the facilitators also contacted government officials.

Teaming up with additional organizations within Colombia also assisted in the collection of information. Organizations could participate in one or more of the four following ways: providing relevant information on the implementa-

tion of the recommendations by the Colombian State, participating in the Coordinating Committee, giving feedback on the draft, or adding and disseminating the final report. The alternative report focused on all aspects of the implementation of the CRC.

Country: Denmark

NGO: National Council for Children

Date: January 2005

Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.40/Denmark_youth_ngo_report.pdf

The National Council for Children submitted an adult-written alternative report in January 2005. Children's ideas and opinions were gathered through two one-day conferences. These conferences took place in Køge and Horsens on September 22, 2004 and October 7, 2004, and a total of 80 children participated, ranging in age between 13–16. The children were chosen to participate because they were part of student councils in their respective areas (Køge or Horsens).

A process of selecting themes was organized in order to gather the children's opinions about what they thought was positive and what could be better for the children of Denmark. The themes were selected from the input of approximately 2,000 young people who participated in the National Council for Children's child panel survey in 2004, asking children how they thought life could be improved for the children of Denmark as well as suggestions from 25 youth and Scout leaders.

The suggested themes were then systematically categorized under relevant headings. The four themes for the conference were as follows: Angry Adults, Schools, Healthy in Denmark, and Who is in Charge Here?

To facilitate the conferences, four adults were given the task of working with a group of young people on one of the four themes. Each adult was familiar with the theme that they would be working with and was used to working with children in the age brackets that were present at the

¹¹ The Coalition Against the Use of Boys, Girls and Youth in Armed Conflict in Colombia.

conference; they also had knowledge of media production. The children gave their ideas and opinions based on their own personal experience on the subject to which they were assigned. At the end of the conference, each group gave a presentation on their findings, and included clear suggestions for solving the problems identified. These presentations were made available through numerous media outlets such as newspapers, radio shows and TV programs and are available at <http://www.boernesyn.dk>.

The children were also asked to bring a photo that would represent a situation that could be improved in regards to children's rights in Denmark. Each child was then given the opportunity to present his or her photo. The children decided which photo represented the situation that was most in need of improvement.

Another method used in preparation for the conference was to gather the ideas and opinions of the children through interviews conducted by the children themselves. Prior to the conference, children were asked to interview two of their friends who were not participating in the conference, so that during the conference they could discuss the most "interesting, essential and surprising" information that they gathered from the interviews.

One of the challenges that the National Council for Children faced was completing a follow-up meeting with the children who had participated in the conference. The difficulty was that these children were no longer active in the student councils, as a result, it was difficult to contact them for a follow-up meeting.

The final version of the report is a direct reflection of the children's discussions and presentations. At the conferences, there were four adults who wrote down the main themes and direct quotes so that the report could be based on the children's own words. A journalism student, along with seven children who had participated in the conferences, edited the report together to ensure that the children's ideas were clearly conveyed.

Country: Egypt

NGO: NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child

Date: 2001

Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/CRC.26/egypt_ngo_report.pdf

The NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child submitted an adult-written alternative report in 2001. The report involved children through a few different methods. Three workshops were conducted with children to discuss "the most important subjects in the report." The report does not mention, however, how these children were selected, or how "the most important subjects" were determined. A youth conference was also held for children between the ages of 9–18 years, and the report states that the children came from seven governorates and were from diverse social backgrounds. The conference contributed a great deal to the development of the report, and a general meeting was also held for all who participated to help with the revision of the first draft.

Meetings were also held with member organizations to discuss the importance of this report and the monitoring process on the whole, as well as to set up three teams that would be responsible for different aspects of writing and editing the report. These teams were labeled as "cultural activities", "health and environment", and "children in especially difficult circumstances". Research methods and the division of tasks were also discussed.

The report addresses all aspects of the CRC, and gives suggestions about how to overcome the shortcomings of implementing the CRC. The report does not, however, mention if the children that participated gave any of these suggestions.

Country: Ghana

NGO: Ghana Coalition on the Rights of the Child

Date: May 2005

Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/Ghana_GNCRG_ngo_report.doc

The Ghana Coalition on the Rights of the Child submitted an adult-written alternative report in May 2005. Children had the opportunity to contribute their ideas to the report through participating in meetings with civil society organizations or in a separate children's forum. Fifty children participated in the children's forum; information was not available on how many children participated in the civil society organization meeting. The children involved were from seven partner organizations, and gave their opinions and ideas at regional meetings, debates on the government's report, and through meetings to get their feedback on the alternative report; information on how these meetings were conducted was not available. While there are recommendations made in the report it is unclear if these recommendations are from the children or from the adults.

Country: India

NGO: National Movement of Working Children

Date: 2003

Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.35/India_NMWC_ngo_report.doc

The child-written alternative report was submitted by the National Movement of Working Children in 2003. The children chose to write their own report because they felt that children should be involved in helping to solve the problems they face, and because they were not consulted when the government submitted its report. The children also saw the report as an opportunity to clearly convey their situation to the Committee and to ensure that the government did not incorrectly depict their situation. Lastly, they wanted to use the experience as a learning tool to find out more information about the CRC and how it is being implemented within India.

The National Movement of Working Children is a state-wide coalition of working children's organizations. There are nine member organizations with approximately 14,000 children as active members. There is a diverse range of children involved with the coalition: the children work in both the formal and informal sectors; some attend school through the formal system or through NGO programs; they live in both rural and urban areas; come from various ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds; and are all under the age of 18.

The report consisted of four sections:

- the children's present situation as working children (in regards to their realization of the right to protection, provision of services and infrastructure, and the right to participate),
- initiatives that the children had made to improve their situation and recognize their rights,
- their review of the government report, and
- suggestions as to how their rights can be further recognized.

Each member organization held individual discussions within their state about the four areas. Next, 16 representatives from different member organizations met to "fine tune" the report. Adults and NGOs were also consulted regarding the procedure of the reporting process, translation and the logistics of the report. The report does not state how each member organization discussed the four topics, or how long the process took. It was mentioned, however, that one of the challenges the children faced was being able to obtain a copy of the report that the government submitted to the Committee.

Country: Jamaica

NGO: Jamaica Coalition on the Rights of the Child

Date: 1998

Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.33/Jamaica_ngo_report.doc

An alternative report was submitted by the Jamaica Coalition on the Rights of the Child in 1998. Although

adults wrote the report, children's ideas were gathered through consultations. In all, there were five workshops, with a total of 126 children participating. The consultations took place in:

- Montego Bay, where 17 children participated,
- Negril, where 29 children participated,
- St. Mary's, where 21 children participated,
- Mandeville, where 27 children participated, and
- Kingston where 32 children participated.

The children involved came from all 14 parishes, ensuring that children from the entire island were represented. Each workshop lasted one day, and gave the children the opportunity to express their views on registration, abuse and abusers, violence, education and health.

This report is divided into three sections: the first section gives an analysis of the government's report; the second comments on the concluding observations of the Committee from the last review; and lastly, recommendations are provided. Unfortunately, it is not specified whether or not these recommendations are from the children. In a few instances, the report specifically includes the children's views on subjects such as abuse and neglect, violence, birth registration and access to education.

Country: Japan

NGO: Children's Group to Send Our Voices to the CRC

Date: January 2004

Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.35/japan_children_ngo_report.doc

An alternative report was submitted in January 2004, by the Children's Group to Send Our Voices to the CRC. The report was written by children, and it contains three sections:

- a general introduction and thematic reports,
- basic reports, and
- an analysis of the questionnaire the group distributed in 2003.

Only the first section of the report was translated from Japanese into English, due to financial constraints. To gather children's views and opinions about the CRC, the children distributed a survey and asked children across Japan to write their own reports based on their own personal experiences, and to submit them to the group. A total of 25 basic reports were submitted; based on that information, the children came up with six themes that they then used to write thematic reports. The six topics for the reports were:

- School rules, school uniforms and corporal punishment which I experienced.
- What is the entrance examination for children?
- Students should be the main actors in school!
- Why did the principle neglect our voices?
- Is the family a place for children to be accepted as they are? and
- We do not want to lose any time in realizing the Convention!

One difficulty the children faced was being able to collect accurate information from other children. They found that children were often afraid of hurting the feelings of adults they knew. Overcoming the general view that children should be seen and not heard also posed a problem when trying to encourage children to reflect on their situations.

Country: Kyrgyz Republic

NGO: Youth Human Rights Group

Date: 2004

Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.37/kyrgyzstan_ngo_report.doc

The Youth Human Rights Group (a group comprising seven organizations) submitted an adult-written alternative report in 2004. The group employed a variety of methods to collect the views of young people. The report mentions that data was collected through research activities, such as interviews, and by holding round-table discussions where both adults and children were present. The report also mentions that interviews were conducted with children in institutions, but it does not indicate how

the children who participated were gathered together, or how the methods used were implemented. In order to collect additional information, teachers, defense lawyers, international organizations, NGOs and government representatives were also engaged through interviews and round-table discussions.

The report covers all areas of the CRC, but more specifically addresses the changes that have been made since the previous reporting session. There are recommendations given in the report; however, it is not clear whether these recommendations are from the children or from adults.

Country: Latvia

NGO: Save the Children Latvia

Date: 2006

Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/ber_zin_EN_ist.pdf

An adult-written report by Save the Children Latvia was submitted in 2006, which included the ideas and opinions of 9,000 children. The report states, that while adults wrote the report, their only tasks were to listen to the children, distribute questionnaires, process and compile data, and provide a brief evaluation of the data. The facilitators of this report stated that the viewpoints presented in the alternative report were quite different from the viewpoints given in the State report.

The report gave particular focus to the ideas and opinions of children at risk, which included children living in poverty, children who have lost parental care, children of ethnic minorities and children with HIV and AIDS. The facilitators gathered the opinions and ideas of these children by distributing questionnaires. The purpose was to solicit children's opinions on their situation using their own personal experience, and the goals were to "realize, summarize, and analyze" children's opinions and suggestions.

The questionnaire given to children who are living in poverty received 1,061 responses. While the questionnaire focused on the perspectives of children living in poverty, it also touched on how these children were treated within the school setting. These responses came from all four

areas of Latvia, with the highest response rate coming from Latgale (the poorest region in the European Union).

The questionnaire for children from ethnic minorities focused on finding out how to reduce and combat problems that were hindering the children's happiness. This survey was also completed in all four regions of Latvia, with the highest percentage of responses coming from Riga, as this is where the majority of ethnic minority children live. Children between the ages of nine-18 participated in the questionnaire, and in total 873 responses were received from 15 different ethnicities.

The questionnaire for children with disabilities was given to children who were enrolled in specialized schools. As a result, the responses only reflect part of the actual circumstances for children living with disabilities, as there are many who are not in schools. Children between the ages of 4–18 years participated in the survey, and results were received from all four areas of Latvia. In total, 178 responses to the questionnaire were received.

The questionnaire distributed to children who had lost parental care was given to 29 institutions, such as orphanages, social care centres and boarding schools. The children who participated were between the ages of 10–17.

Lastly a questionnaire was distributed to local newspapers, children's homes and refugee homes. Participants from a National Debate were also interviewed. The report did not include information about how the schools, institutions or other areas in which the questionnaire were given were chosen to participate. A total of 170 responses were received.

All of the questionnaires were written by volunteers at Save the Children Latvia, and were discussed repeatedly with experts in each of the "at-risk" areas; the results of the questionnaire were summarized and analyzed by experts. The NGO also posted results of the questionnaire on their website at <http://www.glabetbernus.lv> and <http://www.rnc-rtb.lv>.

Country: Netherlands

NGO: Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights

Date: 2002

Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.35/Netherlands_youth_ngo_report.pdf

The Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights submitted an adult-written alternative report in 2002. The opinions and suggestions of children were gathered through questionnaires and discussions. Adults developed all of the reporting processes, along with the questionnaires and interviews. In November of 2001, a daily newspaper published a questionnaire titled "Join the Discussion About Your Rights", and the facilitators received 6,600 responses from children between the ages of 8–20.

Discussions were also held in classrooms with a number of primary students between the ages of 8–17. The interviews were intended to be a theoretical approach to the questionnaire, concentrated on subjects such as teasing, discrimination, school and choice of school, their situation at home and sports.

Children who participated in the National Debate in 2001 also completed a questionnaire. Through the assistance of ATD Vierde Wereld (an organization which assists families in financial need), eight children from families in financial need were interviewed. A school located in Utrecht also helped the facilitators, and arranged for 11 children who had mild disabilities, six children with physical disabilities, and two girls with high IQs to be interviewed. The children who participated in this manner were between the ages of 11–19.

To gather the opinions and suggestions of children in children's homes, a questionnaire was published in a magazine called *House*, which is periodically distributed to youth care institutions. This questionnaire focused on topics such as regulations, group leaders, stress, pocket money and social workers. A total of 178 responses were received from children between the ages of 14–17; all of these children were part of youth councils in their homes.

Child refugees were also consulted through the assistance of Amabel (a meeting place for young asylum seekers), a total of 59 interviews took place. The interviewers found it was difficult for these children to open up, in part because of previous negative experiences. They found, however, that showing a video in which other young people were being interviewed, and allowing the children to have a mentor there with them helped the interview to proceed more smoothly. Additionally, a girl who was living in the Netherlands as an illegal immigrant was also interviewed; this was possible because one of the researchers knew the girl before the reporting process started, and a relationship of trust had already been built. The interviews took place at Amabel and in the children's homes. The subjects discussed in the interviews were school, home, health care, information, leisure time, the future and society in general.

To summarize the findings from the questionnaires, the team turned the responses into percentages. From the interviews, the team extracted the problems and suggestions given, and included direct quotes from the children in the report, which also includes suggestions that were given directly by the children.

Country: Sweden

NGO: NGO Network for the Rights of the Child

Date: 2004

Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.38/Sweden_ngo_report_NC.doc

The NGO Network for the Rights of the Child submitted an adult-written alternative report in 2004. The report was compiled using information gathered from hearings held by children between 2000 and 2003; the hearings are conducted once a year, and are a chance for children to ask their ministers how the CRC is being applied in Sweden. Each hearing is documented and then used to make an annual report that is disseminated throughout Sweden. These hearings are also the basis of the alternative reports given to the Committee. The report did not include any specific information about how the hearings are conducted, nor how children are invited to participate in the meetings.

There are two sections to the report: the first highlights the concerns of the steering committee of the NGO Coalition, and the second highlights the concerns that were raised by the children. Although adults wrote both sections, the only role for the adults was to take what the young people had said during the hearing and compile it into a report format. The second section of the report contains quotes from specific questions that children asked during the hearings. This report covers all the areas of the CRC.

Country: Uganda

NGO: Human Rights Watch

Date: 2005

Link: www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.40/Uganda_hrw_aids_ngo_report.pdf

Human Rights Watch submitted an adult-written alternative report in 2005. A few dozen children were interviewed to gather their opinions; the children were from the regions of Kampala, Mbale, Mbarara, Kabarole and Kasese.

Most of the interviews conducted were in English; translation was provided to those who needed it. The report was focused around the effects of HIV and AIDS and did not include any suggestions from the children; however, it does include quotes from children to support the information being provided.

Children who attended school, as well as those who did not, were interviewed. Various NGOs that provide education and services to child labourers, street children and children involved in the sex trade were contacted in order to reach out-of-school children.

Government representatives from the ministries of health and education, as well as the President and First Lady's Office also assisted in the collection of additional information. Numerous organizations and individuals with experience in the area of HIV and AIDS were also contacted as well. The facilitators also reviewed information from previous NGO reports and peer-reviewed literature.

Country: UK

NGO: The Children's Society

Date: 1999

Link: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.31/Children's_Society.doc

The Children's Society submitted an alternative report in 1999. The report was written by adults, but the views of 109 children between the ages of 12 months and 19 years were included, as well as direct quotes. The children who took part were already involved in other Children's Society projects; of this group, 56 per cent were under the age of 12. More girls participated than boys, and the majority of the children lived with their parents most of the time; however, there was a group of young people who were living in a young offenders institution.

Of the 109 children, 20 per cent were from ethnic minorities, and approximately 25 per cent said that they were following a religion; only seven per cent of the children said that they had a disability or a special need; though none had a physical disability or severe learning disability. The Children's Society recognized this shortcoming, and committed to addressing the views of children with disabilities in their next report.

Children were not asked about their economic status; however, most Children's Society projects are aimed at children living in "economically deprived" areas. For this reason, the writers of the report thought it was fair to assume that most of the children had some personal experience with poverty.

To gather the ideas and opinions of the children, discussion groups were organized for those 12-years-of age or older, and activity groups were organized for those under 12. However, these age divisions were not strictly enforced, as some children under 12 decided to participate in the discussion groups.

The discussion groups consisted of smaller groups of approximately six young people, who discussed what it

was like to be young in the UK, their understanding of children's rights, and action on children's rights. A total of 11 discussion groups, each lasting approximately two hours (with refreshment breaks) were held with 69 children. The discussions were tape-recorded with the permission of those involved.

Within various activity groups, children completed worksheets asking them to describe what it was like to be a child in the UK; to create a report on how well adults listen to children; to describe which rights they thought children should have; and to say what they thought could be done to make sure that children are happy, healthy, safe and have new opportunities. Children worked in pairs or in groups of three, with an adult close by to assist if needed. A total of 40 children participated. Each activity lasted for approximately an hour and a half, with time for refreshment breaks.

The children were also invited to send in their ideas and experiences of children's rights to the Children's Society's headquarters. These ideas came in the form of poetry, drawings, music, photographs and collages. Children under the age of five participated by creating collages and playing.

The activities took place across England and Wales, in 14 Children's Society local projects, throughout 1998 and early 1999. The activities were designed with the CRC and the UN Committee's Reporting Guidelines in mind, so that the information gathered would be as useful as possible. All children who participated received a gift certificate as well as a certificate to acknowledge their participation. For the children who were living in the young offenders institution, postal orders were sent, which they could use within the facility.

Before the activities took place, the facilitators provided the children with some additional information about why their participation was needed, and how the information they gave would be used. This included explaining the Children's Society's commitment to ensuring that the Committee had access to all the ideas, suggestions and

experiences that were presented during the activities. The Children's Society also let the children know that the information the children gave would be used by the Society when setting priorities and influencing public policy. As a final point, the Society reminded the children that their participation was completely voluntary, and that they could stop participating at any time.

The Children's Society hired two adults to carry out the discussion and activity groups, with the purpose of finding out how well children thought the CRC was being implemented, and how they thought children's rights could be improved. Although staff from the Society helped with the activity groups with younger children, most of the discussion groups were held in private and away from other adults. All of the group activities, with the exception of the ones in the young offenders institution, took place after school. The group in the young offenders institution took place during a time that was regularly scheduled for educational purposes.

Recommendations

Based on the review and analysis of the aforementioned reports, and interviews conducted with NGOs and other child participation experts, World Vision Canada has compiled the following recommendations to assist other organizations that wish to support children's participation in the periodic reporting process.

1) **Follow a comprehensive and ethical process:**

Including children in the alternative reporting process requires careful planning and implementation, and it is critical that a comprehensive and ethical process is followed. All too easily, child participation can become exploitive or tokenistic. Having a set of guidelines or a process to follow can assist those including children in the monitoring and reporting process.¹²

¹² Supra note 7.

- 2) **Record the process:** As is evident from the 16 reports summarized, children's participation is often not monitored and documented as closely as it could be. Documenting the methodologies and procedures used in the report will assist other organizations that wish to support children's participation in subsequent monitoring and reporting efforts. Including information such as how the children involved were gathered, what steps were taken to solicit their ideas and opinions, child protection policies that were adopted, and methods used to ensure that the children's views were not skewed between the gathering and writing of the report is essential. It is also valuable to record how children's participation impacted the children themselves, as well as how it impacted government's implementation of the CRC.
- 3) **Use direct quotes:** Including quotations from children within the report adds greater weight and validity to what is being presented. Including what children have said in their own words gives them more ownership of the report.
- 4) **Don't exclude the very young:** Often the very young are excluded from the participation experience. All children have valuable information to share; the challenge is to find ways for children of all ages and levels of maturity and ability to participate. Methods such as dramas/plays, collages and drawings are just some of the ways to get younger children involved in the reporting process.
- 5) **Network with others:** When an NGO decides to include children in the alternative reporting process, it is important to find other organizations that interact with children to seek out opportunities to collaborate. By partnering with a number of organizations, it is easier to reach a greater number of children from a wider range of backgrounds. You will also ensure that work is not being duplicated, and make better use of resources.
- 6) **Value the process and not just the product:** The participation of children within the monitoring and reporting process should be a means of empowering children and youth and contributing to the realization of their rights. Through participation in monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the CRC, children gain the opportunity to learn about their rights and hold their government accountable. Moreover, the process should also provide children with the tools they need to continue contributing to the realization of their own rights and the rights of others. The information gathered in the alternative report, in combination with the Committee's recommendations, can and should be used to promote further child participation. The information presented in the alternative report should be based on what is important to the children, and can lead to other advocacy efforts at the local, national and international levels. For instance, the children who participated in the reporting process may become motivated to see how their ideas and recommendations influenced the Committee's Concluding Observations, and may become involved in advocating that the government take action to implement the Committee's recommendations. Thus, a follow-up meeting with the children is one way to provide the children with additional skills development, and to discuss opportunities for further involvement in advocacy for the implementation of the CRC.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the analysis of various case studies in this report, there are numerous ways to include children within the alternative reporting process on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, the review of several previous alternative reports demonstrates that there is significant room for improvement in enhancing children's participation in the reporting process. While much has been written on the importance of children's participation and

on documenting best practices, these lessons learned have not been utilized to the fullest extent within the reporting process, and many children's voices are still unheard. Additionally, scant attention has been paid to the impact of children's participation on the Committee's Concluding Observations and on the implementation of the CRC at the local and national levels; further research is needed in this area.

Nevertheless, this review has provided some useful information on how children have participated in the reporting process in the past, and has resulted in several recommendations for those that wish to involve children in the

future. Based on this review, World Vision Canada has produced draft guidelines, *Children as change agents: Guidelines for participation in periodic reporting on the CRC*, on how to include children within the alternative reporting process. It is World Vision's hope that these guidelines will provide those seeking to promote children's participation within the monitoring and reporting processes with the tools they need to help make the participation more meaningful and effective. Most importantly, it needs to be emphasized that participation is the right of every child, and the onus is on adults—including governments and NGOs—to take the necessary steps to ensure that this right is fulfilled.

