Research assessment

Creating an enabling environment

Capacity building in children's participation Save the Children Sweden, Viet Nam, 2000-2004

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FOREWORD

Promotion of children's right to participate is a key principle for Save the Children Sweden (SCS) because children's participation is established as one of the principles that ensure all other rights to protection, survival and development.

For SCS there are two main reasons for promoting children's right to participate and be heard:

- First, and most importantly, children and young people are fully functioning members of society, recognized as citizens, and as such they are entitled to the rights accorded to adult members of society;
- Second, there is evidence that involving children in a meaningful way in activities that have an impact on their lives does improve the results of development activities.

Save the Children Sweden's strategy on children's participation focuses on contributing to the conceptual understanding of children's participation, together with ensuring mainstreaming it into all programmes and projects. This is combined with supporting innovative approaches and pilot projects. Building the capacity of Save the Children staff, as well as staff of partner organizations and other stakeholders, is crucial to achieving these goals.

In 2000, SCS in Viet Nam embarked on a process of capacity building in children's participation by conducting an assessment of the understanding of children's participation among its staff, partners and other agencies, as well as the level of children's participation. The recommendations from this assessment formed the basis for a capacity-building programme, which was based on a focus on working with adults rather than children – giving priority to increasing understanding and capacity of all staff and management within our own organization before working with our partners in the field. A children's participation advisor and a programme officer on children's participation were appointed to this end. Subsequent work with partners aimed to sensitize them and to build their capacity and skills to make meaningful participation of children become a reality. Save the Children Sweden programme officers in Viet Nam were able to support partners in their work with children and to provide them with regular feedback and advice. Opportunities were created for the involvement of children, through pilot projects relating to children-friendly

learning environments in schools and a children-friendly district in Ho Chi Minh City. National forums were organized where children could discuss and share their experiences about issues affecting their lives.

All this work aimed to contribute to creating an enabling environment for children's participation – providing opportunities for children to participate and ensuring that adults have the knowledge and skills to facilitate children's involvement.

Creating en enabling environment aims to give an account of how SCS in Viet Nam went about creating an enabling environment, taking stock of the capacity-building process and deriving lessons for further promoting the participation of children.

The main conclusions of the assessment are that:

- Although there is a higher degree of awareness of children's participation as a result of the programme, there is still some way to go to ensure a better conceptual understanding of participation as one of the main principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- There is a need to develop a focused strategy with emphasis on developing tools and practices that ensure the principles of children's participation are applied.

I am happy to say that the conclusions and recommendations of the assessment are already being taken into account in our plans, and will be central to developing future strategies on promoting the human rights of children.

Promoting children's participation is a new area for most organizations and practitioners. When this work began in 2000 we knew that we were embarking on new territory and that it would be a process of learning lessons and also making mistakes.

It is my hope that the lessons from this exercise, as described in this assessment, will be useful for other organizations and practitioners in the same field, and that they will go a long way to ensuring that children's rights in general, and their right to be heard and participate in particular, are ensured in all spheres of life.

In conclusion, I should like to thank the authors of this assessment for a very well-written report and for providing clear conclusions and recommendations. I should also like to thank our partners and my colleagues in SCS for willingly participating in, and contributing to, further developing this area of work.

Herluf G. Madsen
Regional Representative
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The research assessment described in this report was a complex process, which relied on the cooperation of a large number – and considerable variety – of people in Viet Nam and elsewhere. Our primary debt is to the children and adults who gave up their time to share their experiences with us. In addition, the research benefited from the support of the staff of Save the Children Sweden in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, especially the former Resident Representative, Britta Östrom, current Representative, Herluf G. Madsen and Dinh Thi Quynh Mai, as well as Bill Tod from Save the Children UK, Matthew Frey from Save the Children US, Junko Fujiwara from Save the Children Japan, the Alliance CPWG in Viet Nam, representatives of CPFC, MOET, Youth Union and the National Standing AIDS Bureau. In Ho Chi Minh City, we should particularly like to thank Le Quang Nguyen, SCS staff, and Nguyen Van Tuong and Nguyen Tien Dat, Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively of the Peoples' Committee of District 4; the Peoples' Committees of Wards 1, 6 and 14, as well as the 'core group' of children, together with teachers and parents in District 4. Outside Viet Nam, we should like to thank the international colleagues who supported the research, particularly Mark Capaldi.

Perhaps the greatest debt of gratitude in the complex, bilingual research assessment process is to translators of documents and drafts, as well as interpreters in workshops and during data collection. The researchers would therefore like to thank all of them for their able and excellent work, including the way they enthusiastically entered in to the spirit of the process itself.

We are grateful to the Save the Children Alliance in Viet Nam for their support and financial contributions. We hope that this report will be useful for others working in the relatively new field of evaluating children's participation.

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SUMMARY

Since 2000, Save the Children Sweden in Viet Nam, based in Hanoi, has operated a capacity-building programme for administrators, all levels of management and project officers at a number of project sites. The intention of this work has been that adults will be trained to change their perception of children's participation. In addition, a consistent objective has been to create and support forums and exchanges between children and officials at all levels, on matters of concern to the children. The long-term aim was to raise awareness of children's participation in social and cultural activities directly linked to their development, as well as of their potential for political participation.

After some five years of engaging in this programme in Viet Nam, Save the Children Sweden decided to re-evaluate these activities, with particular focus on training and other programme operations following the engagement of Henk van Beers as Regional Advisor in 2000. The subsequent research assessment, which is described in this Report, aimed to provide an overview of past experiences, to describe the successes and failures of the programme and to build the basis for planning future programmes to further children's participation in Viet Nam and elsewhere.

The assessment combined three simultaneous research processes using a single research protocol, designed by the three research teams to assess:

- Children-friendly district in Ho Chi Minh City;
- National forums for children;
- The impact of the capacity-building programme in the Southeast Asia and Pacific region (SEAP) and globally.

The research process was rights-based, including children's views and experiences, using appropriate methods and ethical procedures. It was also participatory in that it included the Regional Advisor at all stages of the research, from planning to writing this Report.

Conclusions

The capacity-building programme in Viet Nam between 2000 and 2004 took place in the context of increasing debates about, and activities in, children's participation worldwide. Children's opinions are increasingly sought on a variety of topics and their presence is increasingly encouraged in spheres that

were until recently regarded as the exclusive province of adults. Yet, despite widespread use of the term 'children's participation', there is no general consensus about what it means, let alone how to assess it. Indeed, despite being a 'buzzword' in international development circles, uncertainties about its meaning and usefulness seem to be encouraging a growing backlash against the idea in conservative circles. Even among the principal theorists and practitioners it is clear that there is a global crisis that is characterized by:

- A concrete split between those working with and for child workers and debates and activities about children's citizenship;
- Demands for political correctness that lead to the requirement for children to be present in international meetings without sufficient preparation or protection;
- Debates about the ethics of participation that leave the door wide open for critics of 'child participation' to stop it happening.

The results of this were reflected in the data collected for this Report from people working in the field of children's participation both inside Viet Nam and at regional and national levels. It was found that international support available for the capacity-building programme, in terms of working tools and materials, was variable in its usefulness. Although many toolkits and manuals have been published, these are more notable for their rhetorical espousal of children's participation than concrete guidelines and tools that can be used by practitioners on the ground. Detailed, accurate documentation of experiences tends to be lacking.

A further general observation made by the researchers is that few people working in children's participation really appear to believe in it; a tendency towards political correctness was notable in the responses of some adult research participants. It is not clear if this is a result of the programme, or because respondents felt they had to give 'correct answers'. Unanimity was expressed to a certain extent on more sensitive issues such as girls' education. Yet, when tested or probed, opinions on children's participation appeared to be superficial and/or confused. Thus the data included statements about how children 'should be' that varied across age groups and cultures. 'Western' or Westernized adults (aged 25-60 years) appeared to be idealistic rather than pragmatic (for example 'strongly disagreeing' that children should obey adults). With some exceptions, Save the Children professionals appear not to be well-informed about children, but to set unrealistic goals for children's participation.

Rights and participation

- Rights in general, and children's rights in particular, are poorly understood, including by people whose main employment focuses on children's participation, many of whom have developed their own interpretations and understandings;
- In Viet Nam, children's participation is not well understood, although the idea (whatever it is) is well-accepted. The reasons for the lack of understanding are not based in 'traditional attitudes', despite the way outsiders use this as an explanation;
- 'Participation' is a moving target, which tends to be variously described rather than confidently defined. Because they are descriptive, definitions are teleological;
- 'Participation' is often closely related to, or even confused with, the CRC on the one hand and children's needs on the other (or both) rather than seen to be rooted in human rights;
- Forums were 'compelling evidence' for children's ability to participate;
- Children's participation is regarded as a children's activity – not related to adults' participation rights – since (thus far) there is little evidence of shared (adult-child) participation. Nevertheless, it was stated by many that children should be involved in adult organizations (but with some caveats).

The capacity-building programme

- No negative impacts are reported in this research and in general the aims (albeit vague) have been achieved, but most information gathered refers to processes rather than to results and, with no baseline data, it is difficult to assess impact other than by recall;
- Positive impacts remarked upon seem to have been due to a large extent (especially in the region) to the personal efforts and energies of the Regional Advisor. Thus an important recommendation is that a strategic plan for institutionalizing and de-personalizing capacity building should be made and implemented. This also needs a consistent enabling environment at national, regional and international levels, taking local ideas and initiatives as the building blocks;
- Perceptions of the capacity-building programme activities are extremely varied and not always correct;

- Possibly related to this, although the programme is well-accepted and has generated interest, it may not have generated enthusiasm, largely because it has been focused on one person rather than promoted by Save the Children as an integral part of all programming.

Recommendations

Strategic plan

Develop a strategic plan for institutionalizing and de-personalizing capacity building in children's participation:

- An enabling environment based in local ideas and initiatives, systems of governance and civil society;
- Appropriate institutional structures in SCS;
- Sophisticated/appropriate communication systems for distributing information.

Planning for enhanced/extended capacity building

- Training and reinforcement of training in facilitation, for adults and for young people, including manuals based on actual experiences;
- Ensure that training has a broader base, so that it results in people understanding participation, rather than giving 'correct answers';
- Base training on human rights, to improve understanding of the context of children's participation, including:
    - o History and chronology of human rights;
    - o Promoting better understanding of the history and mechanisms of the CRC;
    - o History and chronology of 'participation' as a human right and within development practice;
    - o Developing locally appropriate (and where necessary children-appropriate) publications and other materials for capacity building.
- Standardize global tool kits and manuals for local, practical understanding and application;
- Develop materials that clarify, in local terms, the global debates on children's participation, specifically the use of terms such as 'citizen' and 'democracy' within different forms of governance in the SEAP region.

Plan for further children's participation

- Provide more opportunities at all levels (especially commune) for children to participate through giving their opinions on current issues, ensuring that these opportunities are:
  - Integrated with adult decision-making bodies and activities;
  - Well, and appropriately, covered by the media;
- Provide training in children's participation for decision-makers and media;
- Reduce competition and emphasis on results within children's participation as a whole;
- Involve children in planning children's participation, including selection processes, meeting planning and setting agendas;
- Promote the development of commune-level children's groups/councils;
- Link with/build on experiences in District 4 Ho Chi Minh City;
- Develop materials for preparing children for participation;
- Ensure sustainability and follow-up, including financial support.

'Children-friendly' planning

- Build on experiences of District 4 Ho Chi Minh City, to develop further children-friendly districts (urban and rural);
- Research the idea of 'children-friendly' through exploring children's opinions;
- Promote better understanding of children's participation within the teaching profession and educational structures;
- Develop mechanisms through which all children are integrated into participatory processes in schools;
- Link and network children-friendly districts and schools.

Enabling environments

- In collaboration with other agencies and government counterparts, develop minimum standards for preparation and protection of children who participate in meetings outside their local communities;
- Training for 'chaperones' and translators;
- Contribute to establishing clear standards and guidelines for adult behaviour and responsibilities with respect to children's participation;
- Establish, promote and implement children-friendly complaints procedures.

ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term/acronym	Definition/explanation
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations.
Child/children	Human being(s) less than 18 years of age.
Children-friendly	As in 'children-friendly district', 'children-friendly school/learning environment', the term children-friendly refers to the concept of developing an environment that enables children to become full participants in, for example, community or school life. In this Report, 'children-friendly' is used in preference to 'child-friendly' because more than one child is involved.
CFD	Children-Friendly District, in this case District 4 in Ho Chi Minh City.
Confidentiality	The principle of confidentiality means that information gathered during research, through which individuals might be identified, is not made available at any time to anyone who is not directly involved in the research, unless the individual concerned has given specific permission.
CPCC	Committee for the Protection and Care of Children, established 1991 by the Government of Viet Nam, with change of name and - to a certain extent - remit in 2002 (see CPFC).
CPFC	Committee for Population, Family and Children, formerly CPCC.
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Donor	Agency (usually international) providing funds for project or programme activities.
ECPAT	ECPAT International is an international network of NGOs with a secretariat in Bangkok, with the objective of combating the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The acronym 'ECPAT' originally stood for 'End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism', but the organization has had a global remit since 1996.
Ethics	Moral principles or rules of conduct.
Evaluation	Systematic assessment of progress or achievement, measured against agreed criteria.
Facilitator	Facilitate means 'make easy to achieve'. A facilitator helps people to achieve goals in research or workshops.
Forum	In this Report, a Forum is a national-level meeting to establish children's views on a specific topic.
Informed consent	Voluntary agreement to participation in research, based on an individual fully understanding the goals, methods, benefits and risks of the study. Informed consent is given on the understanding that it can be withdrawn at any time.
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh City.
HIV/AIDS	Human immune-deficiency virus/acquired immune-deficiency syndrome.
INGO	International non governmental organization (for example, Save the Children Sweden).
ISCA	International Save the Children Alliance.
Institutionalization	With respect to children's participation, this term refers to the goal of integrating children's opinions

	in decisions taken at all levels of society – in homes, families, care outside the family, schools, the justice system, communities and the nation.
Mainstreaming	Including an issue, such as 'children's participation', in all programme policies and activities, rather than creating a new, separate programme.
Mass organization	Nationwide, quasi-governmental organization for a specific interest group, such as 'women' or 'youth'.
MINCON	Ministerial Conference of ASEAN Countries on children in the SEAP region (2001, Beijing; 2003, Bali; 2005, Siem Reap).
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
NGO	Non governmental organization.
NPA	National Plan of Action.
Participation	There is no single agreed definition of 'participation'. One of the purposes of this Report is to examine the practical outcomes of this definitional uncertainty. Thus no single definition of participation is used throughout the Report. The literature on 'participation' (whether applied to children or adults) often uses the term to mean involvement in decision making and planning, within activities, projects and programmes. However, in the data-collection phase of this research assessment, a broader definition was used – 'presence in a meeting or process' – regardless of the roles and responsibilities involved. This Report explores and analyses different uses of the term, which occurred in the data collected from various groups of respondents.

Partner	Organization (usually a local NGO) supported by a donor agency.
Primary data	Data collected through direct contact with research respondents in the course of a specific research process.
Protocol	Instruction manual for data collection, including definitions of key terms, all research tools, ethical procedures and all other details of research design.
Questionnaire	Form with questions, often with pre-defined answers from which respondents make their choices.
Region	In this Report: Southeast Asia and the Pacific.
Research	Purposeful, scientific data collection and analysis.
Research question	A question a research project aims to answer, which follows from the research aim. Research questions structure the research. They should not be confused with lower-level questions asked in interviews or questionnaires.
Research tool	Purpose-designed research instrument to gather systematic answers to specific research questions. These tools are structured within a data-gathering protocol.
Respondent	A person being interviewed or studied, who answers a questionnaire or takes part in other research activities.
SCA	Save the Children Alliance in Viet Nam.
SCS	Save the Children Sweden (formerly known by the Swedish name Rädda Barnen).

SEAP	Save The Children Sweden, Southeast Asia and Pacific region.
Secondary data	Any existing information collected for other studies or purposes. Secondary data includes books, published or unpublished research reports, theses, statistics, records, media articles, videos, photographs or films.
Special Session	United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children, New York 2002.
Transparency	Presenting information so that it is accessible and clear to everyone (particularly referring to use of funds and the ways decisions have been reached).
Triangulation	Cross-checking between data collected from different groups or using different methods/tools.
UN	United Nations.
UN Study	United Nations Secretary General's Global Study on Violence Against Children.
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund.

1: ASSESSING CAPACITY BUILDING IN CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

This Report presents and analyses the data from a three-tier research process in Viet Nam. It examines and is the product of a particular international non governmental organization working at a specific moment in the history of children's rights, in collaboration with other international NGOs but, most importantly, with government agencies. This organization, Save the Children Sweden (SCS) Viet Nam, does not implement projects directly in Viet Nam but works through partnerships with government at central, provincial and local level and with mass organizations. This requires mutual understanding about the roles and responsibilities of each partner and a shared vision of objectives and strategies. SCS works in a number of programme areas in Viet Nam, including abuse and exploitation (child labour, physical punishment, emotional abuse and violence), education (inclusive education, children-friendly learning environment, children's rights in school), media and governance (macro-economics, children and justice). Accordingly, a strategy to promote children's participation had to focus on many different professional groups at different levels.

History and objectives of the research assessment

In 2000, as part of the global Save the Children Alliance strategy to mainstream children's participation SCS conducted an exploratory assessment in Viet Nam on the understanding of children's participation among its staff, partners and other agencies, as well as the level of children's participation (Beers, 2000). This showed that children were involved to a certain degree in research – mainly as respondents. To a lesser extent, children were involved in practical support projects. Depending on the activities, abilities and attitudes of partners of SCS, children were occasionally involved in other aspects of programmes, but seldom in decision-making processes.

The assessment encouraged SCS to embark on a process of capacity building on children's participation for its own office staff, as well as for its partners in Viet Nam and, to a certain extent, in the Southeast Asia and Pacific (SEAP) region. From the start it was acknowledged that capacity building would take time and patience – changing attitudes and internalizing children's participation cannot happen overnight.

Save the Children Sweden in Viet Nam based its strategy of promoting children's participation mainly on the recommendation of the 2000 assessment that SCS should first work towards demystifying children's participation, in order to arrive at a common and shared understanding within the organization itself – staff, management and partners – about what children's participation entails (Beers, 2000). It was suggested that this would allow staff and partners of SCS to set their own goals for enhancing children's participation within their specific programme or project context.

The report of the 2000 assessment acknowledged that further skills were needed to involve children in programming (Beers, 2000). Training was therefore recommended to enhance the skills and knowledge of staff and partners of SCS in Viet Nam and the SEAP region. This was seen as part of a larger capacity-building process, aimed at sustainability by developing and building on local resources in the SCS office and among its partners, linking key persons and institutions through sharing experiences, dissemination, networking, and exposure of stakeholders to new ideas and different approaches in involving children in programming. The international consultant who had carried out the assessment in 2000, Henk van Beers, was recruited as Regional Advisor, with both national and regional remits, to advise on capacity building, assisted by a Vietnamese programme officer.

In 2004 the three-year cycle of promoting children's participation concluded with the research assessment described in this Report, to draw out the lessons learnt and to provide guidance and baseline information for future work on children's participation. At the same time, an evaluation was undertaken of three national forums with children, which were held between 2001 and 2003 and were organized by the Save the Children Alliance in Viet Nam (SCA), Plan International and the Committee for Population Family and Children (CPFC, formerly CPCC), as well as a review of children's participation in the Children-Friendly District (CFD) Project in District 4 of Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). The reports from these two research processes fed into an overall documentation and assessment of capacity building in children's participation; which examined the quality and cost-effectiveness of inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes, making recommendations about future SCS work in children's participation in Viet Nam and the SEAP region. The overall assessment results in this Report will feed into the SCS Viet Nam planning process for the next three-year cycle, 2005-2007.

What is a research assessment?

This Report documents a process of assessment rather than an evaluation, principally because neither baseline nor longitudinal data were available. Evaluation research is usually taken to mean research that looks at intended and unintended consequences of policies and practices – including measurement, made against agreed criteria, of the extent to which stated goals and objectives have been met, often involving causal inferences. However, in the case of the capacity-building programme, there were no coherent objectives within the programme documents from which criteria for objective evaluation might be derived. Objectives – like participation itself – were recorded differently over time as the programme developed. This evolving nature of objectives for the capacity-building process was perhaps inevitable given the statement of global and national SCS staff, in the introduction to a related regional publication on rights-based programming, that such work is 'a journey of discovery: exploring new ideas, challenging established beliefs and ways of working and searching for solutions beyond the boundaries of conventional development and human rights work' (Britta Östrom and Eva Geidenmark in Theis, 2004, vii).

In addition, the three components of the research assessment studied slightly different aspects of children's participation, which in itself is a contested area, in which definitions tend to be descriptions of vague ideals, rather than observable facts. Beyond the simple definition of participation as 'being there', this Report takes a practical, rather than legal or ideological, standpoint, according to which the quality of participation should be judged in terms of what is possible in the circumstances: 'not ... the token involvement of children, but how to incorporate their specific needs and views into decision-making processes within the context of what is possible institutionally and culturally' (Johnson and Ivan-Smith, 1998, 3). The Children-Friendly District research was designed principally as a mid-term review of a specific programme of development of children's participation in communities and families (Chau et al, 2004). The research on the 'forums' was a retrospective consideration of the processes and impacts of three related national meetings of Vietnamese children (Long and Son, 2004). The capacity-building programme had various inputs to both these activities, and the assessment in this Report, which makes substantial use of the reports on both CFD and forums, tends to focus as much on capacity building processes as the 'quality' or 'level' of children's participation achieved – even if this were measurable in the current state of knowledge and understanding of the topic.

A further consideration is that the field of evaluation studies does not yet include consistent criteria for evaluating children's participation. Most studies, as has been noted elsewhere, provide lists of criteria masquerading as indicators, based on varying ideological assumptions (Ennew and Hastadewi, 2004). Moreover, there is a tendency for the positive results claimed to be founded on little or no systematic evidence. Claims may be made on the basis of opinions voiced by practitioners rather than using objective evidence to make causal links. In addition, attempts are seldom made to record negative effects.

This Report, therefore takes a less restrictive definition of evaluation, which is to appraise or assess in order to formulate criteria and infer reasons for certain outcomes. This is essentially a normative process, and the values upon which the assessment is made are of necessity those espoused by Save the Children. Nevertheless, this is a research Report, which seeks to make inferences on the basis of systematic investigation in order to establish facts and reach conclusions. It follows that one hoped-for outcome of the research assessment will be agreed indicators for measuring and monitoring the inputs, processes, outputs and impacts of future programmes based on the analysis of data collected.

Rights-based research methodology[1]

If Save the Children programming is to be truly rights-based, it should be based on information from rights-based research. The methodology, or philosophical basis, of any social science research determines the type of method that is used. Methodology defines, for example, how researchers view the people in the population that is being studied. The CRC, which is the framework for Save the Children rights-based programming, establishes children as subjects of rights and as active participants in their own lives, with views and information that must be listened to and respected (CRC Article 12). This means that, although adults' perceptions are not devalued, they are not taken to be the sole authority on children's lives. It also means recognizing that children do not always have the same verbal skills as adults. Thus researchers are obliged to find research methods that help children to express themselves. Direct verbal approaches used with adults, such as interviews and questionnaires, are not appropriate for use with children (CRC Article 13). Other methods that can produce better, more verifiable, data include role plays, drawings and group discussions.

[1] This section is based on a presentation made by one of the authors in Lao PDR at a Save the Children Alliance workshop in November 2004, reported in Save the Children, 2005.

The right to be properly researched is implicit in the CRC, not only in the much misunderstood 'participation' articles, but also in various provisions for standards of professional competence, for protection against the production of poor data and for protection against exploitation through inappropriate dissemination of information.

> Article 12 1. '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'. This means that children's perspectives and opinions must be integral to research.
>
> Article 13 1. 'The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice'. This means that methods need to be found, and used, to help children to express their perspectives and opinions freely in research.
>
> Article 3 3. 'States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, the numbers and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision'. This means that research must conform to the highest possible scientific standards, and that researchers must be carefully recruited and supervised.
>
> Article 36 protects children from 'all...forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare', which means that children must not be harmed or exploited through taking part in research (including dissemination of results).

Taken overall, the principles in these four Articles, together with the basic human rights principles of dignity and respect, entail that children should be partners in research and that an ethical strategy must be an integral part of all research design. In addition, a scientific (systematic) method must be used at all times, which enables what is sometimes called 'qualitative' research to produce reliable, quantitative data. More than one method must be used and the results from different methods and research partners compared and contrasted for accurate analysis. In addition, adult researchers have ethical responsibilities to children in research (Morrow and Richards, 1996).

Structure of the Report

Following this introductory chapter, this Report examines the largely-documentary information about the context in which the capacity-building programme took place, with attention to the approach taken to participation by the Government of Viet Nam over time, and the response of SCS in Viet Nam.

The third chapter describes the research process, in which three embedded research projects took place using a common protocol and core set of research tools. This chapter also describes the methods used and their limitations, as well as the types and numbers of research participants.

Chapters 4 and 5 describe and analyze the research data, using both quantitative and qualitative analysis, comparing and contrasting the data collected from different groups and using different tools.

The final chapter turns to a deeper analysis of what the data mean and makes recommendations both for the practice of children's participation and for future SCS programming in Viet Nam.

2: AN 'ENABLING ENVIRONMENT'?

Many of the documents consulted for this research assessment, from SCS Viet Nam and other agencies within the Save the Children Alliance, refer to the need to create an 'enabling environment' for participation to take place. Building human capacity would seem to be a necessity for such an environment to be developed. Yet, the term itself was queried during the first workshop to plan the research assessment in April 2004. Vietnamese participants suggested that 'enabling environment' is too vague – despite its widespread use – because 'enabling' factors are not specified and 'participation' is not defined. Paradoxically, after analyzing both secondary and primary data, we decided that, despite being unclear, 'enabling environment' is the connecting theme throughout this Report. The research assessment task became as much a reflection on what an enabling environment might, could or should be, as an account of the orthodox concerns of evaluation, such as achievement of objectives, cost effectiveness and efficiency. Indeed, the Report can also be regarded as an assessment of the existing cultures of participation (Kirby, 2003) in the various agencies involved, and the implications of these for the quality and level of participation that they bring about: 'An organization's culture of participation helps to predict the amount of time, effort and resources an agency is likely to spend on children's participation, which children will be involved and what they are involved in' (Theis, 2004, 116).

Global history of 'children's participation'

As we have already stated, the operational starting point for the research assessment – the term 'participation' – was taken to mean children's 'presence in a meeting or process' regardless of the roles and responsibilities involved. The aim of the assessment was neither to define participation nor assess the extent to which it had been achieved, but rather to find out what actually happened as the result of the capacity-building processes initiated by SCS, and what 'participation' meant to various groups of child and adult 'participants'. Nevertheless, our examination of some current debates about children's participation in this chapter contextualizes the assessment in both international and Vietnamese spheres. Some actions taken by adults, as well as expectations of what might happen and perceptions of what did happen, depended on how children's participation was constructed within different political and ideological frameworks.

During the research, one question adult respondents were asked in structured interviews was 'What is the origin of the idea of children's participation'. The rationale for this was to examine the extent to which people whose job generally included a mandate to promote children's participation knew about the somewhat complex history of the idea. As expected, most were unable to locate any origin other than the 1989 CRC, which we would argue is a very limited notion. Even though the CRC might be argued to be the origin of a certain legal notion of children's participation (in Articles 12, 13 and 15 in particular), the fact that participation applies to children is fundamental to human rights as expressed in UN legal documents from 1945 (and to a certain extent in the earlier documents of the League of Nations). The CRC simply made it specific that, for human beings less than 18 years of age, participation is modified in view of their 'evolving capacities' (Van Bueren, 1995; Lansdown, 2004). This emphasizes limitations on children's participation, rather than promoting it as a universal children's right. In addition to this legal meaning, as we shall show, children's participation is inscribed in other discourses, principally in the fields of education and community development, which predate 1989, but to which the CRC has given additional legitimacy.

The precise historical point at which a separate notion of children's participation first arose cannot be located. Indeed it is wiser to seek its genealogy in several different lines of thought. Some oblique references to children's rights were made in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy and humanism, but these had little immediate effect. During the nineteenth century, many social and legal developments resulted in the near-universal, international definition of 'childhood' that is reflected in the text of the CRC. However, many of these changes were not intended to increase children's participation in families, communities and societies – indeed they can be argued to have had quite the opposite intention and effects, even though the twentieth century has been called the 'century of the child' (Key, 1900, quoted in Ennew, 2002).

When 'children's participation' is used today it tends to have a meaning specific to the late twentieth century, even though the Save the Children Alliance tends to associate this almost exclusively with the English Edwardian activist, Eglantyne Jebb, who founded the Save the Children Movement in 1919 and whose draft Declaration of Child Rights became the 'Geneva Declaration' of Child Rights of the League of Nations in 1924. Nevertheless, this Declaration, like its successor, the 1954 United Nations Declaration of the

Rights of the Child, was more concerned with provision and protection than with participation. In 1920, the Polish paediatrician and children's welfare activist, Janusz Korczak, who was a contemporary of Jebb, made an elaborate statement to the effect that children were listening but were in some way awaiting their turn to speak (Lifton, 1988), which reflected earlier ideas of natural rights, rather than the legislation-based civil rights that are the basis of the current body of human rights (Sieghart, 2003). In addition to legal activists, and more in line with natural rights thinking, the 1930s and, to a greater extent, 1960s were noted for the so-called children's liberation movement. In the 1960s this was loosely associated with the student and youth revolutions of the time and – because it mistakenly assumed that all human beings should be self-determining from birth to death – was sometimes hijacked into debates about their rights to sexual self-determination (for a refutation of this position, see Finkelhor, 1979).

The three principal areas from which current understanding of 'participation' has arisen are education, community development and human rights. These are by no means mutually exclusive, nor are they the only areas since other disciplines such as law, psychology, paediatrics, psychiatry and sociology might justifiably claim to have made significant contributions. For the purpose of our assessment, however, these three areas have particular significance.

Education

Historically, the idea of children's participation has existed in the theory and practice of education far longer than in other arenas. Some educationalists such as John Dewey (1957), Maria Montessori (1949), A. S. Neill (1962 & 1967) and Elise Boulding (1979 & 1988) made significant theoretical contributions, often converting their theories into practices that have had long-lasting influence. Their pioneering work began in the 1920s and reached its height of popularity in the late 1950s and 1960s, giving birth to the notions of free schools, mutual learning between pupils and teachers and, to varying degrees, including children making decisions about the structure, content and governance of their educational experiences (see for example Montessori, 1949). The links between this and children's liberation were quite strong. But, rather than enduring success and expansion, many of the original ideas have persisted in a much-weakened form. Since only a very small minority of children ever experience this kind of education, its value has mainly been its contribution to theory.

Nevertheless, in some developing countries over the past three or four decades, there has been a movement towards children's participation in their own learning. Starting with the adult literacy approaches promoted by Paolo Freire in Latin America (Freire, 1972 for example) this has been adapted elsewhere to (largely pilot) programmes of active learning, or dialogue between teacher and children, challenging the one-way process in which teachers dominate. In South Asia this is sometimes called 'joyful learning'. In Viet Nam it is related to children-friendly schools promoted through SCS and other INGOs in partnership with the Government of Viet Nam, which were included in the research assessment. 'Joyful learning' is said to empower not only children but also their teachers:

> Built on the premise that a motivated teacher and a satisfied student are the best way of transforming an education system, the teacher empowerment/joyful learning strategy is based on the belief that primary teachers can be motivated and successful if they receive sufficient trust, support and guidance. Parents will send their children to school if the learning experience is made relevant, effective and enjoyable (UNICEF, 1998, 42).

Less notable in developing countries are schools' councils, through which children participate in the governance of their schools, which are promoted by some as an ideal way to develop children's skills for responsible citizenship in democratic societies (Hart, 1997 for example). Related to this, and perhaps more widespread, are children's municipal councils, parliaments and other forums, in which they are now able to discuss and express views on a wide variety of topics that are seen as pertinent to them. The issues range from local environmental and leisure activities to discussions on the merits and demerits of children's work, the global environment and international peace. Whilst they have existed in one form or another since the middle of the twentieth century, children's councils and parliaments became more common during the 1980s, particularly in Europe. Nevertheless, Mary John (1999) has described one of the better known Indian children's parliaments in Rajasthan, which was set up as a means of delivering at least basic democracy to some of the country's poorest children. In the SEAP region, children's councils are active in Hong Kong, Indonesia, Mongolia and The Philippines.

Community development

Children's participation is now recognized as a practical necessity in programme work at community level. Experience has shown that if adults design projects without taking children's views into account, the result will be failure because the activities are irrelevant, unattractive or even harmful to children. This is an extension of the move towards community-based participation of adults since the early 1970s, based on the idea that community members should participate in the development process by providing their own views and perceptions. This has led to a development orthodoxy with its own language, including terms such as 'stakeholders', 'ownership' of 'problems/solutions' and 'empowerment' (Beazley and Ennew, 2006). Yet, in general, 'community members' have not included children. One of the foremost exponents of this approach, Robert Chambers, wrote in the late 1990s that 'Appreciating the potential of children's participation has taken time' and 'For their reality to be recognized and to count they have ... to rely on sensitive insight and enabling by adults' (Chambers, 1998, xvi-xvii). Children are now increasingly included as participants in community-level research about problems and how to solve them. The 2000 assessment, which formed the basis for the assessment of capacity-building in participation in Viet Nam, noted that children had been included as research informants, and that researchers asked for further skills in research with children (Beers, 2000).

Nevertheless, some writers have suggested that participation is 'the new tyranny', in the name of which vulnerable people, be they adults or children, are coerced into activities and decisions for which they are unprepared and that almost always overburden them in the name of (limited and largely spurious) 'empowerment' (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). This is only one of the critical views contributing to a growing global crisis on the topic of participation, which we discuss later in this chapter.

Human rights

Under the 1945 UN Charter, participation in community and national decision-making was established as a universal human right, often equated with the right to vote. Yet this entailed a contradiction for children because the right to vote is associated with a minimum age – usually between 18 and 21 years of age. Thus children's rights to participation appear to be different from those of adults, related to their status as 'human becomings' – who will have rights in the future – rather than 'human beings' – who are subjects of rights whatever their age (See Qvortrup, 1991 for an elaboration of this point).

For more than three decades after 1945, children's rights were seldom the focus of direct international legislation, with the exception of recognition of their right to special protection and the consolidation of half-a-century of International Labour Organization legislation in the 1972 Minimum Age Convention (Ennew, Myers and Plateau, 2005). A UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, in 1959, was not a legally-binding document and did not include what would now be called 'participation rights'. A draft version of a proposed Convention on the Rights of the Child, submitted to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN by the Government of Poland in February 1978, in preparation for the UN International Year of the Child in 1979, likewise did not include participatory rights. However, a twelve-point revised draft submitted to the UN, once again by the Government of Poland, in October 1979 included as Article 7 the basis of what became Article 12 of the 1989 CRC. Thus the current children's-rights notion of participation developed (Detrick, 1997).

Article 12 can be argued to be a somewhat reduced version of the human right to participation enshrined in the UN Charter of 1945 and subsequent instruments (Ennew, Myers and Plateau, 2005). So it is interesting that participation was so strongly associated with the CRC by respondents to the research assessment (in common we suspect with most of those who work to promote children's participation). The term 'participation' only occurs in the text of the 1989 CRC with respect to Article 23 – the rights of children with disabilities. The so-called 'participation articles' (usually limited to Articles 12-15, although some include Article 17 on the right to information) do not, in fact, use the word at all.

The term 'children's participation rights' came into common use during and after the drafting process for the CRC, when Defence for Children International and UNICEF began to think about ways of promoting the CRC and developed the division of children's rights into the 'Three Ps': provision, protection and participation (Lurie, 2003). The intention was to emphasize the innovative idea that children not only have rights to provision of services and to be protected from harm but also to play an active part in decisions about their own lives as well as in society as a whole (Cantwell, 1992; 1993). UNICEF's later division of children's rights into 'survival, development, protection and participation' has, to a certain extent, moved the emphasis towards the traditional health and education aspects of its own programming (Lurie, 2003).

A crisis in children's participation?

Over two decades after the debates of the 1980s, considerable lack of clarity remains in children's-rights circles, despite growing acceptance of the CRC as a framework for rights-based programming among international child welfare organizations (Invernizzi and Milne, 2003). Participation is one of the ideas that provides the strongest – although frequently the least factual – backlash against the CRC. Particularly in developing nations a cultural-relativity argument is used to denounce the CRC for being based on Western values. This may be used to promote other political agendas or as an excuse for not fulfilling State obligations under the CRC. Related to this is a rapidly-developing awareness of the need to clarify references to children's competence: as in 'the child who is capable of...' (Article 12) or 'evolving capacities' (Article 5), both of which can be used to restrict child participation and leave adults to make decisions about which children are competent. Much of this debate has focused on the right to vote, rather than (as in CRC Article 12) to being included in decisions made about their lives.

A further aspect of the current crisis in children's participation is the call for their 'voices' to be heard, resulting in small, usually unrepresentative, groups of children being given limited access to adult forums in which their 'voices' are granted a disproportionate authenticity in endorsing adult decisions – even though the children may not be included in decision making. Some commentators note two fundamental challenges. The first is the need to institutionalize (or normalize) children's participation, the second the need to build political competence among children (Cussianovich and Marquez, 2002; Invernizzi and Milne, 2003). A further issue, identified by SCS and other organizations in Southeast Asia, is the actual or potential violation of children's rights to protection as a consequence of their attendance at such meetings. The relatively *ad hoc* nature of some children's participation in adults' forums has been noted as entailing risks to their right to protection from abuse and exploitation, which opens up an opportunity for those who wish to abandon children's participation altogether (Etherton, 2002; Ennew and Hastadewi, 2004). This is also associated with the realization that children's rights to participation may best be fulfilled through institutionalizing their participation at family and local levels first, before involving individual children in national and international events.

The children's-participation field is now characterized by a number of sometimes conflicting activities. Some children's-rights activists use a 'ladder

of participation', developed as an explanatory device in the early 1990s (Hart, 1992), as a somewhat value-laden device to measure the level of participation in an activity, programme or event. No baseline data or criteria for measurement have been developed, with the result that so-called indicators remain descriptive and normative. Meanwhile children's participation, although widely accepted in some spheres, is also widely misunderstood and criticized for being variously a 'Western imposition', a 'threat to family values', a danger that opposes parents' rights and 'puts too great a burden on children' who thus cannot 'enjoy their childhoods'. In many cases, the promotion of children's rights by enthusiasts amounts to a separation of children's decision-making forums from those of adults, sometimes producing frustration among children who feel their efforts are unremarked (Ennew and Hastadewi, 2004).

Participation is often marginalized as a consequence of tensions between education, development and human-rights approaches. In addition there is considerable feeling in child-welfare circles that provision comes before rights and that protection is more important than participation. Caught in the cross-fire between development and rights experts, while often taking 'joyful education' as the basis for their work, NGOs not surprisingly appear confused about participation. They also tend to lack information about experiences in and practice of children's participation even within their own national contexts – and sometimes within their own organizations. One of the main reasons why misconceptions and repetitions of bad practices continue, and the development of the concept of children's participation tends to stagnate, is that both governmental and civil society organizations tend to lack institutional memory, failing to document their work adequately (ibid). The outcome is that sometimes very little is learned from the past and the creation of an 'enabling environment' for children's participation within a single capacity-building programme could be described as over-ambitious.

Save the Children, rights-based programming and children's participation

After the adoption of the CRC in 1989, some members of the International Save the Children Alliance (ISCA), which had been involved up to that point very largely in welfare-oriented, child health work, were among the first agencies to develop children's-rights policies and programmes. Their interventions developed a greater focus on children. Gradually children were expected to take increased responsibility for programme-related decision making. Save the Children Sweden was closely associated during the 1980s with the drafting process for the CRC, as well as in developing understanding of rights and

what are now called 'rights-based' interventions throughout its global activities. During the early 1990s, Save the Children UK (SCUK) began an internal consultation process that eventually included discussion with other Alliance members, a number of other NGOs and independent experts. The outcome was the publication of *Towards A Children's Agenda,* which was prepared for the 1995 World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen, the recommendations of which highlighted children's participation (Save the Children UK, 1995).

By at least the mid-1990s, SCS, SCUK and Save the Children Norway had started to involve children in programming as part of their commitment to use the CRC as a framework for all activities. Thus, in the past decade, the International Save the Children Alliance has accumulated considerable experience in creating opportunities for children to make their opinions known. To support the process of children's involvement in the United Nations Secretary General's Special Session on Children in 2002 (Special Session), a task group on children's participation was established by some ISCA members. In 2003 this was converted into the International Save the Children Alliance Working Group on Child Participation, which aimed to draw lessons from the experiences from the Special Session, as well as to promote and broaden the concept of children's participation in all ISCA work. A toolkit for consultation with children (International Save the Children Alliance, 2003) and a document on lessons learned during the Special Session (International Save the Children Alliance, 2004) were produced. Nevertheless, all ISCA Working Groups were disbanded at the end of 2004.

Save the Children definitions

Even within Save the Children circles there seems to be no accepted definition of 'children's participation'. In the broadest sense, boys and girls obviously participate in their families, their communities and their societies in a wide variety of ways (for example, as carers, workers, family and community members, consumers and through their involvement in sports and cultural activities). More narrowly, 'participation' is used by Save the Children, in common with others, to mean children and young people thinking for themselves, expressing their views effectively, and interacting in a positive way with other people. In this sense 'participation' means involving boys and girls in the decisions that affect their lives, the lives of their family and community and the larger society in which they live. For Save the Children the core purpose of children's participation is to empower them as individuals and members of

civil society (in other words as 'social actors'), giving them the opportunity to influence the actions and decisions that affect their lives (Save the Children Alliance, Position Statement on Children's Participation draft 3, 2003).

Participation and rights-based programming

Children's participation is seen as integral to an overall 'rights-based' approach to programming. According to senior staff of both global and regional Save the Children Sweden offices,

> Save the Children has promoted rights-based approaches through training workshops, programme reviews, discussions, documents and practical programme experimentation. All of this work is based on a firm commitment to human rights and fundamental principles of universality, indivisibility, accountability and participation (Theis, 2004, vii).

Save the Children Sweden has also encouraged theoretical and practical publications on the 'journey of discovery' that is rights-based programming. The link between children's rights, children's participation and the need for capacity building is explicitly made in the introduction to a volume on rights-based programming, published in Southeast Asia and the Pacific while the research assessment was in process:

> Participation is a fundamental human right. Every child, woman and man is entitled to demand her or his rights from duty bearers. The civil rights to information, expression and association are some of the instruments through which people can claim their rights ...
>
> Children have the right to participate in the family, school, community and society. Children have the right to information, expression, decision-making and association .... Child Rights Programming recognizes children's social and economic contributions. It supports children's participation in all matters and all environments affecting the child, the family, school, community and society. It encourages parenting and learning methods that support and stimulate children's capacity to express themselves and to make decisions. Child Rights Programming also supports children's involvement in policy consultations, programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and in child-led organizations (Theis, 2004, 3 and 7).

The requirements of a rights-based approach with respect to children's participation are also spelt out in a table later in the book by the principal author (see Table 1). Yet it is curious that there is no mention of freedom to expression; the adult rights listed are access to information, freedom of expression and association, and involvement in decision making. In addition, the right to express an opinion is extended to involvement in decision making, to a greater extent than is necessarily implied in Article 12 of the CRC.

Table 1: A Save the Children suggested approach to responsibilities of rights-based organizations towards different categories of people

Responsibilities of rights-based organization managers and other staff towards			
Children	Partners	Staff	Supporters and donors
Access to information			
Children-friendly information on all relevant parts of programme and organization.	Partners are informed about the programme.	• Comprehensive staff induction; • Staff have free and easy access to all relevant information; • Ensure confidentiality of personnel files.	Complete and honest reporting to donors, supporters and members.
Involvement in decision making			
• Involve children in staff recruitment; • Involve children in planning and implementation.	Involve partners in programme decisions.	Transparent and participatory decision making.	Involve supporters in programme decisions.
Freedom of association			
Support children to organize themselves.	Strengthen organizational capacity of partners.	Staff right to unionize.	[cooperation and mutual support between donors and supporters]

(Source: Adapted from Theis, 2004, 47 'Responsibilities of a rights-based organization')

Save the Children Alliance members have continued to promote children's participation within the programmes of partners, taking into particular consideration that children represent up to 40 percent of many national populations (38 percent in Viet Nam) even though they have always been excluded from decision making almost everywhere. The goal is to achieve:

- Public policies that are more effective when children are involved in the decision-making process;
- Means by which children can shape their own future rather than merely being beneficiaries of adult intervention;
- Young people learning how to influence decision makers so that they, in turn, will be more confident adults and use these skills to improve their societies in the future.

Experiences of children's participation in Southeast, East Asia and the Pacific

Thi Lan Ahn Ha, an 18-year-old children's rights activist from Viet Nam writing on the UNICEF webpage 'Voices of Youth', in a reflection on the Special Session, captured the characteristics of Asian cultures of participation in the words:

> Living in an Asian country with a very deep Asian culture where youth used to listen rather than speak, obey rather than opine, I have seen the lack of participation of youth and its consequence: gaps between generations and social gaps (quoted in Ennew and Hastadewi, 2004, 32).

The Southeast Asia, East Asia and Pacific region includes two of the most populous nations in the world – China and Indonesia – as well as the tiny populations of the Pacific Islands. One frequently- noted characteristic of this region is ethnic diversity between and among nations: Viet Nam has 53 recognized ethnic groups in addition to the dominant Kinh peoples (UNICEF Viet Nam, 1994). This means that all external constructions of reality from international sources have to be reinterpreted according to local world views, which presents considerable challenges to the universalistic claims of human rights (Ennew, Myers and Plateau, 2005).

Thus the region also provides possibilities for re-examining cultural-relativity debates in human rights, which came to a head in the Bangkok Declaration on human rights during the regional prep-com for the 1993 UN Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. The Asian debate on human rights has been variously described by observers as:

- A search for post-colonial identity;
- Part of a simultaneous attempt to find a place in a globalized society that espouses universal human rights;
- A consequence of the breakdown of the 'safety net' of 'family';
- A recognition of the contradictions between Western concepts and Eastern religions;
- A convenient excuse deployed by authoritarian leaders to violate rights (Bauer and Bell, 1999).

As is the case with parallel African debates, 'Asian values' are said to be concerned with family and social harmony, rather than individualism, and can result in implicit and explicit criticisms of 'Western' values and society. Buddhism and Confucianism, which form the traditional ideological framework for Viet Nam, define both social and cosmic realms in terms of detailed and fixed hierarchies, making it perhaps difficult to import ideas of essential human equality. Yet, paradoxically, the construction of 'Asian values', with a basis in the construction of the 'Oriental other' can be argued to have its roots in Western intellectual imperialism (Said, 1974). Others question the idea that there is a single set of 'Asian values' and ask who is qualified to be a legitimate spokesperson for 'tradition' (Bauer and Bell, 1999). A further challenge lies in the argument that, in a globalized world, the common threads between East and West are more numerous than differences (Naisbitt, 1997). Family is important in all parts of the world, and Asians are no less likely than non-Asians to value freedom and protection from arbitrary government. 'The West' is no more singular in fact than 'The East'; it is in social constructions that the two appear 'never to meet' (Anwar Ibrahim, former Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, quoted in Bauer and Bell, 1999, 76).

Economically also, this is a dynamic and diverse region. Despite the fact that some countries remain socialist in terms of governance, 'Market forces are reshaping the region's economic landscape' (Naisbitt, 1997, 140), not least through the development of new models of modernization and industrialization, in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. The whole region can be viewed as providing various examples of transition – from relative poverty

to national wealth, from command to market economies, from conflict to reconstruction and, not least, from isolation to globalization. Viet Nam, for example, has been increasingly open to market forces since beginning the 'renovation' *(Doi Moi)* process in 1987.

Because national governance in the region takes such varied forms, programmes to promote children's participation inevitably have to take into account what can be achieved within existing political structures. Over the past three decades, some countries have developed considerable experience of children participating in national meetings, both with adults and separate from them (see for example, ECPAT et al 1999). Many lessons were learned through preparing children in the region to participate in the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Yokohama, Japan, 17-20 December 2001. Others have been learned in regional processes, in which SCA members were among the lead organizations, which led to participation in the Special Session in 2002 and Regional Ministerial Consultations on Children (MINCON) in Beijing in 2001, and Bali in 2003 and Siem Reap in 2005.

As a research evaluation covering these last four processes notes, the achievements of this period stimulated a greater demand for children's participation in international meetings. Yet this is not without its dangers:

> Enthusiasm from organizers of international meetings often leads to requests at short notice to send a specific number of children to a particular forum, without understanding the time, money and human resources necessary for their presence to be effective and to fulfil their rights. Scarce resources and the speed of developments between 2000 and 2003, to say nothing of the slow growth of awareness of children's participatory rights in some quarters, have combined, so that the institutionalization of children's participation is still in its infancy in the region ... institutionalization would mean that children's right to participate fully in decisions made on their behalf, as well as the full range of their civil and political rights, would be implemented at all levels of society, from families to the international sphere. In practical terms, this would entail that mechanisms through which children would be consulted about their opinions would be in place, so that – for instance – their democratic representation and participation in schools, local administration and overall governance, would be automatically ensured. Children's participation in international forums would thus no

> longer be organized on an event-by-event basis, and the opinions expressed by delegates would be representative of the full range of their peers, rather than of a small group. For many of those working in the region, and worldwide, to promote children's participation, this is the ultimate goal. In the short term, however, there is no doubt that institutionalization is a dream, rather than a reality (Ennew and Hastadewi, 2004, 14-15).

A variety of participation activities have taken place in the region:

> Southeast, East Asia and Pacific experiences of children's participation – some stretching back over two decades – include creating spaces for children's participation in families, schools, communities, media and local government, with 'events' such as national children's days. In addition, there are adult-directed organizations for children – scouts and guides, church and mosque groups, and national youth movements. In general, governments in the region are 'strong central governments of large polities', some of which do not welcome civil society activities. Children's participation in the region developed against these realities and, with the exception of nations such as The Philippines where children's participation is to a large extent institutionalized at least at some local levels, efficient coordination between adult agencies is probably the best that can be achieved at this stage (ibid, 32).

Michael Etherton also commented, in his global evaluation of SCA preparation for the Special Session, that: the region has a reputation for considerable 'theorizing' and 'substantial insights' about best practice in children's participation, but also for 'too much theorizing ... around the importance of the CRC as the basis for children and young people's participation' (Etherton, 2002, 49). Children's active participation in South Asia can also be distinguished from the proactive 'protagonism' in Latin America (and parts of Europe such as Italy), as well as with the tendency in sub-Saharan Africa to see child participants as bearers of both rights and duties. In contrast, child participation in Southeast and East Asia tends to emphasize the need to empower children as a group within essentially gerontocratic societies (Plateau, 2004).

Allied to the principle of children's participation, a recent phenomenon in Asia has been the claim that when children 'participate' in various ways the activity

is 'child-led'. However, unless children initiate activities separately from adults, and take a leadership role with respect to planning, implementation and monitoring, the process cannot be said to be child-led (Ennew and Plateau, 2004). The ultimate aim of children's participation – for some – is that leadership should come from children. However, this is not explicit in the CRC, even in Article 15. And many adults would argue that children should not have to assume the full burden of defending their own interests, which might violate protection rights. In addition, it can be argued that children's participation is bound to be different from adults' participation because children may always need to be facilitated by adults to exercise this right; structures should be established through which children's opinions can be filtered through to decision-making agencies (Van Bueren, 1995).

Capacity building in participation was identified as one of the major needs for 'child-labour' organizations in Asia, by a joint agency working group that included SCS (RWG-CL, 1999). A subsequent rapid assessment of organizations in the region focused on adult facilitators in 15 countries. This began with a broad definition of 'participation' as referring to varying levels of children's involvement in programme development and implementation, and in policy and decision-making processes within organizations, in the life and development of their families, communities, countries and on the international stage' (RWG-CL, 2001, 6). Nevertheless, the assessment used another working definition to collect data:

> The conscious, informed and systematic involvement of children in accordance with their age and maturity, in any matter affecting their lives. At a minimum, it means children being educated on, and assigned to, social mobilization activities that respond to any issue that concerns them. At a maximum, it implies children initiating activities and programmes on their own, sharing decisions with adults, and sharing the responsibilities for the outcomes of these decisions (RWG-L, 2001, 6).

Almost inevitably, this was criticized as too ambitious by many research respondents. The overall results of the rapid assessment, which included questionnaires and key-informant interviews, suggested that:

> ... the Asian social development community, including governments, international organizations, academic institutions and the majority of NGOs, still has a long way to go in raising levels of children's

> participation ... The challenge remains of establishing a climate where the principle of listening to children's views is accepted ... [including] effective channels and mechanisms whereby children's contributions are sought and integrated into the decision-making process (RWG-CL, 2001, 25).

The survey identified certain obstacles to working children's participation, at least according to the respondents' experiences:

- Attitudes towards children's capacity;
- Threat to adult authority;
- Lack of preparedness to listen to views that contradict adult views;
- Practical problems – lack of time, energy, transport;
- Lack of trained staff – facilitators;
- Tokenism;
- Lack of follow-up;
- National policy environment;
- Lack of political commitment;
- Children's fear of speaking out;
- Funding and other resources not available from donors;
- Adults' inability to listen;
- Suspicion that children are manipulated;
- Poor selection – resulting in an 'elite' of participating children (RWG-CL, 2001, 19-20).

Some of these points were echoed in the research evaluation of processes leading up to and following on from the Special Session, which identified undemocratic representation and the development of an 'elite' of participating children as problems, although commenting that this does not differ substantially from adult 'representation' in international meetings. Further issues were the lack of both preparation and follow-up in these processes, as well as the risks to which children were sometimes exposed (Ennew and Hastadewi, 2004).

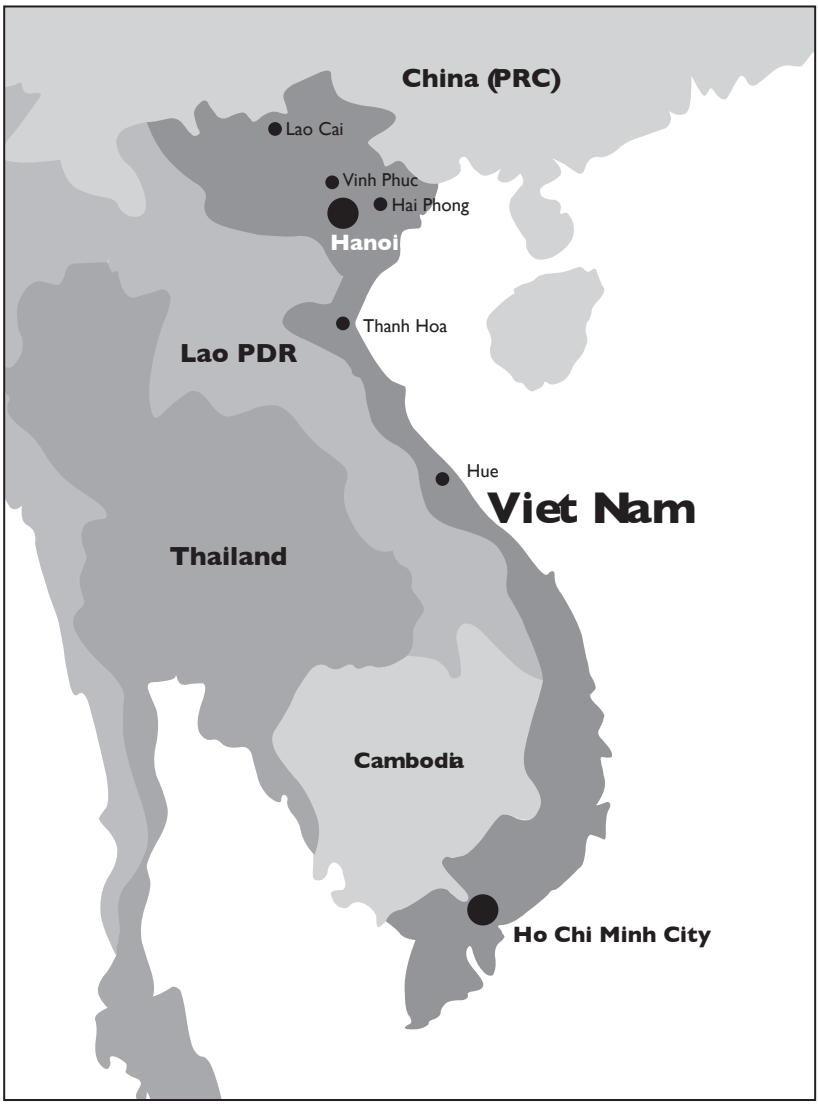
Children's rights and children's participation in Viet Nam

The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam has had a constitution since 1980, establishing a tripartite political structure: the Communist Party of Viet Nam, the People, and the State. The Communist Party has considerable importance due to its part in the liberation struggles leading to the independence of North Viet Nam in 1954, and the reunification of the country in 1975 (UNICEF Viet Nam, 1990). There are four administrative tiers of national governance: central, 44 provinces, 519 districts and 9,807 communes at grass-roots level. Within government structures children's lives are largely the province of the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and the Committee for Population, Family and Children (CPFC) established in 1991 as the Committee for the Care and Protection of Children (CPCC), but changing both name and, to a certain extent, function over a decade later. In addition, two of the mass organizations that fulfil the functions of civil society – the Women's Union and Youth Union – are active at all levels of society, especially at grass roots. They are now expected to deliver social services and to collaborate with international welfare organizations, whether inter-governmental or non governmental. Mass organizations are skilled in political mobilization but tend to lack technical skills (UNICEF 1994). Government and mass organizations are the main partners for SCS in Viet Nam. Local NGOs barely exist. One Vietnamese SCS staff member commented in interview that further national experience is needed with children's organizations, adding that, although the Pioneer Council of the Youth Union is 'tokenistic', it should be strengthened, rather than a new organization being established.

The concept of childhood

Social organization in Viet Nam is based on 'traditional values of membership of a family, a village or an ethnic group' (UNICEF Viet Nam 1990, 9). In the sparse literature examining constructions of Vietnamese childhood, some authors directly question the imposition of 'Northern childhood' in the Vietnamese context, particularly where this relates to misunderstandings about children's rights between expatriate and local staff in NGOs and other agencies (Burr, 2002). Magnus Bjork's study of ideas about children, although based on research with street children, suggests that Vietnamese childhood incorporates ideas of hierarchy, harmony, obedience and intergenerational linkages (Bjork, 1997). Vietnamese official pronouncements about the meaning of childhood and the family are repetitive, and emphasize the same

Figure 1: Map of Viet Nam, showing places where data were collected for this Report



features: 'Children are the source of happiness to the family, the future of the country, those who will continue the work of our ancestors' (Viet Nam Committee for the UN Year of the Child, 1979, quoted in UNICEF, 1990, 176). Children are viewed in a more or less passive relationship to the family, which is conceptualized as the basis of society.

Policies on and situation of children

The image of passive childhood is not associated with a low value for children in Viet Nam. On the contrary, the success of economic liberalization since 1987 was said by UNICEF in 1994 to be due to the high value placed on children by Vietnamese policy makers over a considerable period of time:

> Between 1945 and the present day the leadership of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam stressed human development in general and health and education of children in particular. As a result, the Vietnamese people are highly literate (88 percent); enjoy high life expectancy and low infant and young child mortality and have a high level of female participation in the economy and society. These achievements are particularly impressive considering the low level of GNP per capita (UNICEF Viet Nam 1994, 1).

In 1978, the Vietnamese Committee for the UN International Year of the Child proposed a State Decree on the Protection, Care and Education of Children, which was not only 'a statement of moral principles but [also] set out state objectives for provision' (UNICEF Viet Nam, 1990, 176). In 1989-1990, the Year of the Vietnamese Child, it was proposed that this Decree should be made law 'to enlarge the legal status of children's rights and the responsibility of the entire society towards them' (ibid, 177). Article 13 of the Law on Protection, Care and Education of Children, passed in 1991, states that 'Children shall have the following obligations: To show love, respect and piety towards grandparents and parents, politeness towards adults, affection towards the younger ones and solidarity with friends.'

The total population of Viet Nam in 2002 was estimated at 80,278,000 with an under-eighteen-year-old population of 30,785,000 (38 percent). Gross National Income per capita in 2002 was US$430 with 18 percent of the population living on less than US$1 a day. Birth registration – on which human rights crucially depends – was 72 percent for the whole country in 2002, 91 percent in urban and 68 percent in rural areas. In 2002 the under-five-years mortality rate was

39 per 1,000, and Viet Nam was ranked on this indicator by UNICEF at 86 out of 193 nations; an improvement of 19 places since 1960. Under-12-months infant mortality rate was 30 per 1,000, reduced from 70 in 1960. Net primary school enrolment/attendance between 1996 and 2000 was 93 percent, and secondary school gross enrolment between 1997 and 2000 was 70 percent for boys and 64 percent for girls. There is considerable concern, however, about the lack of educational access for both girls and boys of minority ethnic groups living in remote mountainous areas. Save the Children Sweden is now investing in inclusive education programming as part of its rights-based approach. Children learn about their rights in primary school as part of the curriculum, and this is now in the process of being included in secondary schools. The Government also provides training in gender and children's rights to national education managers and members of parent-teacher organizations (all indicators from UNICEF *State of the World's Children,* 2004).

Children's rights and the Government of Viet Nam

By 1994 UNICEF was reporting that the CRC 'receives strong support in Viet Nam and child rights issues have become part of the political agenda (UNICEF Viet Nam, 1994, 21). Viet Nam was one of the first countries to sign (26 January 1990) and ratify (28 February 1990) the CRC; without reservations and after examining the articles of the CRC to confirm that they conform to the laws of Viet Nam. UNICEF and SCS provided guidance and support to the Government on the preparation of the Initial ('First Periodic') Report submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1992,[1] UNICEF commented that 'the frankness of the report is unprecedented and several issues, such as child labour, prostitution and juvenile delinquency, previously not discussed in public, are fully covered' (UNICEF Viet Nam, 1994, 21). In concluding observations the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about the negative effects of *Doi Moi* on children, the situation of ethnic minority children in remote areas, juvenile justice and the increasing numbers of what were then still called 'children in especially difficult circumstances'. During the second day of consideration of the Initial Report, one Committee member commented that it was 'regrettable ... that article 12 of the Convention, which stipulated that children capable of forming their own views should have the right to express those views freely, was hardly applied, particularly in regard to children in the [remote] regions' (Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention – Initial report of Viet Nam, CRC/C/3/Add.4, 22 October 1992, para 39).

[1] The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child refers to the Initial Reports of states parties as the 'First Periodic Reports', which means that subsequent reports are 'Second', 'Third' and Fourth Reports'. The Vietnamese Government refers to the Initial Report separately from the 'Periodic Reports', which means that the 1992 report is 'Initial' and subsequent reports are 'First', 'Second' and 'Third'. In this Report we adhere to the numbering of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Between 1993 and 1998, children's forums in relation to the Plan of Action for implementing the CRC and the goals for children and development for 2000 were organized:

> ... in many places, especially at local level, [giving] children an opportunity to voice their opinions and aspirations, and to learn more about their responsibilities, rights and obligations. To disseminate the Convention to ethnic minorities, a summary of the Convention has been prepared, with illustrations and translation into some of the ethnic minority languages (para 38).

In the Second Periodic Report (submitted in 2002), the Government stated its commitment to:

> ... continue to promote education to raise the awareness of the family and the community on the role and position of young people as equal citizens in the society. It will also continue to develop a better system for monitoring and supervising existing laws for the respect of children's views and settlement of children's issues. Children's forums, especially those in rural mountainous areas, will be further expanded (Second Periodic Report of Viet Nam, CRC/C/65/Add.20, para 89).

With regard to freedom of expression (Art. 13), the Government stated that:

> New forms of information and communication for and between children have been applied and developed. Mass media, including television, radio, newspapers and local communications networks, have played an important role in public education campaigns aimed at children. In Hanoi in 1995, child representatives participated in the Third Regional Consultation on the Convention, and Fourth East Asia and Pacific Ministerial Consultation on the Goals for Children and Development to the Year 2000. Programmes by and for children on television also create opportunities for children to express themselves. At the five-year review of the implementation of the National Law organized at the central and local levels in 1997, children were invited to participate and express their opinions. These opinions were given due consideration in the amendment of laws concerning children's rights. Children also have the opportunity to express themselves via newspapers such as *Thieu Nien Tien Phong* (Young Pioneer), *Nhi Dong* (Young Child), and *Vi Tre Tho* (For Children). They can participate in

> children's television and radio programmes. At the commune, district and provincial levels, the CPCC has organized children's forums in which children can discuss child rights issues with local authorities. Broadcasting Day for Children is organized in April annually. Children are not only information receivers but can also express opinions and involve themselves in programme production. In 1998, junior correspondents' clubs were set up in Hanoi, Hue, Dalat and Ho Chi Minh City under the Radio Voice of Viet Nam.
>
> In the time ahead, education and dissemination of laws in this field should be further promoted so that children can fully exercise this right (Ibid, paras 97-9).

With regard to freedom of association and peaceful assembly (Art. 15) it was stated that:

> Children have their own organizations, including the YPO, the Child Star, the Young Bamboo Shoot Communication Team, the Red Cross Young Pioneer Organization, and others. In these organizations, children prepare activity schedules, elect leaders, plan meetings and resolve problems with the help of the schools and the community via the Communist Youth Union and Women's Union. There are no constraints on children in exercising this right (ibid, para 103).

The observations made on children's participation by the Committee were brief and mainly focussed on article 12:

> The Committee is concerned that traditional attitudes towards children in society still limit the respect for their views, within the family, schools and society at large. In addition, administrative and judicial proceedings are not always required to take the views of the child into account, for instance in the case of divorce hearings (Concluding observations, CRC/C/15/Add.200, para 29).

The records for 22 January 2003 note the government representative's replies to various questions intending to clarify participation issues:

> 9. Efforts had been made to provide education and information on child rights and to disseminate the Convention at both the central and grass-roots levels. Knowledge of the Convention had improved,

especially among local authorities, as illustrated by the fact that they were paying increasing attention to child-related issues. A national forum had been organized to permit national leaders to listen to children's ideas about their contribution to the National Programme of Action for Children.

14. Children welcomed the fact that they could approach the Committee on Population, Family and Children with their concerns. UNICEF had supported the establishment of a children's-rights network, and a young journalists' group produced a fortnightly programme on children's issues, which was aired on national radio. However, many improvements could still be made; in her view, the Government should endeavour, as a priority, to improve access to water and sanitation, address malnutrition and provide children with greater protection from injuries, accidents and HIV/AIDS.

51. Drawing attention to paragraphs 20 and 21 of the report, he said that the Committee for the Protection and Care of Children had established a working group to supervise the preparation of the report. It had convened a number of seminars to receive the input of experts, ministries, NGOs, UNICEF and other interested parties, including children themselves.

68. With regard to children's knowledge of their rights, she said that a radio programme was devoted to the Convention and the media were used in other ways. The United Nations Children's Fund provided literature on the topic for children. More important than knowledge of the Convention, however, was knowledge of the rights themselves; and to that end her school, and others, had weekly discussion sessions, sometimes including drama and singing, whereby they sought to educate themselves, their parents and their peers. In addition, there were 12,988 'communication teams' and 654 child rights clubs, established by NGOs and UNICEF, in which some 200,000 children participated (ibid).

The Committee recommended that the Government of Viet Nam should:

(a) Carry out awareness-raising campaigns aimed at, inter alia, parents, teachers, government administrative officials, the judiciary and society at large on children's right to have their views taken into account and to participate in all matters affecting them;

> (b) Take legislative measures to guarantee that in all court and administrative proceedings affecting them, children have the right to express their views and have those views taken into account regarding children;
> (c) Promote and facilitate, within the courts and all administrative bodies, respect for the views of children and their participation in all matters affecting them, in accordance with article 12 of the Convention (ibid, para 30).

Viet Nam has not yet submitted its third Periodic Report (due 1 September 2002) but will instead be presenting the Committee with a consolidated third and fourth report sometime before 1 September 2007. In the interim the Government has continued to update its ideas about and commitment to children's participation. With respect to the legal context 'The revised and amended Law on the Press (No. 12/1999/QH10 dated 12 June 1999) was enacted to guarantee the citizens' freedoms of the press, freedom of expression on the press in conformity with the interests of the nation and people, including children.' With respect to the implementation of this law:

> Over the past years, progress has been made in ensuring the freedom of expression for children. There have been different channels for children to express their opinions at schools or regional, national, and international levels. Many forums have been organized for children to raise their voice and express their view to local authorities and state leaders. At the 2001 national forum, children throughout the country are encouraged to express their desires to the State about the implementation of the 2001 – 2010 National Programme of Action for Children. At this forum, children also elected their representatives to the East Asia – Pacific Children and Young People's Regional Forum, the regional Ministerial Consultative Conference, and the world Children's Forum organized on the threshold of the Special Session on Children of the General Assembly. 12,988 'Young Bamboo Shoots' Communication Teams have been organized, with the participation of nearly 200,000 children, to facilitate the direct engagement of children to community activities for children. 654 Child Rights Clubs have been established throughout the country and a number of Young Journalist Clubs have gone into operation to enable children express their view towards the school, family, and community. (Updated Report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child Period 1998-2002, 18-19).

Also interesting are comments on respect for the views of children from the same updated report. For example, in the legal context, it is remarked that 'The Law on Marriage and Family of 2000, article 34, paragraph 1 stipulates 'Parents have the obligation to ... respect their children's opinions'.' In addition, on implementation:

> Much progress has been made over the past time in information and education to all people and the society, including authorities at different levels, on the realization of children's right of respect to their opinion. Children have directly taken part in reviewing the implementation of the National Programme of Action for Children 1991-2000 and in drafting the 2001-2010 Programme of Action. They have also participated in the re-evaluation of the implementation of the Law on the Protection, Care and Education of Children through discussion at local, regional and national levels. Local authorities are giving greater attention to children's opinions on projects and programmes relating to children. For example, a hamlet Chief in Bac Giang province allocated a hectare of land to build a football field to meet children's wishes (ibid, 15).

In contrast, researcher Rachel Burr has claimed that more work on children's rights has been carried out by foreign NGOs than by the Government, yet:

> Expatriate and Vietnamese aid agency workers sometimes held contradictory agendas and working philosophies. This became apparent during an international NGO's staff-training programme on children's participation methods. As the workshop unfolded, some Vietnamese workshop participants discussed their concerns with me. A local woman working for an international aid agency confessed that she felt under pressure to support the child participatory approach, even though it was not something she felt comfortable with. In her view children should respect and follow their parents' line of argument, rather than develop an independent viewpoint: 'We use children's participation at work but I do not use it with my own children. I am not comfortable with going outside the Vietnamese way' (Fieldwork notes, Hanoi: 1998).
>
> When this woman raised her concerns with the whole group it emerged that a number of the local staff were concerned that they were introducing ideas through their projects that conflicted with local expectations. When we went on to discuss what children's

> participation meant to the group, some comments showed that they did not fully understand the principles espoused by the international children's-rights movement. For example, one local participant working for an international aid agency argued that adults controlled the child rights agenda and that children were invisible in the participation process: 'We involve children for the purpose of adults' (Workshop, Hanoi, January: 1998). Confusion existed around the issue of how involved an adult should be when encouraging children to be more independent: 'If a child is to be self-reliant he should be taught and be told how to participate' (Interview Field notes, January 1998). It is striking that these comments emphasize adult leadership and responsibility (Burr, quoted in Kehily, 2004, 156-8).

Our reflection on these assertions, which have been widely-published, is that these impressions have less to do with levels of commitment than with difficulties in communication as issues are raised, defined and redefined. Vietnamese participants from government, research and civil society, who attended the workshop to begin the process of developing a protocol for the research assessment (see Chapter 3), found no difficulty in listing potential criteria for participation, but did query the phrases 'children as social actors' and (as already stated) 'enabling environment'. Throughout the entire assessment, no one challenged the relevance of children's rights to Viet Nam.

A government employee commented during a semi-structured interview in our research that welfare and protection came first in Viet Nam, before participation rights. As early as 1993, children's rights were integrated into some pilot schools in Ho Chi Minh City, but some teachers were opposed to the concept of children's rights. Introducing children's rights into the community upset some parents – who were disturbed to be told that they had not been treating their children well. This interviewee claimed that people have now changed their attitudes and ask children's opinion 'about everything' because they see 'that children's participation is the most important right of all.' Change is not always an even process however, and altered attitudes are not always accompanied by immediate behaviour change. Earlier in the interview she commented adults do not want to listen to children because they 'don't have time' or think 'it is a waste of time'. The idea of children's participation is 'strange to Viet Nam' she said, but this should not necessarily be taken to imply that children's rights are inappropriate to Vietnamese culture as Burr seems to be claiming. Children's participation is not part of any traditional culture – Western or Eastern. One of the objectives

of the research assessment was to explore these apparent contradictions in attitudes and behaviours, as this 'strange idea' takes root in Viet Nam as elsewhere in the world.

The Child Participation Initiative

The Vietnamese Government has placed considerable emphasis on promoting children's right to participate as the foundation for fostering a social environment more suitable for children. A number of forums were organized with the purpose of drawing together children's ideas from local to central levels. Questions related to children's situation and the improvement of their standard of living became an important issue for the State and its administration. This has encouraged them to facilitate children to contribute their ideas.

The forums examined in the research assessment emerged from the Child Participation Initiative established to prepare for the Special Session in 2002, which was attended by Vietnamese children as members of both government and NGO delegations. Supported by the Save the Children Alliance in Viet Nam and Plan International, the forums were designed to provide Government of Viet Nam representatives with children's views. They were not the only such activity. The Vietnamese girl writing on the UNICEF Voices of Youth web page – whom we have already quoted – listed an impressive involvement in public affairs. Thi Lan Ahn Ha states that she had been a child rights activist from the age of 13 years, helped to prepare the Government presentation for the Special Session and was a youth advisor to the CPFC (quoted in Ennew and Hastadewi, 2004).

The principal objectives of the Child Participation Initiative were to:

- Give children an opportunity to participate in the process;
- Enable decision makers to hear and see children's opinions;
- Set up and establish a network of facilitators to work with children;
- Build the capacity of adults to facilitate and support children's participation.

At that point in time, the intent was to impart the views of children to Vietnamese decision makers who would be attending the Special Session and also to promote a longer-term process of children's participation in their country. The three forums that were part of our assessment represented a collaboration between the Government and international NGOs working in Viet Nam.

Save the Children Sweden in Viet Nam

Save the Children Sweden (SCS) is an international non governmental organization, without religious or political affiliation. It is a contributing member of the International Save the Children Alliance, a global movement working for children's rights. Save the Children Sweden activities in Viet Nam began in the mid-1980s, opening a representative country office in 1991. The organization's main principles are that:

- Children should be protected from discrimination, exploitation, violence and other forms of action that violate them;
- Children's ideas must be listened to, and children have the right to participate in initiatives impacting their situations;
- Children are guaranteed a positive environment where they can grow in safety, in health, and in conditions that foment their self-respect and provide them with appropriate knowledge.

A priority in all Save the Children Sweden's activities in Viet Nam is to increase both boys' and girls' participation in project work and to listen to their opinions on specific issues. As one step towards reaching long-term goals, Save the Children Sweden has supported Vietnamese managers in various programme arenas in their efforts to develop a children-friendly approach to the issues they face. SCS also provides funding and technical assistance to many projects that are closely related to one another, most notably the Children-Friendly District project and the Children-Friendly Learning Schools projects. The local authorities of District 4 in Ho Chi Minh City began the Children-Friendly District Project in June 2002, in order to create an environment most favourable for the holistic development of children. The project takes children as its central focus. On the basis of children's own ideas, the District 4 authorities identified six issues of highest concern and dissatisfaction for children, which should be improved one step at a time. Throughout the two years of implementation, children have not only been the recipients of benefits, but also important agents and players in planning, implementing and monitoring the project.

Nevertheless, in the opinion of a female government employee in Ho Chi Minh City, better coordination between agencies is still required. In a semi-structured interview she commented that although NGOs have ample resources they still require more experience about how best to deploy them. She suggested that children's rights should be 'concertedly' protected by all agencies by mainstreaming children's participation into all their programming.

The forums

The Save the Children Alliance in Viet Nam (SCA) – consisting of Save the Children Japan, Save the Children Sweden, Save the Children UK and Save the Children US – formulated a Common Framework of Operations in which child participation is one of four main issues. Among related SCA activities, three children's forums: 'Meeting in August, Hanoi', 'Children Speak Out On HIV/AIDS' and 'Children Speak Out on Education' were organized in 2001, 2002 and 2003 in association with Plan International and with the Government of Viet Nam as the main partner.

- The forum 'August get-together, in Ha Noi', from 8 to 10 August 2001, was co-organized by SCA, Plan International, the Committee for Protection and Care of Children (CPCC, currently CPFC) and Central Young Pioneers' Council (CYPC). This fell within the framework of the Children's Participation Initiative. Fifteen groups of children participated, who had already taken part in SCA and Plan projects from eight provinces and cities: Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hai Phong, Quang Ninh, Phu Tho, Yen Bai and Thanh Hoa;

- The forum 'We speak about HIV/AIDS' was organized from 12 to 14 August 2002 as a result of cooperation between SCA, the National Aids Prevention Board, the CYPC and officials from communities in which SCA projects were being implemented. Five teams of children from SCA projects in Ho Chi Minh City, Lao Cai, Hai Phong and Thanh Hoa took part.

- The forum 'We speak about education', which took place on 18 to 20 August 2003 was the result of a SCA Education Activities group initiative in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), the CPFC and CYPC. Thirteen groups of children took part in this forum, from 11 provinces and cities: Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hai Phong, Quang Ninh, Yen Bai, Lao Cai, Thanh Hoa, Vinh Phu, Tien Giang, Quang Ngai and Bac Giang;

Save the Children Sweden's children-friendly activities in Viet Nam, together with these forums, should be seen in the context of the overall capacity-building project that is the subject of our research evaluation. Encouraging children's participation is understood by SCS not only as fulfilling a specific right of children, but also as a contribution to their development. The belief is

that participation will encourage children to take the initiative, to think actively, develop creativity, make their own decisions, and exercise resolve in carrying out their decisions. The organization believes that, through participation, children learn new knowledge, acquire new skills, and gain new life experiences. In particular, participation is thought to encourage children to take responsibility for their actions, which should have a positive impact both on their own lives and on their society. At the same time, through children's participation, programmes and activities designed for their benefit will better meet their needs so that more appropriate interventions can be provided, resulting in improved programming quality. Since 2000, with these objectives and strategies in mind, SCS Viet Nam has run a capacity-building programme for organizational officers, official leaders at all levels, and project officers in many localities with the aim of changing adult perception of children's participation.

Nevertheless, SCS Viet Nam acknowledges that children's participation can only be achieved gradually. Participation requires self-confidence, determination, the wish to participate and appropriate skills. This means that, in order to realize their participatory rights, children need encouragement and practice in friendly environments where adults play the roles of organizers and supporters.

The capacity-building project began with an assessment by an external consultant (Henk van Beers) in 2000, which acknowledged that implementation of children's participation remained a challenge: 'The social-cultural context of Viet Nam has to be taken into account and also the views, skills and knowledge of [SCS] programme partners'(Beers, 2000, 1). The assessment consisted of interviews and discussions with management and staff of SCA members, and partners, together with a document review. The consultant reported that discussions revealed children's participation to be 'new' in Viet Nam in 2000, which to a certain extent contradicts the official record described earlier in this chapter, although not in total agreement with Burr's pessimistic view. The consultant commented that:

> Whether this [novelty] is indeed the case is most probably a matter of interpretation. Children have been participating in the Vietnamese society in many ways and will continue to do so. The novelty about children's participation may be related to the fact that it has been taken out of its social-cultural context and introduced as a concept and an approach in working with children. The way the concept has been presented – linking it to the rights discourse – may also have contributed to the impression that children's participation is something new (ibid, 28).

Beers suggested that, although hierarchies of seniority may have an important bearing on whether children are listened to, the way the idea has been presented may be an equally – important obstacle. There is, he suggested, a 'skewed impression' of children's participation ... combined with the lack of an 'enabling environment to children to express themselves freely':

> In every discussion, the attitude of adults and community members towards children's participation (negative or reluctant at best) was identified as a major constraint in making children's participation a reality (ibid).

Given the fact that discussions took place within what might be called the 'Save the Children family' of Alliance members and partners in Viet Nam, who might have been expected to have a positive attitude themselves, this seems to indicate a generalized frustration at the time with the environment in which they were trying to promote children's participation – one that might be called 'disenabling'. Chief among the factors in this environment appeared to be a conviction that children cannot participate. This was linked to the common perception that participation is complex and confusing – not only that children cannot 'do' it, but also that adults cannot 'do' it, or do not understand it, probably complicated, as the consultant noted, by the lack of clarity in current academic discourse on the topic (ibid. 29).

A further common observation noted by the consultant was that there must be a planned objective for children's participation – that it cannot occur in a vacuum, but must have a purpose, which raises the question of whose purposes their participation might serve: 'Children's participation can also be seen as having value in itself. From this point of view the process of involving children may be more important than the outcome'. 'Empowerment' might therefore be a generalized objective (ibid, 28; Plateau, 2004).

According to the discussions reported in the 2000 assessment, children's presence in meetings and events, which might be described as the basis of both the Special Session and the Viet Nam forums, seems to be the key to the way most people thought of children's participation in decision-making. But, as Beers, points out:

> There is an abundance of efforts to involve children in adult meetings that have dramatically failed. Children have been ridiculed, not listened to, and insulted and many have shed tears of frustration at not being listened to, or because of being misinterpreted (ibid, 29).

This does not mean, Beers comments, that children should not be invited to such meetings, but rather that issues of representation, adult skills and respect for children – in short the provision of an 'enabling environment' – must be addressed. Indeed it is possible to conceive of children's views being represented in an adult event without children being physically present.

Within SCS Viet Nam programmes in 2000, the assessment notes, children participated through adults who claim to be 'listening to their voices', which in itself implies that they do not listen to their words; 'they can express their views and they can be listened to, but often it does not go any further'(ibid). The danger in this is that although adults listen they do so from their own perspectives – they do not 'hear' (understand) what children are saying, a tendency Beers noted in discussions held with staff of Radda Barnen's partners. The idea that the authenticity of children's 'voices' lies in the sound they make rather than the content of what they say was succinctly summed up by Roger Hart as 'children's voices, adult ears' (Hart, 1997). This is not surprising when one considers that, according to Beers, popular Vietnamese opinion in 2000 was that 'children do not have anything worth saying'. The assessment concluded that there was a lack of clarity on what children's participation means, 'some consider it to be listening to children and many seem to consider children's participation synonymous to children being the decision makers' (Beers, 2000). This is a common misunderstanding of the provision of Article 12 CRC, which specifies only children's opinions *being taken into consideration* when decisions are made.

In 2000, the areas in which children participated in SCS and SCA work in Viet Nam were:

- Research undertaken by SCS and other SCA members, although children were providers of information, rather than research partners;
- Practical support in projects (although to a lesser extent) depending on the context and activities involved;
- 'Exceptionally' in decision-making processes.

In the face of this relatively limited progress, the objective of SCS for capacity building in children's participation in 2000 was:

> To stimulate a process among our partners towards the general perception of children as social actors whose opinions make a difference in research, when doing situation analyses and in the planning process (ibid 4).

This, of course, stops short of mainstreaming children's involvement in programming and organizational structures, as well as of the institutionalization of children's participation in the life of their families and communities. But, SCS clearly recognized that the process was bound to be gradual, and could only succeed one step at a time. To bring about these objectives, the 2000 assessment made four recommendations:

- Demystification of participation, by which is meant 'to come to a common and shared understanding with the staff, management and partners, [of] what children's participation could entail';
- Staff and partners of SCS 'to each set their own goals in enhancing children's participation within their specific project context';
- Increase skill and knowledge of staff and partners of SCS through training;
- Networking and exposure (Beers, 2000).

The next step was to engage the assessor as 'Advisor on girls' and boys' partcipation', with the following specific objectives, to be fulfilled at the end of the programme period:

- SCS staff in Viet Nam and at other offices, for example in the Middle East [Western Asia], Pakistan, Bangladesh and Central and South America are able to monitor, advise and give feedback to partners in their work to include and increase girls' and boys' participation in their work;
- Partners, and to some extent international NGOs in Viet Nam are aware of how to increase children's participation in their work;
- Appropriate methods have been developed in order to promote equal opportunity for girls and boys to give their views and have them taken into consideration in participatory children-focused research, implemented by researchers and partner organizations in Viet Nam;
- Initiation of sharing experiences on children's participation and non-discrimination among SCS staff and partners;
- Documentation of the capacity-building process in Viet Nam and the region, as well as in other SCS offices is available and addresses opportunities and constraints in different socio-cultural settings.

The focus in the first six months was capacity building among SCS Viet Nam staff, especially an assigned children's participation programme officer

('Advisor for Viet Nam') to work with the Regional Advisor and be 'trained on the job'. The process was participatory in that each staff member was expected to 'identify an area/partner organization where children's participation could be enhanced and to come up with an action plan' (Workplan, 22 January 2001, 2). During this period a five-day training session took place to prepare facilitators for activities leading up to the Special Session (which was then scheduled for September 2001). The agenda for that session reveals some of the characteristics of the method used by the Regional Advisor:

- Recall of own childhoods, with emphasis on 'unfair treatment';
- Knowledge-power relationships, in societal hierarchies, showing that children are at the bottom;
- Learning by experience;
- Definition of 'child' and expectations of their roles;
- Definitions of children's participation – to build up a general definition. Fears about children's participation, and how to deal with them;
- Communication skills;
- Facilitation skills;
- Planning.

The workplans from 2001 onwards make frequent reference to research training, initially with the Regional Working Group on Child Labour, but this has not taken place. On the other hand, links have been developed with other international NGOs, the most significant of which was in Viet Nam itself with Plan International for the Special Session, although the national links with other SCA members have proved to be more structurally consistent. In the course of the capacity-building programme, training by SCS staff in Viet Nam in addition to that carried out with SCA members, has included:

- Teachers in selected districts as part of inclusive education
- National Institute of Educational Sciences
- Social work centres
- Province and district leaders on emergency preparedness
- Ho Chi Minh City District 4 facilitators and leaders on various aspects of children's participation
- Legal Aid Centre
- Children-friendly learning environment with pilot schools in Ho Chi Minh City
- Journalists
- Prosecutors
- Teacher training colleges
- Youth Union training school.

In addition, the Advisor has made the following input to regional and international activities on children's participation:

Regional:

- Regular meetings in Bangkok in relation to the Regional Consultation (June 2005) under the UN Secretary' General's Global Study on Violence Against Children;
- Meeting in relation to children's-rights programming in Bangkok and Katmandu;
- Capacity building in Cambodia, Hong Kong, Lao PDR (for SCUK regional office), New Zealand (for Save the Children New Zealand), Fiji (for Save the Children Fiji) and for the ISCA Pacific sub region (Save the Children Australia, Fiji and New Zealand);
- Diplomacy training programme, children's rights and children's participation course in Fiji and Bangkok;
- In Malaysia, review of involvement of children in National Plan of Action processes and subsequent advisory role;
- Organizing a regional network of children's-participation practitioners in SEAP;
- Advisory role to individual programme officers (mostly ISCA members) in Lao PDR, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Fiji, New Zealand, Australia and the Philippines;
- Work with the regional office for UNICEF;
- Work with Child Workers in Asia, a Bangkok-based, regional NGO, on children's participation, including training and facilitating workshops;
- Regional meetings of ISCA, presenting on and advocating for children's participation.

International:

- Writing and publishing a book on the Advisor's prior experiences in children's participation in Kenya (Beers, 2002);
- Ethiopian seminars and advice;
- Peru assessment;
- Main organizer of global meetings of children's participation focal persons of SCS;

  - In Stockholm in preparation of the SCS strategy on children's participation;
  - In Bangkok the first meeting to share experiences in implementing the strategy;
  - In Peru, the second meeting to share experiences in implementing the strategy, together with seminars and visits to children's organizations and key actors;

- Ecuador first Latin American meeting on children's participation;
- Children's-participation focal person for SEAP in ISCA meeting in South Africa, in relation to the UN Secretary General's Global Study on Violence Against Children;
- Work with the ISCA Child Participation Working Group as a member and as the SEAP regional focal person;
- Advisory role to SCS colleagues in Peru, East Africa, West Africa, South Africa, South Asia (Pakistan and Bangladesh), North Africa and the Middle East, Europe and Sweden;
- Involvement in preparation and organization of ISCA Global meeting on children's participation, in Ethiopia;
- Maintaining an email list to share experiences and information about children's rights and children's participation (covering all regions, with a special SEAP focus).

Summary

In this chapter we have described the development of the idea of an enabling environment for children's participation – in Viet Nam, regionally and globally. It is clear that this has been an uneven process, consistently challenged by resistance to the idea of children's participation, yet showing considerable progress. One feature of SCS strategy in Viet Nam has been provision of multiple, capacity-building opportunities, within a realistic set of objectives. The remainder of this Report describes the research assessment, in 2004, of this capacity-building programme and related activities.

3: THREE RESEARCH PROCESSES IN ONE

The research assessment was a complex process involving three teams of researchers, each with different research questions and target groups. The process was viewed as a capacity-building opportunity as well as a participatory exercise that fully involved the SCS Regional Advisor on Participation.

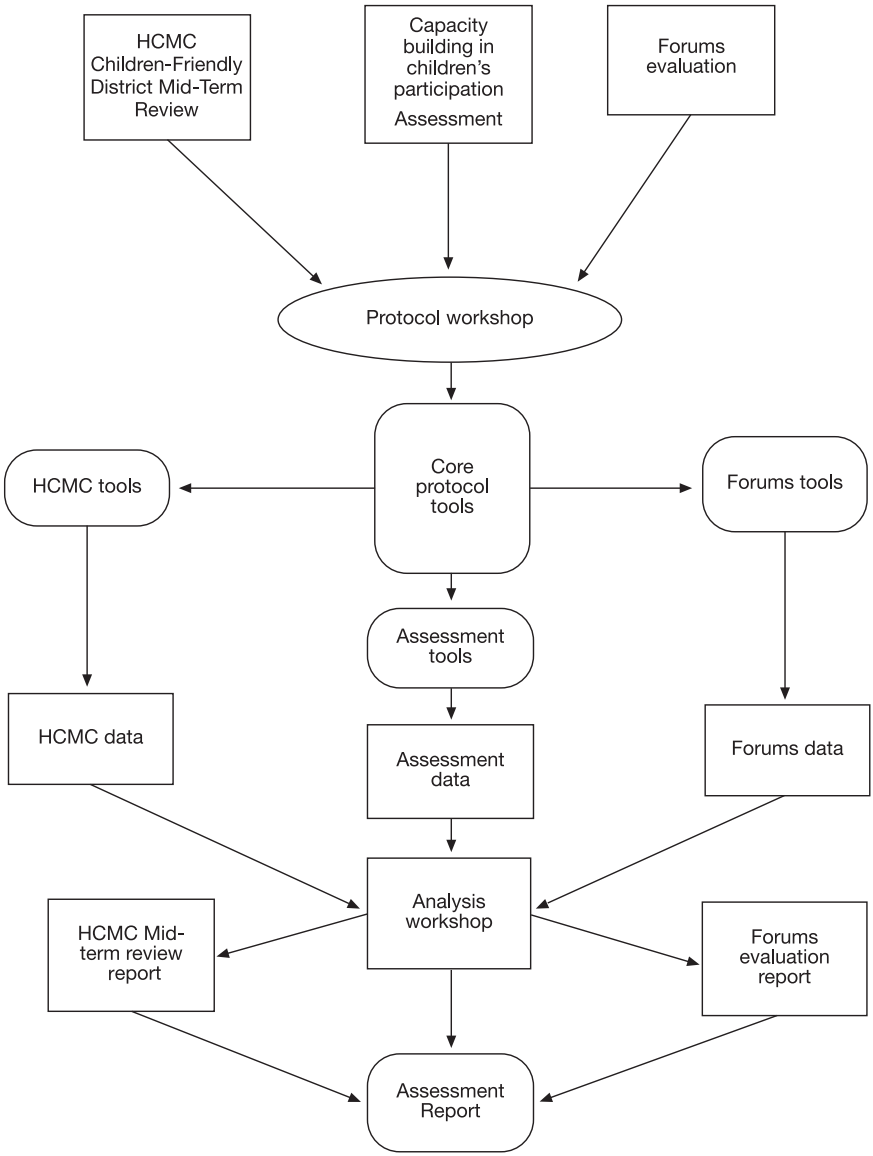
Planning

All teams used a common protocol, in which the ethical strategy was the same and certain research tools ('core research tools') were also identical, but with additional, specific tools, designed by each team. The process of research design began in Ha Noi, with a workshop in April 2004, in which all researchers were involved and through which two were recruited. Development of research questions and design and piloting of research tools and ethical instruments continued for a further week in Ho Chi Minh City. Thus the research plan was developed by all researchers. A common coding manual for the core research tools was devised by all three teams together, in a workshop after data had been collected. Two of the research teams wrote separate reports, which were then incorporated into an overall assessment report (Figure 2).

The overall assessment for the capacity-building project was thus enhanced through coordination with an internal mid-term review of the Children-Friendly District Programme in Ho Chi Minh City, with three staff members acting as researchers, together with an assessment of the three national children's forums, : *Children's participation initiative in Viet Nam (2001), HIV/AIDS Children's forum: Children speak out on HIV/AIDS (2002), and Children speak out on education (2003),* which were described in the previous chapter. For this part of the research, the task was to evaluate:

- The processes of preparation and organization for forums;
- The activities during the forums;
- The outcomes of the forums;
- The impact of forums on children and adults, including perceived changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices.

Figure 2: Flow chart for the research process



In addition, two international consultants, in collaboration with the Regional Child Participation Advisor, documented and assessed capacity building in children's participation with respect to the quality and cost-effectiveness of inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes, incorporating the results obtained in the other two processes. The scope of this part of the research included not only Viet Nam but also the Southeast Asia and Pacific Region as well as the International SCA and partners.

The first two teams (Ho Chi Minh City Children-Friendly District and Evaluation of Forums) analysed the material they collected relating to their research questions and wrote reports in Vietnamese. The third team, with the responsibility of reviewing the capacity-building process as a whole, combined these reports (translated into English) into a single analysis (particularly of data collected using the core research tools) (Figure 1). Full details of the data-collection process were recorded in a joint Protocol or research manual (Appendix).

Ethical strategy

Maintaining a code of ethics during any research process is essential. Researchers are responsible for making sure that research will do no harm to children or adults, that participation in research is voluntary and that children and adults agree to any subsequent action programmes as well as to the dissemination of research materials and results. Although these principles remain the same, specific ethical issues may differ from one research project to another. Participants at the preparatory workshop, 22 April, 2004, (who included all three research teams) identified the following principles as relevant to the research evaluation:

- Participation must be voluntary, individual consent/dissent to taking part and use of specific research tools must be sought by researchers;
- Adequate information must be provided when seeking informed consent;
- Confidentiality must be maintained;
- Children must not be put at risk;
- Any other benefits received by children (especially in the Children-Friendly District) must not be affected;
- Feedback on results must be provided to children;
- Children's contributions, including authorship, must be acknowledged;

- Children's opinions must be respected and appreciated;
- Researchers must not impose their research or views on respondents;
- Equal opportunities should be created for children to take part.

All researchers were responsible for confidentiality and for ensuring that informed consent was sought from each individual participating in the research. All researchers and translators signed a confidentiality undertaking. These are kept with research data in a secure place, with a personal copy retained by the signatory.

Informed consent was obtained from each person participating in the research, using a simple form to record their consent. Children and adults who took part in the research were all literate in Vietnamese, thus a separate informed consent form for people who cannot read and write was not required. As in the case of the confidentiality undertaking, two copies of each informed consent form were signed, one for researchers to keep attached to the relevant data set(s) and the other retained by the research participant (See Appendix for full details).

Research questions for the capacity-building programme

One difficulty encountered by the capacity-building research team was the range of objectives found in various SCS Viet Nam documents between 2000 and 2004. These can be summed up as implying that the activities of capacity building in children's participation should achieve:

- Inclusion of all children;
- Equal opportunities for girls and boys to express their own views;
- Children's views being taken into consideration in research;
- Children's participation being an integral part of research and programming;
- An enabling environment for children's participation;
- Children being regarded as competent social actors;
- Children's rights to have their opinions heard and taken into account being respected.

Because of the scattered and vague form taken by these objectives, as well as the fact that they changed over time, researchers decided to draw up a set of overall standards against which to assess the project, together with specific criteria for the three aspects being studied by the three different teams.

This list of overall standards was derived from group work during the workshop on 22 April 2004 in Hanoi, which included the Programme Advisor's presentation of his own objectives from 2000. As already mentioned, during this process, the terms 'enabling environment' and 'social actor' were questioned. The former question was retained as a topic to be explored throughout research. The term 'social actor', on the other hand, was queried by Vietnamese participants, who associated it with citizenship, which they stated was 'too big' for, and not appropriate to, the current Vietnamese context. International consultants pointed out that 'social actor' is usually associated with a specific Western sociology of childhood, which is unrelated to discourses on citizenship and democracy, and seeks to view children as people who construct meaning and are not only passive victims. Because of these different understandings, it was decided that the term 'social actor' would not be used in the research project.

The overall research questions were derived from the basic standards for measurement established in the 22 April workshop:

- Has the project led to understanding of children's viewpoints and aspirations (both boys and girls)?
- Have children's viewpoints actually been taken into consideration?
- Did both boys and girls, children with disabilities and ethnic minority children have equal opportunities to participate?
- Did children become more confident in:
    - Sharing views?
    - Developing concepts?
    - Solving their own problems?
- Did children participate actively in accordance with their age and abilities?
- Did adults change their awareness of children?

All these questions were asked with respect to process, cost effectiveness, quality, outputs and outcomes (impacts), leading to specific research questions:

- What happened? (Documenting the process)
- What are adults' and children's views and understandings of participation?
- How (if at all) have these views changed as a result of the activities of the project?

- How have the activities of the project in Viet Nam related to the work of the Regional Advisor in Southeast Asia and the Pacific as well as internationally?
- What were the processes?
    - Quality?
    - Management structures?
    - Activities?
    - Cost effectiveness (human and material resources)?
    - Effectiveness?
    - 'Lessons learned'?
    - 'Good practice'?
- What were the outputs?
- What were the outcomes?
- What indicators of 'participation' might be derived from these experiences?
- What recommendations might be made for the future, including what can be done to promote children's participation?

Ho Chi Minh City Children-Friendly District research questions

The research questions for the research in Ho Chi Minh City were developed as part of a Mid-Term Review of the Children-Friendly District Pilot Project. District 4 of Ho Chi Minh City is adjacent to the city centre and the Port of Saigon, with numerous storage areas, docks and wharves, and most notably a branch of the Ho Chi Minh City Museum. Ho Chi Minh City frequently receives many visitors from inside and outside the country. Therefore, District 4 is seen as an important gateway in the southern urban zone.

Nevertheless, District 4 is a small district, 409 hectares in size, bordered on three sides by stretches of water that act as boundaries with neighbouring districts. Technical and social infrastructure are still limited. According to December 1998 data, the population, 194,995 and 37,470 households, is divided into 15 wards, 51 groups of households, and 662 sub-wards. District 4 is home to a total of 34,641 children, 16,918 boys and 17,723 girls. The population density is one of the highest in the city (nearly 50,000 people/km^2). Among the population, 7,038 are Vietnamese of Chinese descent, 47 are Cham, 75 are Khmer, and the remaining majority are Kinh. Nearly all employed residents work in handicrafts, small-scale industry, and small businesses. Population increases have at times been relatively sudden (due to migration), causing difficulties for managing and organizing the population.

District 4's social and economic situation has been improving and continues to improve. Urban construction continues to progress, political security and social order and safety are stable, and citizens' quality of life has been steadily improving. Nevertheless, criminal activities and what are known in Viet Nam as 'social evils' (especially substance abuse) continue to occur and are intricately linked.

In April 1999, with the support of the People's Committee of District 4, the City Committee for Protection and Care of Children (CPCC) obtained financial support from SCS to develop knowledge about and implementation of children's rights in a pilot project in Ward 6 District 4. As the basis for implementation, the project organised 21 training courses on the CRC (six for leading cadres and mass organizations, and one for each of the 15 wards). After this the coordination and integration of training in basic ideas about children's rights was organized through sub-ward meetings and other activities, so that the ideas could be passed on to all citizens. For Ward 6 of District 4 in particular, specific activities were carried out to achieve the goal of having all adults understand and improve the way they care for, protect and help children. Project staff report improvements as workers specializing in working with children kept the project under way, developed good relationships with children and their families, organized children relatively well, and worked methodically so that communication was facilitated. Children developed a sense of camaraderie and were happy to have opportunities to participate.

The project assembled a core group of adults and children in Ward 6, linked to mass organizations at various levels, to identify obstacles to the fulfilment of children's rights, such as children who lack birth certificates, school drop-outs, and child abuse. A core group of children was equipped with the knowledge and skills for a step-by-step investigation – gathering and sharing information with their friends. Between 2002 and 2004, the project built awareness of children's rights in general - but particularly participation rights - among community members, including children.

The main objectives of the research assessment in District 4 were:

1. To assess the knowledge of adults, including leader cadres, district and ward mass organizations, teachers, parents and children about children's rights, especially the participation of children in the Children-Friendly District activities;

2. To evaluate the results achieved in children's participation in activities since the Child-Friendly District project began;

3. To draw appropriate experiences and lessons to formulate the next steps (over a further three years; according to the Collaboration Agreement between SCS Viet Nam and the People's Committee of District 4);

4. To further children's active participation in the process of building a living environment suitable for the holistic development of the children of District 4.

Bearing in mind that the Ho Chi Minh City research was related to a Mid-Term Review, specific research questions identified by the team were to:

* Review the model of participation that has been used;
* Provide an overview and assessment of child participation in District 4;
* Summarize lessons learned;
* Provide models for effective replication;
* Make suggestions for future activities;
* Make recommendations for child participation based on already-existing activities in District 4.

Forums research questions

The Vietnamese researchers assessing the three forums identified their specific research questions:

- What are the perceptions of different groups who took part in each forum?
- How have different groups recognized children's ability to participate in Viet Nam?
- How have forum activities been carried out?
- What are the outcomes of each forum?
- What were the activities of each forum?
- What have been the impacts of each forum on different groups of children and adults?
- What can be done to promote children's participation in the future?

Samples

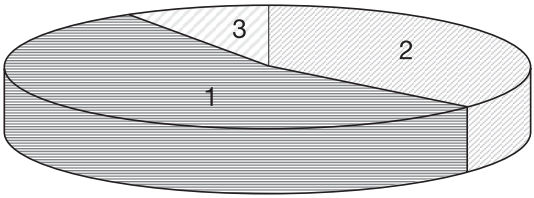
Each research team identified different sample groups.

Ho Chi Minh research samples

The Ho Chi Minh City team selected four broad groups of respondents to take part in the research. The sample was almost equally divided between adults and children (Figure 3)

- Children who benefited directly from the project in District 4
- Children who did not benefit directly from the project;
- Adults who have been directly involved in the project;
- Adults who were not directly involved in the project.

Figure 3: Chart showing proportions of adults, non working and working children who were research participants in Ho Chi Minh City



(1. Children: 55 percent, 2. Adults: 36 percent, 3. Working Children: 9 percent)

The research was carried out with four groups of children (64 percent of the total number of research participants):

- Children from Ward 6 (beneficiaries): The investigation selected children of Ward 6 as those who participated most actively in the project compared with children from other wards because, in the 1998-2000 period, SCS coordinated with the Ho Chi Minh City Child Welfare Foundation and the People's Committee of District 4 to implement the Project in Ward 6. Boys and girls from Ward 6 included those who had participated since the project began in 1999, as well as a number of new children who joined in 2004. These children face especial difficulties, so the Project encouraged ward leaders to include them as research participants;

- Children from Ward 1 (non-beneficiaries): The investigation selected the children of Ward 1 who had not had the chance to participate in the exchange with District 4 leadership, because ward specialists were on maternity leave. Moreover, the Youth Union of Ward 1 was less effective, due to personnel changes, which meant that children from that Ward either did not come at all, or were often absent, or different children attended core activities. Children from Ward 1 were invited to take part in the research but did not participate in the discussion with local leaders. Among them, only one child was part of the core team of children because they had a personal connection with the District 4 Children's House;

- Children from other wards (non-beneficiaries): The investigation also selected one group of boys and one group of girls from various wards, as a control group;

- Working children were also invited separately for comparison. These children regularly participate in the activities of the Grandparents and Grandchildren Club, but have not yet had the chance to participate in the Project's activities.

In addition to the children, four groups of adults participated (36 percent of the total number of research participants):

- Parents from Ward 6;
- Parents from Ward 1;
- Parents from various other wards;
- A group of leading district and ward cadres, teachers and specialists in working with children.

Ward 1 had the highest number of children participating, but this was not significantly different from the numbers from other groups. Children from various other wards participating in the investigation actually included the entire group of core children spread throughout all the wards. Among adults, not all participants were parents.

Tables 2 and 3 show the age and gender breakdowns of the samples, while Table 4 shows the breakdown of the sample by occupation.

Table 2: Age of research participants in Ho Chi Minh City

Age in Years	Ward 6	Ward 1	Various wards	Mass organi sations	Working children	Totals
<12	1	2	3	0	0	6
12-14	12	19	8	0	2	41
15-17	5	1	9	0	6	21
18-25	1	1	1	4	2	9
26-39	0	7	2	1	0	10
40-60	11	2	6	3	0	22
Totals	30	32	29	8	10	109

Most of the children who participated in the research were aged from 12 to 17 years. Children of Ward 1 seemed to be younger than other Wards, and working children were of similar age to others. Adults who participated in the investigation were between 18 and 60 years old, with the majority aged 40 to 60.

Table 3: Gender of Ho Chi Minh City research participants

	Participants	Adults		Children		Totals
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
Ward 6	Children	0	0	9	10	19
	Parents	2	9	0	0	11
Ward 1	Children	0	0	10	12	22
	Parents	1	9	0	0	10
Various wards	Children	0	0	8	12	20
	Parents	3	6	0	0	9
	Mass organizations	1	7	0	0	8
	Working children	0	0	7	3	10
District 4	Local leaders	2	0	0	0	2
Totals		9	31	34	37	111

The number of boys and girls participating from various districts were more or less equal. Among adults, more women than men participated in the investigation (77.5 percent of participants), reflecting the tendency of more women than men to attend local meetings, especially on issues relating to children. In communities, work with children also receives frequent and enthusiastic support from the Women's Union, so the majority of parents participating came at the invitation of the district Women's Union. Men were mobilized from sub-wards.

Table 4: Occupation of respondents in Ho Chi Minh City sample

Occupation	Ward 6	Ward 1	Various Wards	Mass organi sations	Working children	Totals
Government worker	0	0	0	2	0	2
School student	19	22	20	0	0	61
Unemployed or housewife	5	6	3	0	0	14
Facilitator or child specialist	0	0	0	4	0	4
Teacher	0	0	0	1	0	1
Researcher	0	0	0	0	0	0
Worker/labourer	0	2	3	0	0	5
Working children	0	0	0	0	10	10
Other (includes small businesses)	5	2	3	1	0	11
No answer	1	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	30	31	29	8	10	109

Students were involved in both formal and alternative basic education. Although a few children are learning at alternative-based classes almost all the children attend formal school, with the exception of working children. Nearly half the women who participated were unemployed housewives, the remainder made money from small businesses, and a few were labourers who were unlikely to have much time to interact with and take care of children. Leader cadres were usually male, while those who worked with children, or in areas related to children, were usually female.

Forums samples

Some aspects of overall attendance at the three forums are shown in Table 5, although the 'total' numbers are skewed by the fact that some people (adults and children) attended more than one forum. The criteria used by organizers for selection of forum participants attempted to ensure the representation of different groups of children from all regions of the country, students, minorities, street children, abused and exploited children, different age groups and ethnicity.

Table 5. Attendance at the three forums

Category	Number attending							
	Forum 1		Forum 2		Forum 3		'Totals'	
Adults								
Organising agencies	4		3		4		N/A	
Facilitators	15		10		13		38	
Guests	50		0		78		128	
Children								
Gender	Boys 77 (44%)	Girls 97 (56%)	Boys 33 (59%)	Girls 23 (41%)	Boys 63 (39%)	Girls 100 (61%)	Boys 173 (44%)	Girls 220 (66%)
Age (years)	6 - 17		12 -17		10 - 17		6-17	
Ethnic minorities	48 (28%)		11 (19%)		24 (15%)		83 (21%)	
Street and working children	3		10		9		12	

The research on the forums targeted seven groups of respondents:

- Children who participated in forums;
- Children who did not participate in forums;
- Parents of children who participated in forums;
- School teachers;
- Facilitators and organizers of forums (children and adults);
- Project staff (SCA staff and partners);
- Government officials.

Tables 6 to 10 show the breakdown of forum research participants according to age, gender, geographical region, ethnicity and the forums in which they participated.

Table 6: Age of participants in the forums research

Age in years	Number	Percent
< 12	7	5.19
12 - 14	32	23.7
15 - 17	45	33.33
18 - 25	10	7.41
26 - 39	19	14.07
40 - 60	19	14.07
>60	3	2.22
Total	135	100

The high proportion of research participants aged between 12 and 17 years reflects the fact that younger children only participated in the first forum, in 2001.

Table 7: Gender of children participating in the forums research

Gender	Number	Percent
Male	42	31.11
Female	93	68.89
Total	135	100

Although girls were over-represented in this sample, the percentage of girls participating in all the forums (66 percent) was always higher than boys.

Table 8: Geographical area of origin of children participating in the forums research

Geographical area	Number	Percent
Rural	49	36.3
Urban	77	57.04
Mountainous (remote)	9	6.67
Total	135	100

Table 9: Ethnicity of children participating in the forums research

Ethnic group	Number	Percent
Kinh	126	93.33
Non-Kinh ('ethnic group')	9	6.67
Total	135	100

According to Table 9, the overall sample of children from ethnic groups was considerably smaller than the percentage attending forums (Table 5), which may be explained partly by some children being counted more than once because they attended more than one of the forums as 'ethnic representatives'.

Table 10: Children participating in the forums research, according to the forums they attended

Forums attended	Number of children	Percent
Forum 1	18	6.4
Forum 2	13	10.4
Forum 3	56	44.8
Forum 1 and 2	0	0
Forum 1 and 3	3	2.4
Forum 2 and 3	2	1.6
Forum 1,2,3	2	1.6
Did not participate in forums	41	32.8
Total	135	100

The research was conducted a relatively long time after the activities being evaluated. Thus some of the children who participated in the forums had already graduated from middle school and moved on to more distant high schools, beyond the scope of the research. In addition, the time of data collection coincided with semester examinations, meaning that some children were unable to participate or could only spare limited time. It is also worth noting that some respondents seemed to have forgotten details that would have been useful to the research.

A further limitation was that samples did not guarantee the representation of all target groups that had been represented at the forums. It was difficult for the research team to contact appropriate respondents since the forums had happened so long ago, and had been organized through the collaboration of many different agencies and organizations. As in other retrospective evaluations of children's participation, many potential research respondents had been 'lost' (Ennew and Hastadewi, 2004). This places a further limitation on the data, which are necessarily focused on children who are less mobile in both geographical and social terms, and could well be reflected in the over-representation of girls in the sample.

Capacity-building assessment samples

The sample for the overall research assessment of capacity-building activities differed from the other two samples in three ways. In the first place it consisted entirely of adults, who had been the target of the capacity-building programme itself. In the second place, it extended outside Viet Nam to the Asian region and beyond, according to the remit of the Regional Advisor. Because of the

participatory nature of the assessment, this sample also included the Regional Advisor himself, as well as the four consultant researchers (two Vietnamese and two international).

Due to the international scope of this part of the research, some tools were used through the internet in electronic form, in which the response rate was disappointingly low, particularly from members of the Save the Children Alliance Working Group on Participation. Respondents outside Viet Nam were targeted using a list, provided by the Regional Advisor, of those he believed had been reached by his capacity-building work. Within and outside Viet Nam the targeted group consisted largely of staff of SCS Viet Nam, SCA and partners (Tables 11 and 12).

Table 11: Categories of adults, by employment agency, participating in the research assessment of the capacity-building programme

Categories	Number
Save the Children Sweden staff in Vietnam	5
Save the Children Alliance staff in Viet Nam	6
Save the Children Sweden staff outside Viet Nam	2
Save the Children Alliance staff outside Viet Nam	11
Staff of other organizations	2
Other (includes government and researchers)	6
Total	32

Table 12: Geographical location of workplace of adults participating in the research assessment of the capacity-building programme

Location	Number
Viet Nam	16
Other Asian country	13
Developed country	3
Total	32

A total of 32 responses were received. Of these 18 were obtained through a face-to-face approach. In addition to the total 32 respondents from whom data were collected directly by the international consultants, additional data were collected by shared methods with the researchers in the other two research processes. These respondents are counted in the samples for the Ho Chi Minh City and forums research. A further 26 research participants, who took part in workshops and other activities associated with the

research process, are not included in the formal sample because insufficient data could be collected about their characteristics, although data were recorded and used as descriptive material in the analysis and in Tables 15, 17 and 18.

Ten of the 32 formal respondents to the capacity-building research were male and 22 female. Of the 31 whose age was known, two were aged 18 to 25 years, 15 were aged between 26 and 39 years, and 14 were over 40.

Table 13: Age and gender of adults participating in the research assessment of the capacity-building programme

Characteristic	Gender		Age group (years)			
	Male	Female	18-25	26-39	40-60	Not known
Number	10	22	2	15	14	1

Combining the three samples, it can be seen that the total number of participants in the research assessment as a whole was 278, of which more than half (56 percent) were children (Table 14).

Table 14: Total samples of adults and children in the research assessment.

	Ho Chi Minh City	Forums	Capacity-building	Totals
Children	71	84	0	155 (56%)
Adults	40	51	32	123 (44%)
Totals	111	135	32	278

Methods

The full details of the research carried out by all three teams, including the ethical strategy can be found in the Appendix to this Report. The overall aim was to explore ideas about children's participation within different groups, using a variety of methods, which could be triangulated.

Core tools

All researchers used a research diary (with the exception of one part-time researcher in HCMC) and a common observation checklist. In addition, all

three research processes used a core set of tools designed to make it easy to compare data about how respondents had learned about children's participation. These four tools consisted of rapid, easy-to-complete schedules, which were very simple to code for numerical analysis using the Word Excel™ programme. Coding was agreed by all researchers in a workshop after data collection had been completed, because two of the tools invited open-ended responses, which cannot be pre-coded. The only difference between the tools was that the Ho Chi Minh City and forums researchers used versions in Vietnamese, and one tool (the 'Ladder of Participation') had different formats for Vietnamese and English-speaking respondents, to ensure that respondents had a format with which they were familiar. In Ho Chi Minh City the researchers also used a 'ladder' marked out on the floor with illiterate working children, who stood on the rung they considered appropriate. However, as this was a group activity they may well have influenced each other.

The core tools were:

- An attitude survey consisting of eight statements, with which respondents could agree or disagree, designed to assess their attitudes to children and their ability to participate meaningfully;
- A sentence-completion schedule to, explore attitudes to, and knowledge about, children's participation;
- A visual-response tool, using a familiar 'ladder of participation' diagramme, to gather data on research participants' understanding of, and aspirations for, children's participation. This was also used as a stimulus for interviews and focus group discussions. Respondents were asked to mark on the ladder which rung they personally had been on in 2000, where they were in 2004 ('now') and where they would like to be in 2010;
- A timeline to explore the ways adults have learned about children's participation, including the influences of training courses and publications. Respondents were asked to use the line ' to show when, how and what you have learned about children's participation'.

These research tools were used as far as possible in the above order with all research participants (adults and children); although in Ho Chi Minh City the timeline was used only with adults. The core tools were also used in electronic form with participants outside Viet Nam.

One problem encountered with Vietnamese respondents, especially for children in Ho Chi Minh City, was that some of the attitude statements were provided in negative form. In the forum research also, researchers commented that the way the sentences had been translated may have caused some problems of understanding, which could have affected data.

Core tools were among the first tools used during data-collection sessions, and in some cases were the only tools used. On other occasions, they were preceded by an unstructured interview to establish context; complemented by the observation checklist, and/or followed by another research tool. The attitude survey and sentence completion tools were always used, the ladder and timeline only as time and circumstances permitted.

During the piloting stage, researchers found that some groups of adults began to argue with the statements in the attitude survey and/or to discuss possible endings for the sentences. Such debates and discussions were useful data and were recorded in research diaries or on audio tape, provided that participants had given their permission for the use of a tape recorder.

In the early stages of the research in Ho Chi Minh City, which was combined with the intensive experience of jointly designing and piloting tools, members of all three research teams often combined to collect data. In such cases the data were collected in Vietnamese. Translators were only used if an interview was being carried out. Otherwise the international consultants acted as observers, using observation check lists and checking that tools were being used in the same way each time, to provide feedback to the Vietnamese researchers. One of the international consultants also accompanied the forums research team on fieldwork to two additional urban areas.

Additional tools

Additional tools were designed by each research team to explore their particular research questions with their specific target groups (Table 15). As already mentioned, an opportunistic survey of Save the Children staff from the region was also carried out (with 26 respondents) by an SCUK facilitator at a workshop, using the core tools ('workshop survey' in Tables 15 and 16).

Table 15: Research tools used

Tool	Ho Chi Minh City	Forums	Capacity-building
Research diary			
Observation check list			
Secondary data collection			
Attitude survey			
Sentence completion			
Ladder of participation			
Timeline			
Focus group discussion			
Unstructured interviews			
Semi-structured interviews (individuals and groups)			
Structured interview			
Drawings			
Role Play			
Structured discussions with Regional Advisor			
Workshop survey			

The Ho Chi Minh City research team members were disappointed with the data they collected using focus group discussion, for which they had originally had ambitious plans. They reported that:

> The time agreed by the community for the meetings was to be about 90 minutes, usually at night. Two difficulties were encountered: meetings frequently began late and some parents and children had difficulties writing. Thus more time was spent than planned. The number of discussions needed was high, so investigators did not have much time to invite respondents to clarify things they said during the discussions. In addition, the focus group discussions were scheduled at the end of data-collection sessions, when most participants were anxious to leave. The atmosphere was noisy. Ideas usually came from a few individuals and were recorded with the agreement of group members. Under better circumstances and with more time, this tool could have probably been used more effectively.

The Ho Chi Minh team had also anticipated interviewing two District 4 leader cadres. However, at the time of the investigation, elections had just taken place, and the District was busy with the transition, with organizing a Month of Action for Children and activities for the commemoration of District 4's Traditions Day. This meant that it was not possible to meet these respondents face-to-face, and the researchers used a self-completed interview schedule, as the only way of gathering ideas from representatives of leadership level.

Disappointingly few drawings were collected by both Vietnamese teams. In Ho Chi Minh City only nine valid drawings were collected. Although the forums team began by collecting drawings, and using role play when they were sharing data collection with international researchers, they dropped these methods later, feeling that they did not have the experience to collect and analyse data this way.

Table 16: Data collected by all three research teams

Research tool	Piece of data			
	HCMC	Forums	Capacity-Building	Totals
Research diary	2	2	2	6
Observation check list	11	21	4	36
Attitude survey	109	63	30	202
Sentence completion	109	70	30	209
Ladder of participation	120	43	17	180
Timeline	38	17	28	83
Focus group discussion	7	7	0	14
Unstructured interviews	0	17	3	20
Semi-structured interviews (individuals and groups)	0	10	9	19
Structured interview	2	11	24	37
Drawings	9	9	0	16
Role Play	0	5	0	5
Discussions with Regional Advisor	0	0	5	5
'Workshop survey'	0	0	1	1
Total number of pieces of data	407	275	153	835

The three-processes-in-one approach to research generated a considerable amount of data from a variety of research participants. Moreover, the use of the common set of 'core' research tools enabled the international researchers to include the information gathered by other teams in a comparative analysis of the capacity-building project as a whole. The use of many different research methods facilitated a process of triangulation, through which results could be cross-checked and conclusions reached with greater confidence than would be the case with a single-method approach. In addition, children represented over half the research participants, meaning that their opinions and experiences could be taken into account in assessing a programme that had been run for their benefit.

4: LEARNING ABOUT CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

This chapter concentrates on the data collected by all three research teams that reflected on how respondents learned about children's participation, when they learned and what they learned. It concentrates on the core research tools, first the timeline (which was only used with adults), then the ladder of participation, used with children and adults, and finally the attitude survey and sentence completion tools, which aimed to discover more about what the respondents' understanding of children's participation might be. We will describe the data from different samples – children and adults in Ho Chi Minh City, children and adults involved in the three forums, and adults in Viet Nam and further afield who have a stake in children's participation, comparing and contrasting the results from all three groups.

When and how did respondents learn about children's participation?

The main tool for examining respondents' reflections on when they learned about children's participation was the timeline. This also provided some information about what was learned and how. It was an open-ended tool, in which both the periods of time and the reflections on what had been learned were left to the respondents to define. Thus the data coding was imposed after data collection, and (exceptionally) differs between research teams. In the case of timelines collected by the international consultants, the data are compared in this Chapter with information from structured interviews/ questionnaires.

In Ho Chi Minh City, the research team defined the learning period in direct relationship to the SCS project, from 2000 to 2003 (Table 17). They concentrated on information about children's rights, rather than focusing only on children's participation, and followed this with reflection on their growing knowledge of children's rights within the first stages of the project. Information about 2000 can be regarded as baseline data – what people knew about children's participation before the HCMC project began. The research team also examined differences between responses from parents (including disaggregation by gender) and members of mass organizations, including in different wards.

Table 17: How and when parents in Ward 6, Ho Chi Minh City learned about children's rights (timeline research tool)

Ways of learning about children's rights:	Number of parents			
	Year			Totals
	2000	2001	2003	
Through information from project activities	6	4	1	11
Through children	16	5	5	26
Another source	1	0	1	2
Totals	23	9	7	39

All parents from Ward 6, said that they had opportunities to learn about children's rights in 2000, probably as a result of the SCS project implemented during that year (Table 17). The fact that most parents seem to have learned about children's rights through their children may indicate that activities including an element of children's participation also act as direct advocacy to parents. Children not only participated in project activities but also fulfilled a communication function with respect to their families and communities. This was also the case for Ward 1 and other Wards, although at a lower level of intensity.

Although parents from the other Wards did not yet know much about children's rights, mothers had had greater opportunities to learn than fathers. About half the female cadres and people working with children said they already knew about children's rights by 2000. This is perhaps indicative of the fact that women are expected to be closer to, and have greater concern for, children. Certainly, mothers participated significantly more than fathers in the project (13:4 ratio). It is still a common belief in District 4 that the domestic arena is primarily the duty of mothers, while fathers shoulder greater responsibility for 'more important' matters, such as earning money or relationships with relatives and the outside world.

The majority of participants seemed to become aware of children's rights through children, which shows that creating conditions for children to participate not only helps them to demonstrate their capacity, but also gives an important message to their families. However, this may reveal the relative ineffectiveness of other forms of communication used by the project. By contrast, members of mass organizations seemed to learn about children's rights through information from specific project activities, which shows that project communications should be tailored to different audiences.

Between 2001 and 2002, the Committee on Population, Family and Children (CPFC) of District 4 began children's rights training activities with District leaders, intended to strengthen capacity for facilitating children's participation. This seems to have been the chief means through which people working with children and the Youth Union learned about children's rights. At that time, in order to create an enabling environment, the Ward CPFC sent invitations to children explaining some proposed joint activities with leaders. These aroused parents' curiosity, so that they asked children what they were doing, thereby increasing their knowledge of children's participation. Selected children also received invitations from the Wards to participate in other activities, which resulted in further exchange of information between child representatives, their peers and parents.

Up to the beginning of 2002, when the Children-Friendly District Project really began, parents in Ward 1 were regarded as being the least participatory, yet the timeline data show that almost all of them learned something about children's rights through their children. In this case, children's knowledge probably came from their schools. The children from Ward 1 who participated in the project were all elementary school pupils. District 4 Educational Training Office had received guidance from Department of Education and Training of Ho Chi Minh City on building a children-friendly learning environment. From a single pilot school (Dong Da) in 2001, the number increased to 15 elementary schools in the District by 2004. In addition, children's rights were becoming part of the elementary school curriculum.

Timeline data from the research on forums, with a small set of only 13 valid responses, shows that adults involved in the forums learned about children's participation before the capacity-building project began. This is not surprising. Programme managers of the agencies involved in the forums would be most likely to select staff who *already* had some awareness of, and practice in, children's participation as organizers and facilitators for the forums. Thus 10 respondents reported that they first learned about children's participation between 1990 and 1999, while two had learned in 2000 and one in 2003.

Only two of the adults participating in the research on forums stated that they had learned about children's participation through training in the capacity-building project itself (Table 18). Likewise, of the regional and global experts who responded to the research through the timeline tool, only 10 percent referred to learning about children's participation through this means. As capacity building in this area can be said to be in its infancy, this is not

surprising – especially among those who might be described as experts in this field. Well over half of the ways of learning they mentioned related to experiences of working with children – in other words 'learning on the job'.

Table 18: How adults working in children's participation said they had learned about the practice (Timeline research tool used in forums, research assessment and workshop)

Ways of learning about children's rights	Number of times mentioned			
	Forums	Experts	Workshop survey	Totals
Training in capacity-building project	2	11	0	13
Training outside project	5	21	5	31
Acquired information/ knowledge through personal experience or practice	6	69	42	117
Through children	0	5	10	15
Acquired information and knowledge through mass media	0	2	2	4
Other sources	0	4	1	5
Totals	13	112	60	185

Table 18 also records data collected using an amended timeline in a Regional SCUK workshop in 2004 to assess organizational capacity in children's participation. The 26 workshop participants, divided into national groups, were given similar instructions to research assessment participants:

> Using the vertical line as a guide, please mark on the left-hand column the times ('life stage' or date or year) when your country programme or team was specifically exposed to children's participation. Then write in the right-hand column how and what you have learned at that time. Start as early as you like in your organizational 'lifeline'!

All the workshop replies located the beginning of national exposure to children's participation *before* the start of the SCS Viet Nam capacity-building programme: China 1996, Indonesia 2000, Thailand and Lao PDR 1999, Mongolia 1999, Myanmar 1995 (when the office opened) and Viet Nam 1999. Significantly, 10 of the 26 respondents mentioned learning through national forums. Specific mention was also made of activities of the Child-to-Child movement, which also influenced some of the 'experts' in the sample.

Results from the structured interview complement these data. Three quarters of the 'experts' who responded through the timeline tool were staff within the Save the Children family of agencies, while almost all were employed in posts that involved children's participation as part of their job descriptions. In some cases these were posts dedicated to this activity. Of the 24 employed in Save the Children organizations, 18 stated that children's participation was 'integral', 'essential' or 'very important' to their work and 16 said that they discussed the issue with their colleagues 'often'. Yet it was also interesting to note that some members of this group later contacted researchers to ask if their responses had been 'correct' or to request feedback on their opinions. We took this as an indication that, in this new field of programme activity, even 'experts' are still thinking through issues in both theory and practice, and feel uncertain about their own expertise, even though 23 had personal experience of working with children. Hands-on experience, such as facilitation, was mentioned 15 times, management 13, training 19 and research six. Sixteen 'expert' respondents had attended training courses – two in the capacity of trainer. Thirteen of the courses had been run by a Save the Children agency (four having been organized within the capacity-building project and facilitated by the Regional Advisor). All but one 'expert' respondent had read books and articles about children's participation, one providing a fairly comprehensive list, although the repetition of a small number of titles by almost all respondents reflects the small range and limited accessibility of this literature. The uncertainty with which the experts regarded their expertise, despite their practical experience, may well reflect the opinions expressed by the Regional Advisor himself in one of the unstructured conversations recorded for the assessment, in which he suggested that, in ISCA as a whole: 'Nobody has really thought [child participation] through. Most people are too busy with "feel-good" participation or with their other work.'

'Experts' responses to the timeline tool show a gradual dawning of awareness of children's participation, combined with reflection on their own childhoods. In addition to underlining the importance of the Regional Advisor's method of beginning training workshops with reflection on participants' memories of childhood, this also revealed a global tendency that negates any assertion that children's participation is a Western imposition. On the contrary, adult lack of respect for children's opinions appears to be almost universal. 'I was four when I decided to leave home,' wrote one European respondent as his first awareness of children's participation, 'The bus driver refused to let me on the bus and sent me home.' Another, non-Asian, respondent located 1975 (at five years of age) as 'my first conscious memory of not being allowed to participate in a

family decision. It felt unfair.' Three years later, however, this respondent was allowed to participate in a decision 'about something I wanted.' Gradually, greater participation was allowed more, both at home and in school: 'It was a process of learning how to express myself, be understood (and not understood), learning about others' points of view, being given responsibility and taking responsibility for decisions.'

An older researcher from outside the region referred to learning through childhood awareness of 'adult ignorance and hypocrisy.' A member of staff from an ISCA organization recalled learning 'that adults are always/usually right; no need to consult children.' Another, younger, international SCS staff member said that he had learned about participation in childhood and adolescence 'through realizing the lack of opportunities for participation' at home at school and in other contexts. This led to a decision 'to be firm' on his own beliefs, ideas and ambitions; by 'getting acquainted with the concepts of rights, certain philosophical concepts, and knowledge about laws,' leading to the recognition of 'the importance of expression, access to information and education, fulfilment of [my] own decisions, as well as the responsibility of adults to facilitate and encourage these.'

The understanding of children's participation recalled by a Vietnamese woman was 'social activities organized by adults.' An Asian woman wrote, 'When I was a six-year-old girl my father didn't allow me to read a children's novel. I wished I could be an adult and do anything I wanted.' As a secondary school pupil she recalled that she wanted to participate in class activities of singing and dancing but her father forced her to stay at home to learn and work. In response she remembered making up her mind not to do this with her own children in the future. Finally, in her teens, her father refused to allow any male classmate to go to the house, even so that they could work together on homework. She learned through this that 'my father was not always right.' Memories of a strict upbringing were part of this overall picture of non participation. A Vietnamese member of SCS staff said that he was 'born and grew up in a rather good but conservative family where the rod and rules were regarded as a good way of bringing up children.' Another Asian from ISCA wrote that, until 1995, 'I had no idea' about child participation: 'I thought children had to obey adults ... I thought punishment could make them better.' The experiences recalled from the Southeast Asia and Pacific Region are thus similar to one angry recollection from Europe. 'Rubbish time at school ... adults not listening, teachers pretty sick people.'

Nevertheless, positive experiences of childhood were also mentioned. For example, one young Asian learned through involvement in a radio programme written, directed and produced by children, through a working children's organization and through involvement in the 1998 Global March Against Child Labour. An older, European, respondent mentioned schooldays in the radical education programme Summerhill, 'where children decide what and when to learn' (Neill, 1962). A North American respondent also mentioned family-based participation in which 'I had choices to make' about clothes, food, vacations, and later about 'study and work options.' A similar experience, in the Middle East, for a girl, contradicts regional gender stereotypes: 'Taking part in selecting the new apartment my family was moving to and the furniture that was being purchased for it. I learned in the process that, if I supported them with reasons, my opinions would be taken seriously by my family.' Other respondents mentioned being involved in choosing their schools and having opportunities for representation and organization within schools. Yet it is more than possible that these recollections reflect a middle-class origin shared by many research participants.

The next set of timeline experiences of lifetime learning about children's participation mentioned being a student in higher education, living away from home, becoming involved in student politics, teacher training and the experience of teaching, as well as becoming a trainer or facilitator on the CRC and children's participation (which was mentioned by six of these respondents). Personal study and research in the specific area of children's participation was mentioned seven times, indicating perhaps growing commitment to the issue. Finally, a further crucial area of learning is clearly the experience of parenthood. Motherhood taught 'awareness of children's capacity' to one international respondent. Another learned from being a parent that 'Children develop better by being involved; by participating in things going on around them.' A Vietnamese father stated that having a baby son brought home to him 'the conflict between theory and practice', which 'made me reconsider the CRC and child participation' forcing him on to 'a higher step on the ladder of participation.' Three participants, underlined both the incremental, life-cycle learning process as well as implying the relative uncertainty of their understanding by writing that they 'learn more every day.'

Finally, the timelines recorded by 'experts', like their responses to the structured survey schedule, recorded specific training in children's participation, through working with SCS and SCA. One comment was that, during a workshop to share information about its programmes in general with all partners, SCS 'took

the opportunity to give a half-day training on children's participation.' Workshops had also been provided at other times by other organizations (sometimes previous NGO employers), through training in Child-to-Child approaches and through capacity-building experiences linked to forums of various kinds, including the Special Session. Many research participants had been involved in more than one of these activities and/or more than one forum, which emphasizes that learning about children's participation is an incremental process based in experiences of many kinds.

Table 19: Levels of participation signified by the 'rungs' on the 'ladder' used in the ladder of participation research tool

Rung number	Rung name	Explanation
0	No consideration	Children are not given any help or consideration at all; they are ignored
1	Adults rule	Adults make all decisions; children told nothing except what they must do
2	Adults rule kindly	Adults make all decisions; children told what to do and given reasons and explanations
3	Manipulation	Adults decide what to do and ask children if they agree (children must agree)
4	Decoration	Adults decide what to do; children take part by singing, dancing or performing ceremonial functions
5	Tokenism	Adults decide what to do; afterwards, children are allowed to decide some minor aspects
6	Invitation	Adults invite children's ideas, but make the decisions themselves on their own terms
7	Consultation	Adults consult children and consider their opinions carefully; then adults decide, taking the opinions into account
8	Joint decision	Adults and children decide together on a basis of equality
9	Children lead, adults help	Children take the lead in deciding, with help from adults
10	Children in charge	Children decide what to do; adults get involved only if children ask them to help

In all three research processes, respondents' perceptions of changes over time in their own attitudes to children's participation were explored using a tool based on the 'ladder of participation'. Both adults and children were asked to record where on the ladder they felt they had been, were now and would like to be, in 2000, 2004 and 2010 respectively. The aim was not to check levels of participation against the rungs of the ladder, as if this were a set of ranked criteria, but rather to use the ladder as a tool for respondents to think with, so that their perceptions of their own level of participation could be meaningfully compared. Figures 4 to 8 show some of the overall results using this method.

The rungs on the ladder of participation were taken from the diagram originally popularized by Roger Hart (Hart, 1992) and later modified in Viet Nam by Barbara Franklin when she was a consultant for SCS (Hart, 1992; Boyden and Ennew, 1997; Appendix). Each rung is numbered - as in Figures 4 to 8 - to indicate levels of participation from 0 ('no consideration of participation') to 10 ('children in charge') (Table 19). Although most participants were already familiar with the 'ladder', each time this research tool was used, researchers first ensured that all research participants understood the significance of each rung (Appendix).

Figure 4: Changes in perception of children's participation among children in Ho Chi Minh City, 2000 to 2010 using ladder of perception tool (N=82).

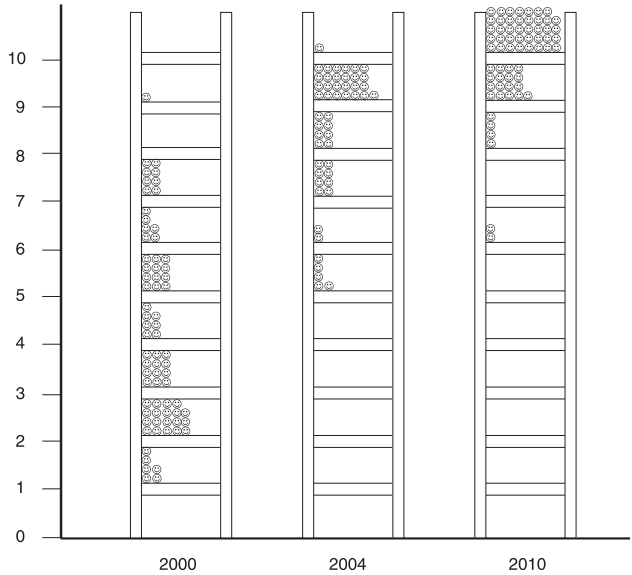


Figure 5: Changes in perception of children's participation among adults in Ho Chi Minh City, 2000 to 2010 using ladder of perception tool (N=38).

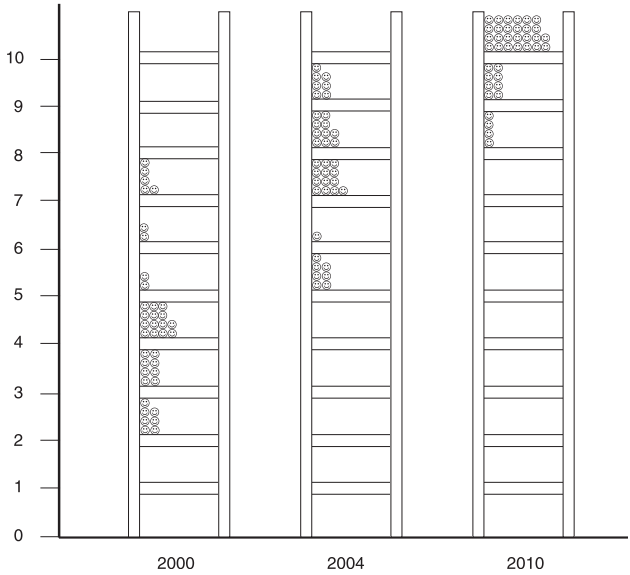


Figure 6: Changes in perception of children's participation among adults connected to the forums, 2000 to 2010 using ladder of perception tool (N=30).

For 2010 there were three 'don't know' responses.

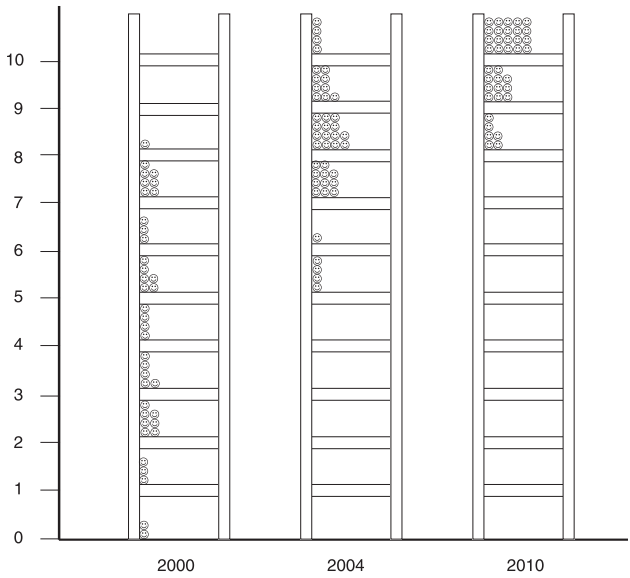


Figure 7: Changes in perception of children's participation among adult 'experts', 2000 to 2010 using ladder of perception tool (N=17).

In 2004 there was one don't know response and for 2010 one

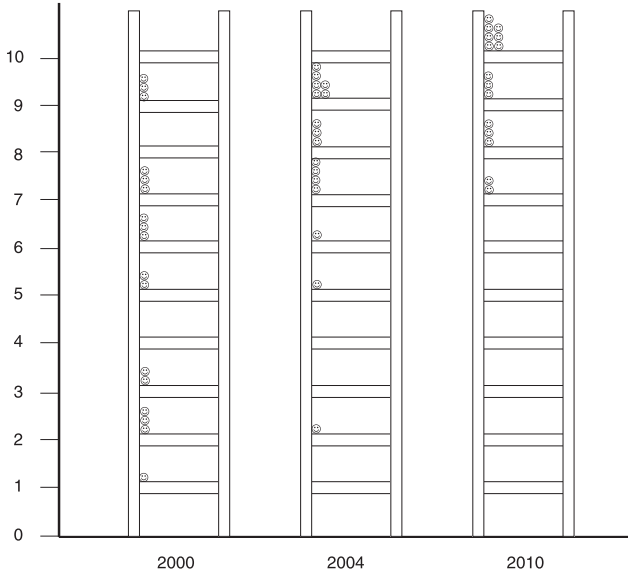
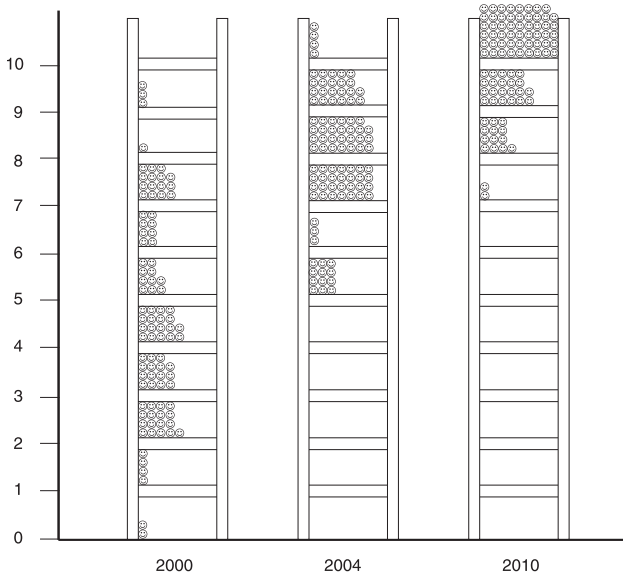


Figure 8: Changes in perception of children's participation among adult respondents in all three research processes, 2000 to 2010 using ladder of perception tool (N=93).



One clear conclusion from data gathered using this tool is that all groups of research respondents report they had increased the level of children's participation in their personal orbit between 2000 and 2004, and say they are aiming to raise this still further by 2010. Indeed the anticipated shift up the ladder of perception by 2010 is remarkable, with three-quarters of children and just over half of all adults saying they would like children to be 'in charge' by 2010.

From detailed analysis of the Ho Chi Minh City data it seems that there are no notable differences between girls and boys, although there were differences between working and non working children. The Ho Chi Minh City researchers commented that 'these children usually have to struggle to find means of subsistence; they have to worry about many things, which results in greater boldness of expression and higher degrees of independence and self-determination.' As many of the working children were migrants from rural areas it may also be the case that slightly greater knowledge of 'the world' had influenced their views of their own rights to participate.

A further difference can be noticed between children from different Wards in Ho Chi Minh City, in that the greatest increase in perception of participation was recorded to have occurred between 2000 and 2004 among those who belonged to the core group of children who had had greatest contact with the Children-Friendly District Project. Differences between parents in different Wards mirrored those between children, emphasizing the important role played by children informing their parents about their rights to participate.

The surprising factor connecting the three groups of adults (from Ho Chi Minh City, adults connected to the forums and 'experts') is the commitment to reaching the highest levels of participation (rungs 8, 9 and 10) by 2010. With the exception of two of the 'experts', all those adults who responded with their hopes for this year wanted children to be equal partners in joint decisions (13 of 90), or leading adults (22), or 'in charge' (53). Perhaps the most significant figure here is that more than half said they were aiming for a world in which children decide what to do, and only ask for adult help if they feel they need to do so. This could indicate one of two conclusions, which are not mutually exclusive: children's participation is not unacceptable in Vietnamese culture and/or the capacity-building project has had a considerable degree of success. Of course the adult participants in all three research processes were almost exclusively adults who had been in direct contact with the project and/or were staff or trainers in children's participation. These

results might be interpreted to mean that at least some respondents would feel obliged to respond that they wished to be on the top rung of the ladder, because they felt this would be expected of them – an explanation that would be backed up by the tendency of experts to check back with researchers to see if they had 'got the answers right'. Some clues about how to interpret the data from the timeline and ladder tools can be found in the data gathered using the attitude survey schedule and sentence completion tool, which provided information about what participation means to research participants 'now' (2004). But first it is important to consider how the person with greatest influence on the capacity-building project – the Regional Advisor – viewed his own process of learning about children's participation, and his aims for 2010 in this sphere. The personal influence of the Regional Advisor on the capacity-building programme was clear from the frequency with which his given name (Henk) was used by research respondents when referring to their personal history of learning about participation or about the programme itself.

Learning about children's participation – a personal view

As we have already explained, one feature of the three processes was the involvement of four of the researchers and the Regional Advisor as research respondents, as well as the participation of the Regional Advisor at all stages in the evaluation of his own work. The Regional Advisor and the two international consultants have been close colleagues for almost two decades. The analysis in this section is thus based on data collected using the core tools, as well as on a series of semi-structured interview-discussions targeted solely at the Regional Advisor, as well as on some of his published writing. This is an example of the reflexive method of research analysis, and bears in mind the shared experiences of all three individuals over a considerable period of time (see for example Okley and Callaway, 1992).

A significant overall observation is that the Regional Advisor had a clear, pragmatic vision of his role and its relation to the progress of children's participation. This is demonstrated in a number of the definitions of key terms he gave in various contexts. For example, when discussing the term 'enabling environment', after the first protocol-development workshop in Hanoi, he said that 'In the context of training [this means] to try to find out what adult participants think adults should or shouldn't do to make participation work ... it relates a lot to ethical issues ... to the conditions that must be in place for participation to be a reality.' On this occasion he also pointed to the difficulty of translating this term into Kiswahili during his previous work in Kenya, as

well as currently into Vietnamese. When asked by an international researcher if one of the problems was the metaphorical use of a physical concept to describe a social 'event' - which is typical of English language use - he replied that he is not a native English speaker, which meant that the exact meaning of English-origin terminology was frequently a topic of debate with Vietnamese colleagues.

The Regional Advisor was also clear about the influence of cultural context. 'Enabling environments,' he stated, are bound to be the product of on going interaction between local culture and external ideas or pressures. Reflecting on his experiences training Kenyan adults – mostly from NGOs for street children – in children's participation between 1995 and 1999, he wrote:

> Capacity-building on children's participation needs to be tailored to the local context. Partners in capacity-building have to be identified carefully and strategically and partnerships need to be built, which is a time-consuming process ... Experiences also show that emphasis should be put on preparing adults, rather than children, to promote children's participation. More than anything else, capacity building in children's participation relates to changing attitudes of adults and to internalizing the concept, which does not happen over night (Beers, 2002, 123).

This comment is congruent with the SCS approach in Viet Nam, referred to earlier, which acknowledges the importance of local alliances and of promoting children's participation within the bounds of local possibilities. This statement also raises (or maybe even answers) a question prompted by the emphasis placed by the Ho Chi Minh research team on the important role played by children in promoting the idea of participation in their own homes. It may be that this is part of the politico-social reality of the environment of capacity building in Viet Nam, where it is the duty of all citizens to communicate messages from official sources, and would not have been an enabling factor in Kenya. On the other hand, it is important to remember that the Kenyan capacity-building programme was aimed at NGO staff working with children who were largely outside families, so that children would not have this role, or it would not have been noted within the bounds of that particular project.

The Regional Advisor's definition of 'participation' is likewise pragmatic:

> It depends on the context and you have to agree with adults and children together [what it should be]. The context includes the characteristics of both children and adults, the topic, the impact of political, cultural and social context, the roles and responsibilities of adults and children, the methods used and the venue (Research Tool 11; Interview schedule).

'A lot of the big words' surrounding children's participation, he stated on an other occasion 'are part of what ... people want it to be. "Consultation" [rung 7 on the ladder] may in some circumstances be as far as you can get, but it is not where it should end' (Interview 04.05.04). Where it should end – 'the ultimate goal' – he saw as the end of a 'very long-term process' towards:

> A society where children can freely express themselves and where their concerns, their aspirations and needs are taken into account to a large extent. Where they can play an active role themselves. A society where children's rights are respected. Regardless of the percentage of children in the population, children as a group have a longer future ahead than adults as a group (ibid).

When asked what such a society might look like, he responded, 'In a way it is Utopia because you can't see it separate from the whole aspiration of society, from equal opportunity, from the twin principles of equality and equity.' If this social transformation were to be presented as the goal, he commented, there would be people and interest groups that would 'back off', including some who currently promote children's participation.

This vision, therefore, is not congruent with the notion of 'children in charge' but rather veers off the rungs of the ladder towards a broader goal. Even with respect to capacity building, and certainly with respect to children's participation in general, the Regional Advisor made it clear on several occasions that children's right to information must be fulfilled before they are asked to make decisions; adults are responsible for ensuring that children do not take 'decisions that would have more impact than the children could foresee' (interview 04.05.04). This leads to his emphasis on the importance of children being involved in decisions within families, communities and local government, rather than at international gatherings: '[UN] Security Council decisions *do* impact them; but some of the power issues at that level are

beyond their experience' (ibid). While pointing out that his post is 'advisory' to adults, rather than to children, he was also clear about the skills training required for children to participate effectively: life skills, analytical skills, information processing, debating, sharing and leading discussions, public speaking, self expression and listening. Many of these of course are skills that most adults do not have, the lack of which does not prevent their participation in political arenas, even at the highest level, which raises the issue of why children's participation should bear a heavier burden of qualification than adult participation (Ennew and Hastadewi, 2004).

The personal history leading the Advisor to this pragmatic position was unusually practical and grounded, beginning with establishing a children's film house as a student volunteer with a group of children in The Netherlands. It is worth noting that this was in 1980 – contemporary with the specific discussions on children's participation that started with the drafting process for the CRC. The aim of the film house was to provide alternative films for children that were respectful of their capacities, but 'children's participation' was not discussed as a principle or concept. Because this volunteer activity led to studying social work and law, the Advisor might perhaps be described as having a career grounded in children's participation, rather than as having encountered children's participation as an issue in the course of his career.

Perhaps his answers to the sentence completion tool best sum up the Advisor's personal opinions on participation:

Children's rights are ... *human rights.*
Children's duties are ... *to respect others' rights.*
Children can participate from the age of ... *0.*
Children should not ... *do things adults should not do.*
Children should ... *have opportunities to participate.*
Children should participate in ... *all matters they would like to participate in.*
Children should not participate in ... *violence.*
Children's opinions are ... *important.*
When children make decisions the result is ... *dependent on the quality of the process.*
Adults have a responsibility to ... *ensure that children can participate.*

How and what did 'experts' learn?

The Regional Advisor's philosophy provides the background to analyzing the responses of the group of respondents to whom (because their work is directly related to children's participation) we refer to as 'experts' in this Report. They responded not only to the core research tools but also through interview and questionnaire schedules. Consisting of staff of SCS and other ISCA agencies, together with their partners (in Viet Nam, the SEAP region and internationally) they had been the primary target group for the capacity-building programme. All had been in contact with the programme, mostly through a direct (and often long-term) working relationship with the Regional Advisor.

Table 20: Classification of responses given by 'experts' to the question 'What is the origin of children's participation?'

Category of response	Number of responses
Human rights	3
Convention on the Rights of the Child	6
Practical experience	10
Did not understand the question	1
Other	1
Don't know	3
Total responses	24

Twenty-four of these 'experts' responded to Tool 11 (structured questionnaire) either in a face-to-face session or through email, as well as to core tools. As we commented earlier in this Report, one striking result of the research was found in responses to the question: 'What is the origin of the idea of children's participation?' (Table 20). Four 'expert' respondents either said that they did not know the origin of this key concept for their work, or failed to understand the question. One quarter replied that the idea originated in the CRC, three elaborating by referring to the 'participation articles', particularly Article 12. Only three referred to human rights in general. The largest proportion located the origin outside rights altogether, in practical work with children. While some respondents were, by their own admission, relatively new to the children's-rights world, others had more than sufficient experience to be expected to know a little more about the derivation of the current concept of children's participation. More than half worked for Save the Children Alliance members or for other NGOs within the same field (see Tables 11 and 12).

From the classification of responses in Table 29 one might conclude that more than a quarter of the 'experts' believe that participation is a children's-rights idea, which it indeed came to be during the decade of drafting the CRC (1979-1989). Yet, as we discussed in Chapter 2, this is only part of the story. Examination of the (sometimes extensive) explanations in interview responses reveals that 'experts' are divided between this view and a broader perspective, which is often similar to the 'Utopian' vision of the Regional Advisor. It is particularly interesting that this division does not reflect whether or not the respondent is Vietnamese. One Vietnamese academic commented that children's participation 'will create a better, more equal, society.' Likewise, a Vietnamese NGO worker wrote that children's participation is:

> a process that enables the child to make decisions, to have greater ownership of their lives and make adults aware of children's needs and make a better life for them. It is a two-way process with benefits for both.

One Vietnamese SCS colleague of the Regional Advisor suggested that the origin of the idea lies in 'the Western concept of democracy', while an international SCS colleague commented:

> [Children's participation has a] long and winding history, closely interlinked with human development concepts, possibly starting with the earliest times – more recently through efforts of educators and rights activists ... We probably should be talking of *origins,* and these should be very diverse, depending on the context/civilization/social model explored ... [including] children's civil rights, democracy, children's rights as social actors who influence their environments, child development and active citizenship.

Both a Vietnamese NGO worker and a SCUK staff member (national of another country in the region) proposed that children's participation is the outcome of an historical struggle by children as a group (some might say 'class'), their respective comments being:

> [The origin comes from] children – a large population of human beings with a right and the ability to participate, which is good for their development. Also from experience that adults got it wrong;

> In my opinion, children have always been struggling to be part of discussions and decisions on issues that affect their lives. It is only with the 1989 CRC that there was a general consensus among adults and state parties that children have this right.

Comments directly relating the origin to practical experience – for example 'community development', 'children's rights and needs', 'a training workshop' and 'promotion of the CRC' – also included information about the personal dawning of the idea for some respondents. For example:

> On a philosophical level I have no idea but at an academic level I presume the CRC;

> I don't know [the origin]. The first time I heard about it was an SCS training course.

'For me' wrote a Vietnamese SCS staff member 'It came from the CRC; before knowing the CRC I used to think like many other people that children and young people are the ones that adults have to care for and they have to be obedient.' A respondent from a SCS partner organization in Cambodia wrote: 'child participation is ... not well recognized and valued by our society. Currently CRC has been used as a tool to promote more children's participation at all levels.'

What 'participation' means now

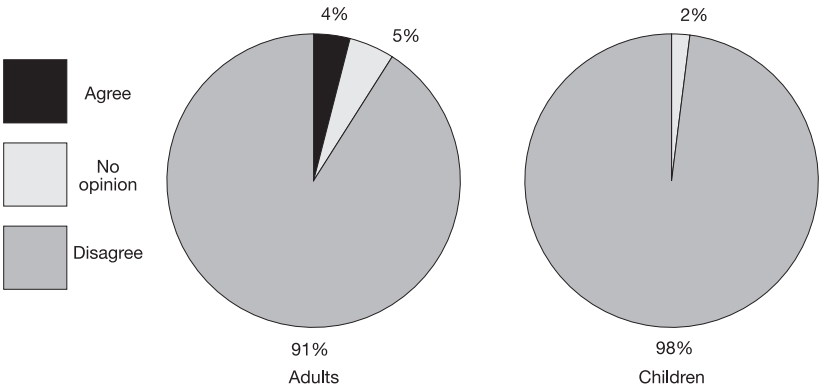
In order to cross-check self-reports, especially from the the 'ladder of participation', two further core tools were employed – an attitude survey and a sentence completion instrument. These were designed to check personal and cultural ideas about children's participation, making it possible to examine in greater depth the possibility that respondents (most of whom had been involved in the capacity-building programme) were providing answers they believed were expected of them. Analysis of the sentence-completion data was limited, however, because of the large number of responses coded as 'other' from data collected in HCMC and the forums. This should be taken into consideration in the following account of research results. The samples for the attitude survey, which consisted of 'agree/disagree' responses to eight statements, were HCMC = 109, forums = 65, 'experts' = 30, and the analysis was relatively robust throughout, enabling differences between adults and children to be noted, although few differences were actually identified.

The results from the attitude survey and sentence completion tools can be grouped according to two research considerations, both of which have considerable implications for the development of an enabling environment:

- The Vietnamese context of children's participation;
- Overall willingness to accept children's participation as effective and meaningful.

The Vietnamese context of children's participation

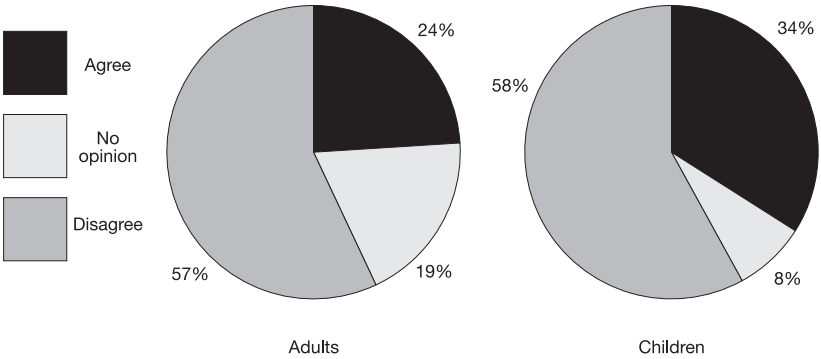
Figure 9: Adults' and children's responses to the statement 'Children's participation is not appropriate in Vietnamese culture' (all three research samples)



The almost complete disagreement with the statement 'children's participation is not appropriate in Vietnamese culture' by both adults and children (Figure 9) seems to deny Rachel Burr's thesis that children's rights are incompatible with Vietnamese values. Culture is never static, and the efforts made both by the government and NGOs, described in Chapter 2, are likely to have changed attitudes towards children's participation in the decade or so since Burr's fieldwork. Vietnamese traditional proverbs, such as 'the shirt cannot cover the head' and 'the egg cannot be larger than the duck,' might indicate that children's ideas are not highly valued by adults. But Vietnamese society is steadily interacting with, and absorbing, new perspectives through books, newspapers, and films as well as through increasing familiarity with children's-rights principles. Thus, many Vietnamese have changed or are changing their perspectives. As the HCMC research team comments, this is both an encouraging result from the perspective of SCS Viet Nam efforts to

promote children's participation and a source of energy for creating conditions for children's participation (Chau et al, 2004). Nevertheless, responses to other attitude survey statements show a lingering ambiguity as people incorporate the principles and ideas of children's participation into their worldviews (Figures 10, 11 and 12).

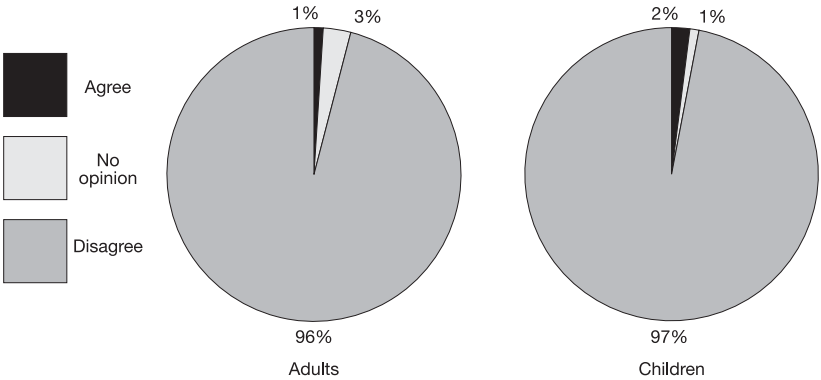
Figure 10: Adults' and children's responses to the statement 'Children should obey adults' (all three research samples)



The statement 'children should obey adults' was intended to explore the tradition of the central place of 'obedience' in the morally correct way of 'being a child' in Viet Nam. Vietnamese childrearing patterns reinforce obedience as a virtue, and the results from responses to this statement (Figure 10) show that there may be more underlying resistance to the idea of children's participation and child/adult democratic relations than might be thought from looking at Figure 9 alone. 'Children should obey adults' produced one of the largest 'no opinion' responses in the survey – especially from adults – even though the majority of respondents – both adults and children – disagreed. In addition, we are once again forced into the position of wondering if the responses recorded in Figure 9 reflect the desire to give a 'right' answer. Just as we suspect adults (or children) might baulk at the idea of 'children in charge', without asking what they might be 'in charge' of, so we suggest that adults might not disagree that 'children should obey adults' unthinkingly at all times – for example in matters of safety. As more than one 'expert' respondent commented with respect to this statement, 'it all depends', not only on the 'evolving capacities' referred to in Article 12 of the CRC, but also the context in which obedience is being expected. When the HCMC researchers

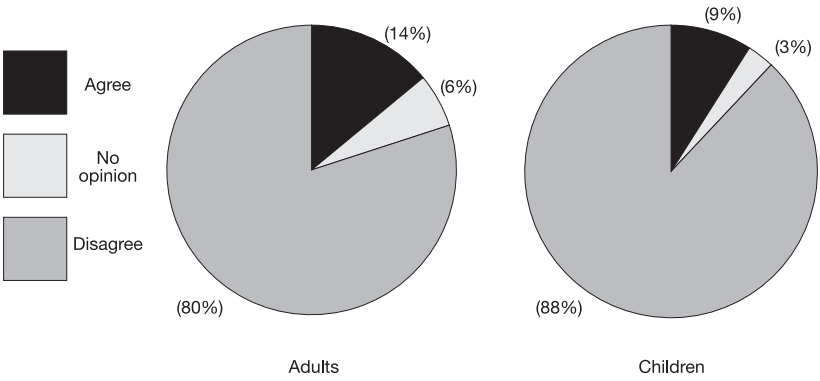
questioned adult respondents on this point they found that disagreement with the statement was not unequivocal. In addition, these researchers commented that,' in reality', adults do not always understand children correctly and that 'obedience' should be tempered with exchange of ideas and opinions (Chau et al, 2004). On the other hand, Figure 11 shows that almost no adults or children in any of the samples said they find it 'disrespectful' for children to express their opinions to adults. Negative responses were attributed by HCMC researchers to 'confusion' about children's rights, while forums researchers commented that children who had participated in forums were more likely than non participants to support the notion that children should actively contribute their opinions, instead of only giving them when asked.

Figure 11: Adults' and children's responses to the statement 'It is disrespectful for children to express opinions to adults' (all three research samples)



The potentially coercive nature of the statement 'children should give their opinions when asked' (Figure 12) was commented on by some of the 'experts', six of whom disagreed. This explains the apparent contradiction between Figures 11 and 12. Agreement with this statement might imply that children must be obedient, and give their opinions – but *only when their views are solicited.* It could also imply that they should remain silent unless spoken to, and that they do not have the right to *withhold* their opinions. Overall, Figures 10 to 12 qualify the almost total agreement that children's rights are appropriate in the Vietnamese social and cultural context, demonstrating that attitude change progresses unevenly, in Viet Nam as elsewhere.

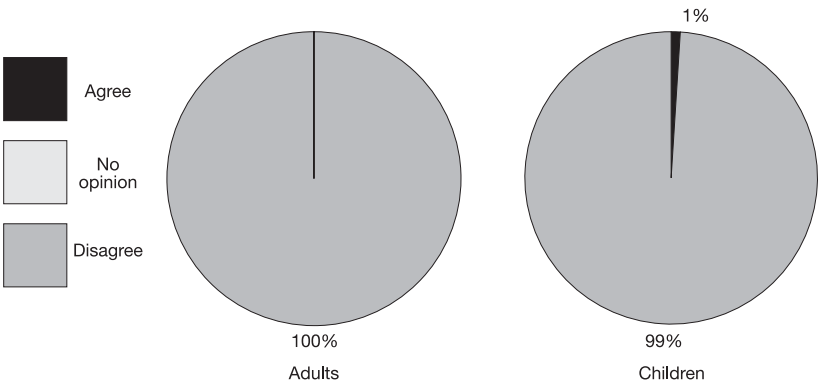
Figure 12: Adults' and children's responses to the statement 'Children should give their opinions when they are asked' (all three research samples).



The final statement in this part of the exploration of attitudes was intended to test changes in perspectives on children's participation compared to another rapid attitude change in Viet Nam – the education of girls – which has been promoted by both government and external agencies in the relatively recent past. It was not surprising to us that there was virtually universal disagreement with the statement 'Educating girls is not worthwhile'. The single respondent who agreed was a boy in Ho Chi Minh City. HCMC researchers commented that

> All parents and children regardless of gender have awareness of gender, and know to protect children's right to receive an education without discrimination on any basis. In recent years, Viet Nam no longer distinguishes between genders, women's capacity has been demonstrated to be no less than, and sometimes even more than, men. This also affirms that children's education is close to and fits with policies and priorities of the local government. District 4 is striving to prevent child dropouts from school, and to forge ahead with universalizing secondary education by 2005. If they have the conditions to learn in, girls will be able to develop not only themselves but also to contribute to their families and society (Chau et al, 2004).

Figure 13: Adults' and children's responses to the statement 'Educating girls is not worthwhile' (all three research samples)



Overall willingness to accept children's participation

The final three statements in the attitude survey, together with the very open-ended sentence completion tool, in which respondents could express their own opinions rather than reacting to a statement, attempted to assess other elements of the environment in which children's participation is being promoted, such as views about the relative rights and duties of adults and children, children's ability to participate and the arenas in which their participation is regarded as appropriate.

In the first place, some of the items in the sentence completion tool aimed to explore knowledge of children's rights. One of the most common responses from 'experts' completing the sentence 'Children's rights are ...' was 'human rights', while all three samples contained some respondents who provided general assertions that children's rights are 'good', or something to be approved of. A tendency among respondents from HCMC and the forums was to list the rights that should be enjoyed by children, such inventories showing accurate knowledge of the provisions of the CRC and probably indicating successful capacity building on this topic. The HCMC researchers comment that all the groups of children in the research easily completed this sentence, showing themselves particularly able to name the four 'groups' of rights (survival, development, protection and participation). A large number of other children also answered that children's rights are important and very good for children because, through their rights being observed, children can

receive education, protection, equal treatment, health care and recreation as well as being able to talk to, and exchange opinions with, adults. Not surprisingly, the working children differed from others by suggesting rights such as having breakfast, a house and a birth certificate. Although children in HCMC tended to list children's rights, the researchers found that adults usually listed children's essential needs and that only parents in Ward 6 and professionals working with children mentioned the four groups of rights.

Adult knowledge of children's rights is important for ensuring that, as duty bearers, they ensure these rights are fulfilled. Responses from adults in the HCMC and forums samples completing the sentence 'Adults have the responsibility to ...' were congruent with the tendency to list needs rather than rights, suggesting a somewhat conservative view of the role of adults. In HCMC, according to the responses to this sentence, both adults and children were in agreement, but there were some differences according to gender; women and girls being more likely to respond that adults should care for children and protect them from dangerous people. Some children indicated that they would like adults to have more responsibility in teaching and helping children overcome obstacles, or bringing happiness to children. Working children wanted adults to protect children's right to be fairly compensated for their labour.

Taking all three samples together, the general opinion seems to be that adults have the responsibility to fulfil rights and respect children, to 'care for' children and (to a lesser extent) to protect them. Only the 'experts' (perhaps bearing in mind the topic of the research) mentioned listening to children – which represented the largest proportion of answers from this sample.

Children's duties are not mentioned in the text of the CRC, in contrast to one complementary regional treaty, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Yet a frequent criticism of the CRC made within 'cultural relativity' debates from Asian and other majority-world cultures is that, in traditional cultures, children's duties are at least as important as their rights (Van Bueren, 1995). Although seven 'experts' responded 'don't know', which may indicate identification with the 'Western model' of children's rights, the phrases used to complete the sentence 'Children's duties are ...' fell mainly into two groups: self-improvement (related largely to education) or reflections of the traditional image of an 'obedient' child ('helping' or 'respecting' others or, in one case, from HCMC, simply 'obeying'). According to HCMC researchers, the majority of adults and children believe that children must bear the

responsibility for taking advantage of educational opportunities, and must obey adults. It was children who were most concerned with helping others, specifically the elderly and the disadvantaged. A large number of both boys and girls in HCMC responded that they have responsibilities to their community and society, such as keeping public spaces clean and preventing 'social evils'. Only the working children group included the responsibility to work and help their families and to take care of themselves.

Related to the sentence about duties, but not mentioning the word, was the very open-ended sentence 'Children should ...'. Once again some 'experts' (and *only* 'experts') mentioned 'be respected' or 'listened to', while responses from other groups covered children's obedience to moral rules, contribution to society and development of their own capacities, as well as exercising or knowing about their rights. Adults and children in HCMC did not differ much in their answers, although children tended to name specific activities, including going to school, doing their homework, helping friends, knowing how to resist temptations, participating in school and ward activities, and participating in communications campaigns to combat drug use. Adults, on the other hand, mentioned general issues such as obedience, helping parents and helping with household chores, followed by learning.

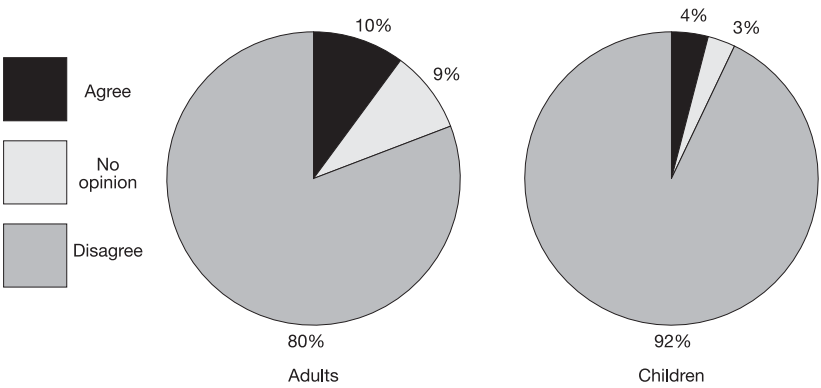
The repeated return by some adults to the notion of obedience reveals once again the contradictions raised when attitudes towards children's role in society are changing. The other side of the coin of what children are expected to be was shown in phrases used to complete the sentence 'Children should not ...'. Adults and children both tended to resort to moral structures. In the active voice, children should not breach moral, legal or ethical rules; in the passive voice, responses reflected adult responsibilities 'children should not be exploited, abused or disrespected'. Nearly a quarter of working children wrote that children should not work too much.

The remaining statements in the attitude survey, together with sentences to be completed, explored the existing environment for children's participation in terms of when children should participate and in what activities. In the first place, evoking the CRC use of the term 'evolving capacities' in Article 12, one sentence began 'Children can begin participating at age ...'. Like the Regional Advisor, 'experts' overwhelmingly chose birth or one year of age. This was not the general choice in the other two samples, the greatest number of responses from adults and children placing the age for beginning participation between nine and 12 years of age. In HCMC, children tended to mention the age of ten

years, perhaps because (as the researchers commented) this is the age at which they are invited to 'participate' in activities in their neighbourhoods or wards. In other words, the word 'can' was probably interpreted to mean 'are allowed/invited to' rather than reflecting a belief about capacity. Likewise adults seemed to suggest the age at which children begin to participate in activities outside the home – by going to school for example.

In addition to chronological age, two preconditions for involving children in decisions might be their understanding of their rights and their ability to make decisions. Two statements used in the attitude survey tested respondents' views on the evolving capacities of children in these respects.

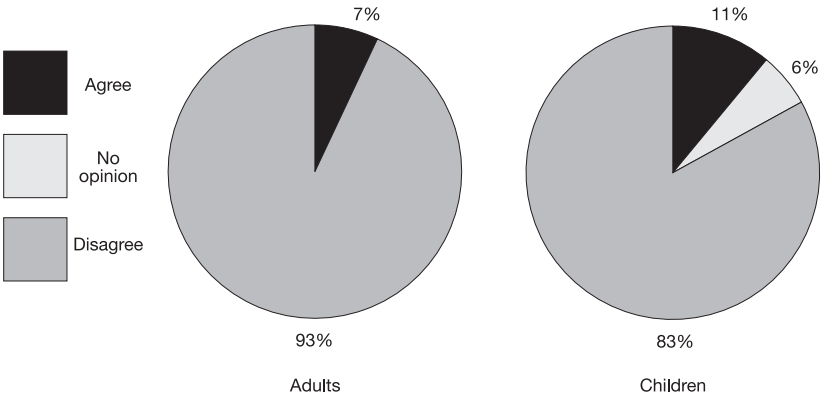
Figure 14: Adults' and children's responses to the statement 'Children do not understand about rights' (all three research samples).



A substantial majority of both adults and children disagreed with the statement that 'children do not understand about rights', although more children than adults were in disagreement (Figure 14). In HCMC, results were related to the ward in which respondents lived and the relative amount of time during which capacity building in children's rights had taken place, confirming that this training has been successful in the view of beneficiaries. Forums researchers reported that facilitators and project officers rated children's understanding of their rights higher than other adults, possibly reflecting the children with whom each group had been in contact. Observation by one of the international researchers confirmed this. In a school in one district, where preparation for the forum had apparently been a hasty, last-minute affair, discussion with both children and teachers revealed that, although there was

knowledge of the existence of the CRC, neither adults nor children seemed to know much about the meaning and content of the rights it confers.

Figure 15: Adults' and children's responses to the statement 'Children do not have the ability to make decisions' (all three research samples)

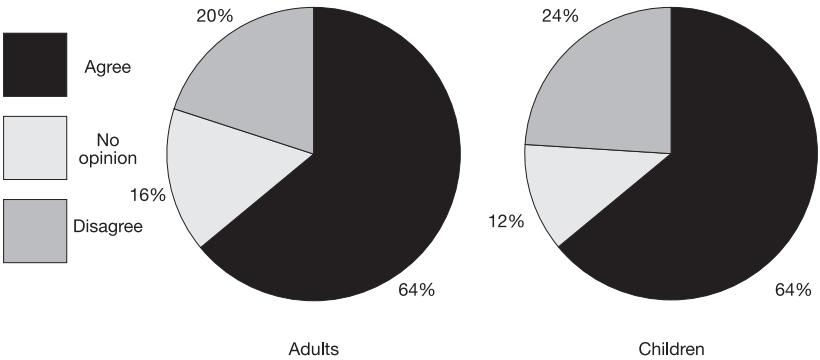


Views about children's ability to make decisions were, in general, positive, although children seem to have less confidence in their own capacities (Figure 15). It could be that this is a reflection of their lack of opportunities to be involved in decision making. In HCMC it was surprising that working children seemed to lack confidence, whereas girls appeared to be 'more bold' than boys. Confidence in this case seems not to correlate to status. It is also interesting that detailed analysis of the HCMC data shows that both parents and leaders of mass organizations lack belief in children's ability to make decisions. From this, and the results of discussions, researchers concluded that the best way of convincing adults of children's decision-making capacity is experience – seeing with their own eyes that children are capable in this respect. This agrees with the results from completing the sentence 'When children make decisions, the result is ...'. One common response from all samples was that adults are often surprised by how good children's decisions and opinions can be. Moreover it was often stated that when children have the opportunity to make decisions they find this satisfying, it improves their confidence and demonstrates their responsibility, although in HCMC girls seemed to show a greater awareness of the need to strive to make the *best possible* decisions. There was overall agreement that children's opinions are 'good', with a small number stating that they are beneficial to adults.

Nevertheless, nine responses from the forums stated that children's opinions are a way of attracting attention to themselves – although this may imply that it focuses attention on topics of concern to children that adults might ignore.

Completion of the sentence 'Children should participate in...' by adults in HCMC and connected to the forums shows a relatively narrow range of activities, all relating to children's traditional role in education and development into adult beings. Only 'experts' mentioned 'decision making' (although half of them did so), while a smaller number (five 'experts' and one in the forums sample) responded that children should participate in 'all aspects of life'. Once again this reflects ambiguity: children's participation can be contemplated – but only as a theoretical or philosophical slogan that is not tied to any practical consideration of the appropriate contexts for their participation. With the principle clearly well-accepted, the challenge for the future is to make participation a concrete reality in many sphere of life. A further sentence for completion, 'Children should not participate in...' did not elicit responses that draw a line between acceptable and unacceptable spheres in which their human right to participate might be exercised. Even from the 'experts' group it produced a protective, even prohibitive, moral response. Children should not participate, both adults and children said, in dangerous or antisocial activities.

Figure 16: Adults' and children's responses to the statement 'Children should be represented on the management of adult organizations' (all three research samples).



The most direct test of where a line might be drawn around areas in which children should or should not participate was made in the attitude survey with the radical statement that 'children should be represented on the management of adult organizations'. The Regional Advisor's suggestion, that many people who campaign for children's participation might not be able to take their advocacy to this level, has already been quoted. Of course this statement in the attitude survey does not specify which organizations. None of the SCA organizations in Viet Nam, nor indeed ISCA members worldwide, have facilitated children's participation in management – which tends to be the common top-down management structure of all NGOs. As Figure 16 shows, a substantial number of both adults and children did not express an opinion about this statement, while the same proportion of both adults and children agreed. This gives a greater indication than we might have expected that children's abilities are recognized and would imply that organizations might be encouraged to seek ways of including children in management so that adults can assess and address issues that children are concerned with, in ways that are most relevant (and beneficial) to children.

Summary

One important result from analysis of all four core tools across the three samples is the demonstration that Vietnamese cultural attitudes to rights in general, and to children's participation in particular are changing. The process is uneven, but relatively straightforward, and there are clear links with the capacity-building programme.

Programme managers benefited from training, not all of which was organized by the capacity-building programme, but certainly from within NGO (especially SCS) circles. The Child-to-Child movement also seems to be an important influence as an early exponent of, and advocate for, children's participation in the field of health education. But it is also clear that, in these early days of the development of children's participation in Viet Nam (as elsewhere), many key practitioners are actually 'learning on the job' through practical experience, including attending courses as trainers/facilitators in participation. On-the-job learning appears to lead to a certain lack of confidence or certainty among 'experts', who are still thinking through the issues, which is not aided by the relative paucity of materials available.

In the case of the Regional Advisor (who appears to have a coherent philosophy of children's participation) it is a way of life and a vision of a better

society, which has most probably been communicated to colleagues in Viet Nam, according to the data from interview schedules and questionnaires. The same data show a consistent picture of incremental lifetime learning – a continuing thread in which experience of childhood and parenthood plays an important part. Participation is not a discrete activity, to be meaningful it must be mainstreamed (and also concretized) if the idea is to take root and flourish. SCS Viet Nam seems also to have enjoyed some success through taking the opportunity to communicate the 'children's-participation message' in all training, in order to facilitate mainstreaming. Nevertheless, the relationship to life-cycle learning could indicate that Early Childhood Development Programmes might be a crucial point of entry for promoting children's participation.

The role played by HCMC children in communicating children's-rights messages to their families and communities may possibly be unique to Viet Nam, although children have been successful elsewhere in communicating health messages to their families and communities using Child-to-Child methods.

The ladder of participation tool showed self-reported increase across the board in the practice of children's participation between 2000 and 2004, not all as a result of the capacity-building programme, although clearly related to it in HCMC. Although all samples showed a notable increase of vision to the 'top of the ladder' in 2010, we suspect that this is the response research participants believed they should give. It seems unlikely from the responses of the same groups to the attitude survey and sentence completion tools that they really would want to see 'children in charge' in all spheres of life. Indeed 'children in charge' may not be the correct top rung of the ladder. Several responses to other tools seem to locate the goal of children's participation in the development of a better, more democratic, society that would recognize the human right to participate for everyone, without making a distinction between adults and children as subjects of rights.

The attitude survey might well provide baseline data for monitoring the impact of future SCS work on children's participation in Viet Nam. Taken together with the sentence completion tool, the results of analysis are remarkably congruent with the timeline and ladder of participation tools in showing the uneven progress of acceptance of children's participation. The results also seem to confirm the official view of progress towards children's participation discussed in Chapter 2, and to indicate successful influence of the capacity-building programme in working towards acceptance of the principle.

Nevertheless, what participation ‘means’ and how to make it meaningful in different social contexts remain, as yet, grey areas.

5: ASSESSING ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS

The analysis of data collected with the core research tools established, in the previous Chapter, what research respondents understood by 'children's participation' and how they reported learning about this area of human rights. This Chapter turns to assessing three environments – children-friendly district, forums and the capacity-building programme. Our account is based on the results of specific research in the three processes, together with the analyses developed by each of the three research teams.

Children-friendly environments

Although the research in Ho Chi Minh City was primarily conceived as a mid-term review it also provided information that allows us to explore two significant questions: Is a children-friendly environment – in district or schools – an enabling environment for children's participation? What was done in HCMC District 4 and 'children-friendly schools' and what have been the outcomes so far for children's participation?

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Committee for the Protection and Care of Children (later CPFC) came into being in 1991, charged with coordinating the National Plan of Action for Children from central to commune level. Despite considerable effort, by 2000 there had been only limited success. One reason was the vertical structure of programme delivery. Another was that human resources to carry out advocacy were thin on the ground and lacked thorough knowledge of the issues. Thus communication activities usually stopped at the district and ward level, rather than filtering through to sub-wards and neighbourhoods. In addition, according to one key informant:

> Higher levels always have lots of local-level programmes and launches so people are over-burdened [the leaders] must allow every local area to analyze and solve and prioritize their own problems, and programmes should not be the same everywhere.

The Government's Child Participation Initiative resulted in training activities for local leaders and mass organizations at both district and ward levels, and each ward made plans for widespread collaborations between adults and children. However, these integrated activities did not achieve the desired results. The time allocated to training was too brief, and communication

methods and materials used were inadequate. Another significant determinant in the lack of success of messages about children's rights was inconsistent coordination between mass organizations, which consider this to be the sole responsibility of the CPFC. Thus the researchers in HCMC consider that the activities of international organizations, such as SCS, have been important in helping to bring understanding (and therefore implementation) of children's rights closer to every citizen. In other words, the development of an enabling environment within specific wards has been effected to a large extent by international NGOs. District 4 of HCMC has been particularly active in this sphere since 1999. As one government employee pointed out in interview, children's rights had been taught in pilot schools in HCMC since 1993.

As reported in Chapter 4, very few parents in the various wards knew about children's rights in 2000, but this knowledge seems to have increased in 2001 and 2002, after the Children-Friendly District Project began in District 4; organizing a core group of children to participate as well as holding forums and competitions. Mass organization cadres and secondary school teachers also indicated to researchers that they learned about children's rights at this time, through specific project activities in which they were involved. As already noted, for parents, knowledge about children's rights often came from the children themselves. The Children-Friendly District Project undoubtedly had considerable impact on the communities involved.

When they spoke about participation in discussion groups and interviews, the first thing almost all children and adults mentioned was being invited to an event. However, participation consists not only of attendance, but also of contributing ideas, being listened to, making decisions about some issues, as well as formulating and carrying out plans, and monitoring their implementation. Although the core tools show that this is understood by both adults and children, HCMC researchers report that it rarely occurs in practice, usually only in agencies and activities directly connected with the Children-Friendly District project. The phenomenon of children's participation is not yet widespread, and remains uneven within the three environments of family, school, and society. Within families in particular, children have very few opportunities to voice their ideas. Vietnamese customs and habits remain as obstacles to the widespread acceptance of children's participation in decision making. Comments made by adults to researchers show that adults are sometimes irritated when children give their ideas or try to join in decision-making processes. Some adults commented that children's ideas are synonymous with making demands, whereas children said they felt as if they were

pleading when they put forward their ideas. One interviewee from Government commented that children also offered passive resistance. It was difficult at first to get them to provide opinions, because they were unused to being asked. Brainstorming methods provided one means of encouraging them to say what they thought; over time they became more creative and confident, both as individuals and as a group, 'They learned to raise children's social problems, which is good for children in society generally.'

According to the HCMC assessment, gender was the most striking characteristic affecting children's levels of participation. The results from all research tools indicate that girls have a higher rate of participation than boys, measured by attendance at meetings and involvement in activities. Of the 130 core children in the project, 60% are girls. HCMC researchers suggest that girls usually enjoy collective group activities, are keen to learn and to take part in social activities. Boys, on the other hand, tend to prefer activities such as sports and games. In addition, the process of selecting and inviting children from the 15 wards tended to favour girls, who tend to take part regularly in ward activities, are 'better-behaved' and put in more effort than boys. Thus girls were more often invited to join the project. Moreover, parents are usually more relaxed about what their sons choose to do with their time, with the result that boys have more options and can engage in a variety of activities without being restricted by their families. Girls are usually closely monitored by their parents in any activities outside school, and can take part only in activities deemed to be good for them. Thus, paradoxically, discriminatory restrictions on girls' lives in general tended to increase their likelihood of enjoying the right to participate, which calls attention to the fact that gender relationships in childhood cannot be deduced directly from gender relationships in adulthood.

The Children-Friendly District Project worked with four main adult agents to promote children's participation: mass organizations, teaching professionals, child care professionals and parents. Researchers noted significant differences in understanding and promotion of children's rights in each of these groups.

Mass organizations

District- and ward-level leaders of mass organizations are the main focus for advising on and organizing activities for and about children at the local level, under the direction of leaders higher up in the hierarchy. Nevertheless, researchers report that experience in the Children-Friendly District Project showed that, in some situations, the awareness of mass organization cadres

has been an important factor in an upward flow of attitude change – bringing about change in the leaders' awareness of children's participation. To enable such changes, the Project collaborated closely with these mass organization officers, and supported them in transforming the leaders' perspectives into specific actions. As a former employee of one mass organization commented in interview,

> It is not easy to make officials and leaders improve local democracy – of course they understand but they need training in implementation. They are especially bad at listening if they have not been trained.

Thus the Project also organized regular workshops, training courses and discussion sessions for local officers, which, together with experience working with children, contributed to fomenting a fundamental change in implementing children's rights. This brought about not only a change in awareness and behaviour of mass organization cadres and leaders, but also among people in sub-wards and neighbourhoods. Mass organization staff are crucial partners in developing an enabling environment. As we have already mentioned at various points in this Report, the structure of governance in Viet Nam has specific effects on the working methods and chosen partners of an international NGO, such as Save the Children Sweden.

Education and children-friendly schools

After families, schools usually provide the second most important location of activity and learning for children. As we discussed in Chapter 2, at the global level, education was an arena for explorations of children's participation long before the CRC was even drafted, and can play a crucial role in society both for change and for conservatism. Thus, although teaching methods in Viet Nam tend towards rote-learning rather than discovery methods, school management boards and teachers constitute a significant potential force for communicating about, and implementing, children's rights, as well as creating enabling conditions for children's participation.

Ho Chi Minh City researchers report that school managers and teachers can play a significant role in implementing projects for children. But, despite being targeted for involvement in the Children-Friendly District Project, and involved in certain specific activities, this group is still not actively involved. One reason for this, identified by an interviewee with considerable experience in working with educators, is the influence of education authorities:

> school management committees try to keep to Ministry rules and worry about getting 100 percent pass marks. They do not encourage children's participation; do not listen to children. They ask (and force) children to do things. They don't know how to do [participation].

Activities specifically organized by the Project for education staff, especially leaders in management, have included training activities on children's rights, workshops, discussions, and plans for an investigation of living conditions of children in District 4 with the participation of 10 schools. In particular, the organization of forums for exchanges between pupils and school management boards and teachers of each school in November 2003 was reported to be an important step in forging an open and friendly collaboration between the Project and teaching professionals.

Complementing the Children-Friendly District Project a number of schools were also targeted to become children-friendly schools. International and national researchers visited two of these schools, using observation tools. In one school, core tools and group and individual interview schedules were also used with adults, plus role play and group discussion with a small group of children who had been selected by teachers to work with researchers.

The school in question had around 2,500 primary-level pupils in 58 classes, with a staff of 78 teachers and 80 supplementary staff. It had been implementing the children-friendly school project for two years and teachers seemed to be proud to share their experiences with researchers through a Powerpoint™ presentation and a photograph album. Researchers felt, however, that standardized photographs of groups of children and teachers cannot provide an adequate visual demonstration of 'participation'. Documents shown to the researchers described the children-friendly schools project as a 'special programme for children to express their views'. The head teacher said that the project is 'very close to us' and considerable enthusiasm was expressed by the group of senior teachers we interviewed. Group work was singled out in particular as resulting in children becoming more actively involved in their own learning and in discussions in general. Participation, it was claimed, increases children's confidence so that teachers become closer to the pupils. The atmosphere in classrooms was described as 'cheerful and friendly' – casual observation of children in classrooms and school corridors indicated that this claim seems to be correct. According to the teachers, children like to linger after classes and also state their preferences for lesson content, becoming active and creative thinkers (some being rewarded with prizes for

this). Learning through play in class is combined with taking part in the children's camps that are characteristic of Vietnamese work with children, in the socialist tradition. The head teacher also mentioned school-to-school relationships being established as well as links with charity centres, 'enlarging children's experiences in and knowledge of the surrounding environment.'

One technique for encouraging children to express their feelings and emotions is the provision of a Mail Box (called 'I want to say'), originally suggested by educational managers and apparently provided for each class in some schools, although only one is used in the school we visited. Teachers claimed that this has encouraged children to be more open and confident with them – and have become very confident to be more open with the teachers, although there was no mention made to us of a two-way flow of 'openness'. The head teacher reads the (usually anonymous) notes out in Monday morning assemblies, choosing (in her words) 'typical letters'. The scheme began late in 2002, at first attracting 30-50 letters a day, which often made comments about teachers. But two years later 'teachers have changed' and now the flow has apparently reduced to five or six letters daily. Among the six children we met, only one said he had used the Mail Box.

An interesting discussion took place between researchers and teachers after the latter had completed core research tools. Researchers asked why all three teachers marked 1988 as a significant date on their timelines. They answered that, before then, they had learned about human rights but there were no practical activities, 'It was all theory.' Now, they said, they were more confident about participation because of the Children-Friendly Project. On their ladders of participation it was notable that all three teachers wished to reach the penultimate rung ('children lead, adults help') by 2010, because they believe that children can take decisions without adult support. They reported that, with adult explanation, analysis and guidance, children can now make decisions themselves and are more proactive generally, including in their attitudes towards neighbourhood concerns, such as care of the elderly and the environment.

In this school, researchers were only able to work with teachers as a group, who qualified their comments with 'we can only speak about this school' and not for others involved in the Children-Friendly School initiative. In both of the schools we visited, pupils were practicing for a holiday parade to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu. There was thus much marching to military music, which did not appear to be a voluntary

activity. The children whom researchers met were chosen by teachers and brought out of their classrooms to work with us. Although we sought informed consent in the usual way, we suspected that children would have been unlikely to feel able to refuse. Both factors indicated an underlying disciplinary atmosphere. There were plaques in evidence to show that Microsoft™ had donated the computers at the school but none of the children seemed ever to have used them, although in the second school children said that they had access outside school, for example in internet cafes, which are widespread in urban Viet Nam. The teacher who accompanied us was unsure how access to the school computers might be gained, or who might use them.

The group of children with whom we worked without the presence of teachers, were lively and cooperative. When they were asked to perform a role play about relationships between children and adults they showed a scene in which an adult produced a cake and children agreed on how it should be shared out equally. During subsequent discussion they said that they had experience of doing role plays, and mentioned one they had performed for teachers and guests about 'mother's love', with the message that mothers should pay more attention to their children. They were adamant that role plays must bear a moral message.

In both schools, neither the children nor the adults we met seemed to know about other children's-participation activities in HCMC, such as the Children-Friendly District. Whilst there was contact with other schools in the scheme, we suspected that this tended to be adult-adult, rather than child-child, so that the participation activities within the schools may not be taken beyond the school gates. On the other hand, the confidence with which children interacted with teachers and other adults (including foreign researchers and officials from the education department) was very convincing. The visits were too brief to come to any clear conclusions, but we suspect that there is less rights-based children's participation going on in children-friendly schools than in children-friendly districts. Not surprisingly, even children-friendly schools appear to be exhibiting the virtually-universal conservative role education tends to play in societies.

Child care professionals

Child care professionals of the 15 wards made up another group carrying out Project activities at the community level. However, HCMC researchers reported that the composition of this group was unstable and members had to take on too many responsibilities, so that their commitment to the Project's activities was not high. Moreover, because of the turnover of personnel, child care professionals had varying levels of knowledge of and understanding about children's rights and children's participation; which also represented a significant obstacle to carrying out Project activities. To help these specialists fulfill their responsibilities, the Project conducts training activities and workshops in which they can share experiences, as well as supplement their knowledge and skills in working for children's participation. Concurrently, these specialists also advise in the District People's Committee in planning and coordinating activities for children in the community. Thus their impact on the Project could be considerable.

Parents

Parents are the gatekeepers for children's participation, as can be seen in their influence on the relative levels of participation by boys and girls. Traditionally, as one interviewee put it, children did not speak up in front of their parents and only receive 'one-way instructions'. When children's-rights concepts were introduced into communities, it was reported to researchers that some parents were distressed to be told that they had not been treating their children well.

Although promotion of children's rights has now continued for many years – not only through the Project's work but also through the contributions of mass organizations – according to general evaluation and children's reflections, parents' understanding about children's participation is still limited. Nevertheless, the Project organizers report that parents are gradually developing greater confidence in children's abilities. Some parents of children from the core group have shown their support by giving permission, picking up and dropping off their children at activity sites, thus facilitating their children's opportunities to participate. One reason for this, as we have already discussed, is children communicating Project messages to their parents.

Some conclusions

Clearly it is not easy to develop a genuinely enabling environment for children's participation at community level and the Children-Friendly District Project has had its share of obstacles, from the inexperience of key adult players to traditional ideas about children's place in society. In addition, some interviewees from outside the Project commented that coordination between agencies in HCMC could be better, 'We have the resources, but how do we do things so that we are effective? Children's rights should be concretely protected by every agency according to its responsibility.'

The 'voice' of the core group of children is not yet representative of all children in District 4, and the statistical records of the Project show that even the participation of core children is not consistent. It is also important to note that both boys and men seem to participate less and have lower understanding of both children's rights in general and participation in particular.

In addition to the fact that many adults do not want to listen or feel that they 'don't have time' or 'it is a waste of time'; there seems to be a lack of willingness to listen to 'problem children', such as school drop outs. Yet the results of core tools discussed in Chapter 4 showed significant differences between children in the Project and working children, while (as one researcher commented) 'adults need to listen to the reasons for these children's problems, because children give more realistic reasons than adults do.' Nevertheless, there are additional small activities within the district for children in need of special protection, such as group work with sexually abused children, and a 'self-organized' house for street children, in which children reportedly make their own house rules and are consulted when family reunification is planned.

Although children have participated in many activities, the project thus far remains activity-based, and cannot yet be said to have penetrated to all levels of children's lives – a fact acknowledged by the HCMC researchers in their mid-term review (Chau et al, 2004). Children's participation depends on the continued occurrence of projects and is not yet stable when projects have ended. General capacity building, especially on participation, has only reached core children and specialists; but has not achieved the desired quantity and quality because the groups were limited in time and conditions for participating. Information about project activities with the participation of children has not yet reached the wider community.

Forums

Assessment of the forums in this Report examines the means by which, and extent to which, they provided an enabling environment in which children could express their opinions to national leadership. As explained in Chapter 2, each forum had a specific focus. The 'August Get-Together', in 2001, focused on the preparation for the UN Special Session on children in New York. In 2002, the forum focused on HIV/AIDS prevention with the additional objective of encouraging Vietnamese children to participate in the fight against this global pandemic. The objective of the Education forum (2003) was exchange of ideas on education and children's needs and aspirations concerning schools, teachers and education.

All three forums entailed cooperation between SCA and Plan International in Viet Nam together with government bodies, such as the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), The Central Young Pioneers Council (CPYC) and the CPFC. Each forum had at least three external partners, and the HIV/AIDS forum attracted the participation of local government wherever SCA was implementing a project. According to partners' feedback, SCA internal cooperation and cooperation with specialized bodies and functional bodies concerned with child issues facilitated the organization of large-scale events such as the forums, because between them they could mobilize a variety of resources. The forums also enjoyed good press coverage, which means that their impact was probably of fairly widespread significance.

Researchers used both core and specific tools with nine groups of children from different parts of Viet Nam, ranging from highly-urbanized to remote mountain areas, as well as with 11 facilitators and seven members of the organizing group from SCA and Plan International (See the map in Figure 2 and Tables 5-10). Nevertheless, it was not always clear that children involved in the research had actually been closely involved in the forums. In one research site, only children from a single school were involved in the research, even though those who had participated in the forums had been drawn from a wider area. In addition, as is common in research with child participants, some children had 'moved on', not least by passing the age of 18 years. Thus the sample included some children who had had experience of preparing for and/or attending forums, along with others who had no such experience.

Preparation

All three forums were characterized by considerable prior planning, not least in training facilitators through a training-of-trainers programme, established through the capacity-building programme and organized by SCA and Plan International (See Than, 2001 a; 2001 b; 'Notes taken ... 2001'). Because this training included follow-up sessions and feedback from facilitators, it contributed to the 'learning on the job' tendency identified in Chapter 4. The preparatory stages of the first and third forums included three training courses each, while for the second forum there were two. These courses focused on equipping trainers with knowledge about children's right to participate, as well as some basic interpersonal and instructional skills. In many ways this training can be said to have been the key strategy for producing an enabling environment for the forums. One important aspect was systematization of learning through experience'. Training courses for facilitators in all forums had the following structure:

Step 1: Learning about children's right to participate;
Step 2: Applying this knowledge through working with children to prepare for the forums;
Step 3: Sharing, analyzing and discussing experiences and lessons learned;
Step 4: Continuing work with children, applying lessons learned and learning new ones;
Step 5: Further rounds of sharing, discussion and finding new solutions.

In this 'continuously-spiralling' learning process, practice was always the space for verification of and experimentation with theoretical knowledge. The learning-through-experience process also applied to the children's experiences of learning how to participate. Thus adults and children were engaged in mutual learning. This created an environment that contrasted with children's classroom experiences of rote learning from textbooks and teachers.

Between 10 and 13 children were selected for each small, local group, although the selection process was not clear to researchers and varied from one province to another. Selection of rural children, for example, came about somewhat late in the day because of concern about over-representation of urban children. The organizing committee decided to select children from provinces where projects were being implemented by Save the Children Alliance members. Consent was sought from both parents and children. In

general, the children participated in selecting representatives. In some groups, the children who were already known to each other through participation in SCA projects, elected their representatives. In others individual children were chosen (by other children) on the basis of their ideas for presentation at a forum. Sometimes facilitators chose the representatives. According to interview data, the common criteria for selection were active participation in group activities and/or 'artistic talents', such as singing, dancing and acting. Forums researchers referred to participation as a 'chance ... to showcase their talents and ideas' (Long and Son, 2004), which raises the question of whether the forums risked remaining at the fourth ('decoration') rung of the ladder of participation. It also prompts us to ask if these criteria are inclusive. While it may have been important, in terms of Article 13 of the CRC, for children to be able to express themselves in appropriate ways – such as singing and role play – what about representation of the 'quieter voices'? Surely the content of an opinion is more important than its artistic qualities.

The group discussions and the preparation of items for presentation at the forums were highly-regarded experiences by children interviewed. Nevertheless, problems were encountered by them in harmonizing their schedules so that no one was forced to miss any meetings. In all groups documented for the research, no children had to drop out of the discussions, but some mentioned difficulties in re-arranging their schedules to accommodate studies and household chores as well as discussion sessions. This drawback to children's participation has been identified by children in other research (Ennew and Hastadewi, 2004 for example).

Monitoring and supervision of children's participation in each locality was the responsibility of a project officer assigned to each place. Project officers met with facilitators and children to encourage and support them in the preparatory stages.

During the forums

Each forum took place over a three-day period, consisting of groups' self-introductions, ice-breaking exercises, introduction of the group presentations, meetings with Government leaders and development of the forum declarations. In addition, these activities were interspersed with outings and games.

The children used various methods to present themselves and their group products, including role plays, folksongs with new lyrics, wearing traditional clothing and displaying paintings and photographs. From their accounts it appeared that facilitators acted as advisors, while children determined the content. Groups of children also had a chance to interact and ask questions after presentations. One characteristic of all presentations appeared to be concern for children more disadvantaged than themselves. Interviews with adults also revealed positive evaluations of children's products, which contributed to increased adult belief in children's ability to participate.

In each Forum, the discussions aimed to produce an agreed message about existing problems, children's hopes and suggestions. Children also gave positive feedback about facilitation of these discussions. The forums provided opportunities to meet, interact with and express their views to Government leaders, policy makers and international guests. Child participants were very interested in the way adults listened and talked to them about the issues that they had presented. They considered the opportunities to interact with the Government leaders very important and viewed these events as milestones in their own maturity. Children's feedback to researchers showed satisfaction with the extent to which they had been listened to. Adults who were interviewed also rated the presentations highly. Many of the adult participants said they had been surprised by the children's abilities; they had not previously thought that children could have such profound thoughts about social issues, or imagined that children could be so creative.

Nevertheless, one exchange recorded in the documentation of the education forum provides a less positive picture of interaction between children and leaders. In a 'question-and-answer' session, children from the Hanoi group asked the Vice Minister of MOET, 'The quality of teaching in the city is better than on the outskirts, can you resolve this?' The Minister replied with another question, 'Are you satisfied with your achievements?' When a child replied in the affirmative, the Minister's response was something of a put-down: 'Then you should only look at what is suitable for you and not look at others' (Bendixsen, 2003,19).

Post-forum activities

Follow-up activities in each area depended on the awareness and capabilities of facilitators and local leadership. In some places, schools allowed participants to make presentations about the activities of the forum and their participation.

Information campaigns on children's rights were organized in some communities, while other participants organized games they had learned during the forums. In other places, participants organized mini-forums in schools. It seems that what they had seen and heard in the forums had motivated them to study, apply and build upon what they had learned within their local contexts. After the education forum, representatives were invited to participate in another forum (for adults) on education organized by UNICEF, SCUK, OXFAM UK and MOET, where the artistic products and declaration were presented.

Government officials who attended the forums also promoted children's participation among their colleagues. For example, *Aids and Community,* a magazine of the Central Committee for AIDS Prevention, printed a full-page report of children's views on HIV-AIDS. Some other concerns and suggestions raised by participants became objectives for development programmes, one example being building schools for children in mountainous areas.

Impacts of the forums

Implicitly, children were the main group targeted as beneficiaries of the forums. Through group sessions, children learned basic information about children's rights and particularly the right to participate. The attitude survey showed that nearly three quarters of child participants could list children's rights and name the main rights groups, although they may have had this knowledge before participating. The presentations they brought to the forums were the fruits of enthusiastic, collaborative and creative effort. When gathering materials, or writing articles, painting pictures, or writing and rehearsing role plays, or writing lyrics for songs, they learned from each other. In addition, the process of information gathering helped them gain a considerable amount of knowledge through the newspapers, magazines and books that they referred to in their research. During the forums, when watching others' presentations, they would learn further useful lessons. Facilitators commented that children's awareness of each of the topics had developed significantly during the process. According to one facilitator,

> before coming to the [HIV/AIDS] forum, HIV-AIDS was something very vague with the children ... There was no one infected in the area and, through the media, the children thought that an infected person must be very disgusting and should always be avoided. In the forum, they

> met and interacted with children who were infected and were working with groups to prevent HIV-AIDS. Their attitudes changed, they were not afraid of interacting with the infected persons and realised that they did not have to keep away from them.

This is corroborated by a child participant at the same forum:

> During the forum, we met a few children who were infected. They were nice and attractive. They also took part in HIV-AIDS prevention, like us. Now we are not afraid of people with HIV-AIDS because they were nice too, and very unfortunate.

Through the forum declarations, messages were conveyed to leaders and policy makers asking them to provide those in difficult circumstances with more support and better living conditions. In group discussion, children also suggested that more opportunities should be created for disadvantaged children, such as street children and disabled children to participate. Other, more-contingent factors also intervened to exclude some children. A former Government employee commented in interview that, although preparation for the HIV/AIDS forum had been fairly extensive in HCMC, some children who had been chosen as representatives were not sent to the forum because the director of the social work centre where their group met was afraid the children might say something that would reflect badly on the centre – she had not been trained in children's participation or rights and was new to her job.

Researchers' observation of a data collection session with children from HCMC who had attended the HIV/AIDS forum, showed them to have no problems expressing themselves, or listen to each other. They appeared to be interested in what others had to say. These adolescents were healthy, well-nourished, well-dressed and highly literate. The researchers also observed the same ability and confidence in their interactions with other groups of children who attended the forums, when they took part in focus group discussions. They spoke up, made additions, and complemented each other, making the discussion happen very easily. Only a few groups remained inarticulate, causing the discussion to degenerate into passive question-answer sessions in which very few children actually participated actively in the discussion. In some other groups, there were few boys compared to girls, and they were also very shy during discussions, in which a few individuals dominated. This is consistent with observations from some project officials interviewed, who reported that some children had shown signs of 'stardom' after returning to their provinces

from a forum. During data collection, researchers observed that some children assumed the role of 'spokesperson', even if not requested. This showed that the activities of the forums had created an environment conducive for building confidence, but also encouraged some to 'assume dominance and become overly-eager in expressing their opinions in group activities' (Long and Son, 2004).

The most recognizable change that child participants reported in themselves after the forums was improved interpersonal skills, saying that they had become more confident and outgoing in interpersonal relations. Many showed their perception of this change through drawing themselves with larger mouths and relaxed smiles, and mentioning 'development of language and speaking skills.' A participant from a minority group said, 'now we are more outgoing when meeting strangers. Before this, sometimes when people asked, we did not even answer!' Another child participant reported that 'Before coming to the forum, whenever I had to speak before a crowd, I felt very nervous and unsure, but after this, I became more confident when speaking to a crowd.' Facilitators, teachers and parents of participants offered similar observations in discussions with the forums researchers. A teacher observed that: 'After the forum, they were very proactive in posing questions during class, or participating in class or school activities'. Even though the criteria for selection emphasized speaking skills, these very significant changes showed clearly that the forums' activities created an enabling, group-based environment for the development of interpersonal skills and self-confidence.

Facilitators also were direct beneficiaries targeted by forums. This was a key role. Children's previous experiences of participation had usually been limited to singing, dancing and playing games. This is a common interpretation of the meaning of children's participation. Even the forums researchers initially had the opinion that participation is 'a lot of games', contrasting this with 'tough' Vietnamese schooling in which games have no part. Because facilitation techniques, such as games and 'ice breakers', are so often described in the literature (for example Than 2001 a; 2001 b), it can seem that the only obstacle to children's participation would be removed if adults learned these skills, whereas the main obstacles actually lie within adult attitudes (Ennew and Hastadewi, 2004).

Studying and participating in activities for and in the forums significantly influenced the awareness and capability of facilitators, as has already been seen from the results of the core research tools. The forum facilitators who

were interviewed for this research reported that attending training workshops helped them develop a 'better perception' of participation and improved their skills in working with children. Observation showed that facilitators had close relationships with children and were patient in encouraging shy children to converse and share opinions with researchers. Children were confidently at ease in discussions with facilitators, who seemed to respect their opinions. The relationship between them was equitable. In contrast, observation in one research site revealed teachers who did not understand participation, although they could confidently quote the appropriate slogans – once the forum was over it was clear that they had 'done participation' and were no longer interested.

The forums research team found that all facilitators had good knowledge of children's rights; all eleven interviewed facilitators could list the basic groups of children's rights, emphasizing participation, and they reported that this knowledge had been acquired both through forum training workshops and being involved in forums. More importantly, all the evidence from data showed that facilitators had changed from thinking they had to assume the role of organizers/instructors to taking on the role of consultants/assistants who enabled children to fill their own roles and responsibilities; through the activities of forum. One of the facilitators commented: 'We have developed the ability to communicate with children and encourage them to participate.' Many facilitators said that, at the beginning, they had presumed that adults should be the decision makers even when children were participants. They had not believed children could be so thoughtful about social issues. Thus it is clear that an enabling environment not only encourages children to participate but also enables adults to change their assessment of the participation capacity of children.

This last observation also applied to the adults who were responsible for organizing the forums. Members of the organizing agencies said in interviews that, at the beginning, they had only an unclear understanding of children's participation but that the intense experience of implementing the forums, especially training workshops, enhanced both their understanding and their belief. In discussions and interviews they praised children's abilities and said that their initial doubts and anxieties about the forums had been alleviated.

The Save the Children /Child Participation Working Group in Viet Nam effectively began in 2000 in preparation for the 'August Event' of 2001, but was not called 'Child Participation Working Group' until after that forum.

Coordinated from SCS Viet Nam, which had the most experience, the CPWG organized training-of-trainers activities for themselves and government partners, such as the CPFC and mass organizations, including in provinces. Similar trainings were organized, including workshops by the Regional Advisor, between forums and continued after the 2003 forum ended.

According to interviews with various members of the CPWG, administered by both forums researchers and international researchers, teamwork was an important factor in success of the forums. Children's participation can add to the burden of workloads if it is seen as an additional programme area, rather than as a cross-cutting issue in daily life and work:

> We are there to do more than work but also to show people good practice. But to be sustainable it must be owned by local partners. NGOs are not always democratic. They select children they like and know. Children are not prepared for national stardom and 'they get harmed' it is 'very easy to spoil them'. On the other hand it is good to see ethnic children gaining confidence through the forums.

The experience of collaboration between the SCA agencies and Plan International Viet Nam had been successful according to the staff who responded to the research, who spoke of an enthusiastic and effective working atmosphere. They claimed that cooperation between different agencies with distinctive institutional methodologies enabled them to expand the scope of operation and learn from each other, with the result that further collaboration on other projects was taking place.

Lessons learned

The forums researchers commented on some general lessons learned through their analysis of the data. In the first place, the geographical representation did not cover the full range of environments within Viet Nam. The forums only allowed participation of a small percentage of children from the provinces where there are SCA and Plan International projects. The activities did not create equal opportunities for all participants. Children with hearing disabilities participating in the forum had no interpreters and were thus hampered in their interactions with other participants. Moreover, there were usually too few such children and they thus had no one in the same situation to share with and learn from.

Nevertheless, the annual activities and events over a three-year period had helped to nurture and develop ideas about children's participation at national level. The extensive preparation for the forums at local level had deepened this awareness as well as providing opportunities for facilitators and a wider group of children to learn together through experience. The ongoing, reflexive trainings for facilitators had undoubtedly aided this, and indeed the entire process. But there was no prior research on which to develop methods of encouraging children's participation appropriate to Vietnamese (or minority-group) culture.

The activities of the forums appear to have had positive impacts on children and to have changed adults' awareness. However, there was no planning for follow-up to further build upon the impact of the forums. The results of the forums, the messages and declarations have not reached the whole child population and general public. The planning of the activities did not provide for post-forum activities to resolve issues arising in the forums. Requests made by children during dialogues with Government leaders have not been answered. Participants did not receive any information after the forums about how their requests and suggestions were responded to.

The presentation and content of the messages from the forums were not impressive or persuasive, and they seemed to be presented as problems that adults should solve, rather than recognizing children as active social agents who can contribute to solutions. The leaders, policy makers and guests were not prepared to respond to children's participation and answer their questions and suggestions appropriately.

The forums researchers considered that formats of activities in the forum were not innovative. The programmes of all three forums were similar, without any significant modifications made by organizers between forums. Children were never included in design and organization. The forums served mainly to showcase results of small-group, local work, rather than to be a forum where children could meet and exchange opinions and experiences about a particular topic, although extensive discussion did occur. This meant that both facilitators and children were pressured to focus on the presentations, and thus lost the opportunity to learn and innovate. Participants reported that the atmosphere of the forums became tense at times because of the pressure on all groups.

Many organizations' encouragement of children's participation to activities at the national level had adversely limited their effectiveness in practice because, while their ideas, views and suggestions were very practical and applicable to their home areas, they did not reach the relevant organizations at the local levels and thus did not bring about any local benefit. Children could have contributed to the development of their own villages, communes and districts, and would have been more encouraged if their suggestions were responded to in this way.

Some conclusions

The three children's forums were significant events for children and those concerned with the protection of children's rights. The forums shared the common goal of encouraging children's participation to allow their views to be heard by the government leaders and policy makers, and proved to be compelling advocacy for children's participation. Cleary the mixture of reflexive training in theory and 'learning on the job' is a powerful way of developing an enabling environment. But this environment seems to be limited to events and processes and there are indications that the lack of follow-up planning prevented children's participation penetrating into local communities. Once the forums were completed participation was 'concluded'.

Cooperation between international organizations and Government bodies as well as local partners created a high level of agreement on the organization of the forums, but did not produce innovative methods, nor involve children in planning. This made the activities in all three forums very similar and the format of presentation routine, failing to create a truly creative and diversified, or specifically Vietnamese, environment for the participants.

The capacity-building programme

Targeting adults, the capacity-building programme aimed to develop an enabling environment in which children-friendly district/schools and forums could flourish, and also to contribute to a national, regional and global 'climate change', in which children's participation can grow and flourish.

From the Kenyan to the Vietnamese context

As already mentioned, a major professional experience of the Regional Advisor had been coordinating a programme to assist street children projects in Kenya to improve their work with children. The programme's main components were organizational strengthening and capacity building. Participatory action research (PAR) with children was seen as one of the core elements in strengthening interventions for children. Over a period of five years, intense work with staff and management of organizations working with marginalized children and in PAR, gradually developed a strong focus on children's participation as an important aspect of organizational development. Many of the constraints and challenges that were encountered by organizations proved to be overcome by involving children. Increased participation of children also opened ways for greater involvement of adults from within the organization, as well as parents and adults in the wider community (Beers, 2002).

The 2000 assessment of children's participation in SCS work in Viet Nam (Beers, 2000) showed that, on the whole, adults lacked skills and knowledge on how to go about involving children, just as had been originally the case in Kenya and is also encountered elsewhere. Yet the working environment in Viet Nam was very different from the work in Kenya, where the bulk of partners were drawn from among numerous local NGOs. Even though the project continuously tried to involve Kenyan governmental institutions and departments, this was only achieved to a limited extent. Capacity building could not be separated from organization building. In contrast, Viet Nam has few local or international NGOs operating, and SCS works exclusively with government departments and agencies and mass organizations, which meant that capacity building had to be seen as separate (to a large extent) from organizational development. Identifying and working with key actors became even more crucial in the Vietnamese context – the strategy being to work with 'like-minded allies' who can lobby and advocate for children's participation. On the other hand, the desired impact would be much greater when government departments or agencies are convinced of the need to involve children and embark on it with serious intent.

A further difference was that, in Kenya, work entailed intensive interactions with small groups of participants intensively over a period of 10 months, starting with a 10-day workshop, followed by one-day meetings every fortnight, as well as regular project visits. This 'mentoring' relationship was

not possible in the Vietnamese context, where follow-up after initial workshops was necessarily less intense and had to be carried by Vietnamese colleagues. In addition, work in Viet Nam was most frequently with adults who do not work directly with children but rather design policies, manage departments or agencies or provide training and guidance to others who do work directly with them. This necessarily required greater emphasis on sensitization and internalization of the concept of children's participation, and less focus on communication and facilitation skills with children. In the words of the Regional Advisor, the strategy was to:

> work first within the SCS Viet Nam office with management and staff. Increasing the understanding of the concept of children's participation, having them internalize it and guiding them in their efforts to lobby for more involvement of children in the work of the counterparts of SCS. From the start a Vietnamese staff member worked along with me, to be trained on the job to become the children's participation programme officer. We could thus work quite intensively with individual staff members to enable them to take up children's participation with the partner organizations and to ensure that children were involved in a meaningful way.

Assessments of end users

The information in this section reflects the data collected from 'experts' who responded to the survey/questionnaire tool, taken from a list provided by the Regional Advisor of people who had been in contact with the capacity-building programme. As already indicated in Chapter 3, the response rate was disappointingly low. Nevertheless, most of the responses received were extensive, and the group included a wide variety of 'experts' from SCA members locally, regionally and internationally, as well as from other agencies.

It should be remembered that the Regional Advisor's role was specifically advisory, and that he had no management responsibility, although within his own field he was able to take proactive, strategic decisions about where and in what activities to target his efforts (SCS Viet Nam, unpublished Workplans and Reports on activities). The range of activities, both in type and geographical scope, can be judged from the extensive (but not exclusive) list provided at the end of Chapter 2. All had the common objective of building capacity, many requiring the Regional Advisor to travel extensively, to provide training and to respond to requests for information from a network of email contacts, which

he built up progressively. This electronic networking was much appreciated by all but one of the experts who responded to the research. The single complaint, that it was 'difficult to obtain information about the project' seemed to refer to documentation on the capacity-building project itself, rather than to a failure to provide materials about children's participation.

Evaluation of the materials was usually positive:

> [Project activities provided] many opportunities for discussions and exchange of information and resource materials through the e-mail group. The tool kits on how to consult children and how to involve children in research were particularly useful. We shared them with our partner organizations and research consultants.

A senior SCA staff member within the region commented that 'It has been really useful to have such an active and networking participation advisor in the region'. The Regional Advisor described his systematic method of collecting and distributing materials, which he developed in order to avoid inundating recipients with irrelevant materials, or materials that they might not have time to read:

> I identify [materials] myself as I roam around on my travels, being alert and looking at all documents, not only those in which the title contains the word 'participation'. I also follow up references made by or mentioned by other people. It has a snowball effect, because then people send materials to me that I might not have heard about. I work through each document, reading, scanning and making a summary of the content and stating the potential use before sending it through the electronic network. This has resulted in good feedback, probably especially because I try to be selective about who I send things to. The network is global, but the process is time-consuming.

One problem with this approach is precisely the time and thought necessary, as well as the personalization of the process. Unless a method can be found to ensure that this valuable service can continue without the input of the Regional Advisor's personal and extensive experience of the field of participation, it is unlikely to be sustainable.

No respondents identified provision of materials as a 'gap' in the project, although an NGO colleague in Viet Nam suggested that more materials –

especially tools for working with children – were necessary. This may well have reflected a lack of such information in Vietnamese. The Regional Advisor commented that many requests for information were of this kind – requiring 'correct answers' rather than asking for advice about how to develop tools for working with children into methods for working in national cultures, which confirms the comments made by the forums researchers. In a brief brainstorming session, the Regional Advisor and international researchers considered this absence of critical thinking at national and local levels, in the light of the materials available. They concluded that there is no basic text compiling key readings in children's participation that would provide background information for those new to the topic, which would enable them to understand the different strands of theory and practice within the field. Such texts should probably be available for different readerships, including children. Currently-available training materials, especially certain CD Roms produced in the region, are sometimes not useful, being badly written, poorly indexed and containing far too many photographs and acronyms, with a virtual absence of background material for contextualization. 'Documentation' of children's participation events, likewise, are of limited usefulness, either providing no information about 'how it was done' or printing largely-meaningless lists taken from flip-chart sheets as the 'products' of activities, alongside descriptions of games and pictures of 'solidarity nights'.

The availability of information about children's participation is low, as indicated by the limited and repetitive lists of 'influential reading' provided by 'experts'. In many cases these texts are difficult to obtain – not least because they are not available as internet downloads and purchase must be made in a Western currency. Even costs of postage cannot be afforded by smaller NGOs in developing countries.

The capacity-building project appeared to be well-known, despite the partial reliance on the Regional Advisor's personal network. Eighteen out of 24 respondents said they had heard of the project by name, rather than simply associating it only with the Regional Advisor. These 18 respondents had different perceptions of the activities included within the project: citing capacity building and training (13 mentions) and awareness raising (10 mentions) as well as research, monitoring, dissemination, Children-Friendly District and the Forums, and programmes or policies. Eight had found out about the project through the Regional Advisor himself, and nine through SCS or another member of the SCA. While only ten claimed to have had direct contact with the project, 15 said that it had influenced their work and 11 that

they had influenced the project – which is probably a reflection of the scope of the electronic network.

A rating survey included within the survey/questionnaire invited respondents to provide their views on the performance of the project with respect to cost-effectiveness, information and understanding of children's rights and of children's participation in Viet Nam, the Region, globally and within the international SCA, as well as benefits to children (Table 21).

Table 21: Assessments of the Save the Children Sweden capacity-building programme

Aspect	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Very poor	Don't know
Cost effectiveness	4	1	1	1	0	11
Children's rights	8	5	1	0	0	5
Understanding of children's participation in Viet Nam	6	3	4	1	0	5
Understanding of children's participation in Southeast Asia	2	2	6	1		8
International understanding of children's participation	2	4	2	2	0	9
Understanding of children's participation within the International Save the Children Alliance	5	6	3	1	0	4
Benefits for children	3	7	2	0	0	6
Totals	30	28	19	6	0	48

The overall rating of those who felt they could respond to these issues was positive, with only a total of six responses indicating that the performance had been 'poor', and 30 assessing performance overall as 'very good'. This can only be a rough estimation of course, but it is indicative of overall satisfaction on the part of 'end users'. One regional SCA respondent commented about his replies to this item that he answered 'not in terms of rating the overall project "quality" but rather in terms of what could realistically be achieved within available resources, in relations to the geographical area and the audience targeted.' Researchers had not been provided with budget information for the project, with the result that no statistical assessment of cost-

effectiveness could be made. In any case, it would be extremely difficult to calculate the long-term impact at different levels of the use of the Regional Advisor's time on maintaining the electronic network, and the actual costs of running workshops for training were frequently hidden in budgets shared with partner organizations. This may be behind the single estimate of cost-effectiveness as 'poor', which the respondent qualified with a comment on the budget being very low ('peanuts'). It is interesting that the highest expressions of satisfaction concerned 'children's rights', which probably reflects the rights-based nature of the approach adopted by the Regional Advisor. As he commented, rather than beginning training workshops with introducing 'participation' as a topic – because participants 'are resistant to the idea' – he usually began with 'children have a right to be listened to'. Although in some contexts he would not use the word 'rights' at all and say 'it is good to listen to children'. In addition, the Regional Advisor occasionally provided training exclusively focused on children's-rights programming. Overall, according to these data, the project appears to have contributed more to the development of understanding of children's participation within the SCA internationally than within Viet Nam, the region or general international organizations.

Comments in response to open-ended questions about training activities were positive, and usually quite extensive. For example, a regional respondent who had attended one of the Advisor's workshops wrote that:

> This activity helped clarify my analysis of why the child's participation rights are the least realized right in The Philippines: unequal power relations between adults and children related to the patriarchal view of children. They also helped clarify the focus of my work as focal point on children's participation ... access to information, the right to be heard, the right to be involved in decision making and to form or be a member of an organization. This became part of our work to ensure that children's participation becomes concrete in our work with partner organizations and in our own operations.

Workshops can themselves serve a networking function. Thus a Save the Children Alliance Global Meeting on Children's participation:

> ... put me in touch with other organizations within the SC Alliance working on children's participation, particularly with groups working on child-led organizations and initiatives. It was also at this meeting that the initiative on developing Practice Standards on Children's

> participation began. I found the working paper on this very useful to share with partner organizations and consultants. [We] funded the translation of this document, along with the SC-UK Child Protection Policy into two [local] languages so that children can have access to information and discuss issues and concerns or report violations on the practice of children's participation.

The impacts of taking part, particularly those from Viet Nam, in training activities were all described in positive terms. Some participants had clearly been affected by the philosophical perspective of the Regional Advisor, saying that they had changed their own childrearing practices,

> I try to spend more time talking to my five-year-old. He really enjoys that (SCS Viet Nam female staff member);
> I changed a little bit in behaviour with my children. I am more flexible about letting my daughter (13 years old) decide for herself (female Vietnamese Government official);
> I realized that children can participate and how to work with children so they can express themselves. I changed my attitude to my daughter (female staff member Plan International, Viet Nam).

Comments on capacity-building workshops directly related to subsequent effects on working in children's participation, included:

> [the training] helped substantiate the reading and helped put theory into practice, but also gave good tools for exploring my own and other people's issues/situations around child and youth participation (regional SCA staff member on a regional workshop);

> I understood ethics better – this was not adequately mentioned in [previous] CRC training (SCS staff member);

> Children's participation can take many different forms according to their readiness; we should think of child protection issues while working on children's participation; working on children's participation is working with children and adults (regional SCA staff member);

> Children's participation is sensitized among partners and as a result they start to initiate activities promoting children's participation at school level (SCA staff member after national-level course in the region). It has changed my views on the complexity and scope of the issue.

> This is where I realized the cross-cutting nature of children's participation as a strategy (regional staff member of youth organization);
>
> [the training workshop] validated some of my own perceptions of children's participation as well as raised questions and issues to complete the picture, such as ethics, protection, perceptions of participation (female SCS staff member from another region).

The difficulties (and future needs) of providing training on children's participation in Viet Nam were also mentioned by staff who had been involved in organizing and providing training:

> because our partners like workshops we need to build human resources and reinforce skills and understanding. 'The results will not be as good as we expect' because more support and management is needed. Also need to share experiences more;
>
> children's participation is not an overnight process, there are many projects that should be followed up and support continued; so follow-up might not be the investment to make, compared to support and expanding the number of participants especially in ethnic minority groups;
>
> We have a lot to do still on awareness raising and attitude/behaviour change amongst adults. But I believe that we can start at the same time working on direct capacity building for children because different entry points are complementary. We help both adults and children come into contact with each other, while they learn about [children's participation] in practice. This is very helpful because they understand each other and find ways to overcome obstacles;
>
> I want to have as many participants in training as possible. We [Government organization] have to choose to invite because the number is limited. The project supports only two communities. We would like to invite neighbouring communities too. The budget is too small. And we need to learn from models in other countries in the region;
>
> We have a pool of trainers, but we need a training manual. They have no tools. We need more advocacy for the Government so that it is a regular platform, rather than event-based. We should involve more children.

Nevertheless, the gaps in the project identified by 'expert respondents' read more like challenges and obstacles than areas the capacity-building project failed to address. The main requirements listed were addressing tradition and culture, advocacy and more training for adults.

Before making future plans, however, an SCS staff member in Viet Nam suggested that more attention should be paid to evaluation of current activities. The tendency, he stated, is for most organizations to go ahead with their children's participation activities, without stopping to evaluate what they are doing. Moreover, 'There is not good coordination between NGOs/IGOs, nor planning on the basis of experience. More transparency is needed – all this work is for the children not NGOs and UN agencies'.'

Some conclusions

The broad and ambitious objectives of the capacity-building project could not have been achieved within the project time-frame and with the resources available, particularly given the near-universal resistance to children's participation and relative lack of information about what it entails. Nevertheless, the project has undoubtedly contributed to the acceptance of the idea in a wide range of contexts, thus beginning to develop an enabling environment.

The capacity-building project focused on working with adults, first to sensitize them to the need to involve children and subsequently providing them with the skills to involve children. The work was 'on-the-job' learning as much for the participants as for the organizers of the capacity building, and it was clear from respondents' self-reports that training activities changed attitudes and behaviour. The process was as participatory as possible and embedded in the daily work of those who were personally involved. The overall evaluation of the project by end-users was positive, particularly with respect to the networking and knowledge-sharing activities of the Regional Advisor, although this is unlikely to be sustainable if he should leave this post.

Capacity building also needs to be understood as a process that requires reinforcement over a prolonged period of time. Throughout the research it became clear that participation as a concept needs contextualization to understand and internalize it. Many factors determine opportunities and limitations that attach to children's participation, among them how participants perceive children – especially the children with whom they work.

6. REFLECTIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One clear message from the data collected in all three research processes is that capacity building in children's participation provided by or through SCS programming in Viet Nam has developed and enhanced understanding and practice among a wide variety of children and adults since 2000. The training provided or promoted has been much appreciated, changing both attitudes and practices. Nevertheless, researchers suggest that some crucial conceptual work remains to be carried out by and within organizations promoting children's participation. The often-repeated terms 'meaningful participation', 'enabling environment' and 'participation' itself, remain unclear or have different meanings to different social groups and agencies.

The first of these terms, 'meaningful participation', is logically redundant, because all human activities are meaningful. The implication in its use by organizations promoting children's participation is meaningful only in ways defined by the organization involved. Such meanings are ascribed variously to children's 'voices' or 'opinions' being heard, often based to a greater or lesser extent on rights provided in the CRC, and – to a lesser extent – in the human rights of children. This raises questions about children's citizenship that, according to Vietnamese colleagues, it is not yet possible to discuss in their country. In interview, the Regional Advisor pointed to the contextual nature of 'meaningful':

> It depends on the setting, although it does mean that adults and children should reach agreement. The context includes the kind of children and the kind of adults, the topic, the political, cultural and social environment, the roles and responsibilities of adults and children, as well as issues, methods and venue.

From this it appears that the meaning of 'participation' is dependent on the event or activity in which it takes place, rather than on a general definition. The data appear to bear out such an observation. The research on both the Children-Friendly District and the forums showed that, at this stage in the development of the concept in Viet Nam, participation is linked to events and activities.

Similarly, participants in the first workshop, held to discuss research questions in April 2004, said that they did not feel comfortable with the term 'enabling environment', even though the development of such an environment was a key objective of the capacity-building programme. Despite, or perhaps because of, this qualification, the examination of 'enabling environments' for children's participation became a continuous thread in our data analysis. In simple terms, and in the context of training and capacity building, as the Regional Advisor stated in interview, the development of an enabling environment requires trying to discover what adults think they should or should not do to make participation work – the conditions that must be in place for participation to be a reality. It is clear from the data that the methods used by the capacity-building programme, beginning with people's own experiences in childhood and the right of children to be listened to, have altered pre-existing ideas about the place of children in society. The idea that children's rights are 'not appropriate' to Viet Nam is not supported by the data. Societies learn and change, albeit in a somewhat bumpy fashion, just as their component individuals, communities and organizations change over time.

Teleological definitions

All researchers came to a similar conclusion when discussing data: the definition of participation implicit in most responses was teleological, by which we mean a definition according to what is done in the name of participation rather than what children's participation means for children and society in the longer term

This was particularly clear in the definition used in the study of the forums, which was almost identical to the definition agreed in the first capacity-building workshop in January 2001:

> Children can participate in all sorts of activities in suitable forms to their ages, circumstances, conditions and abilities with adults' assistance through which children can have access to information, express their own opinions and can be listened [to] by the adults in order to help children best develop.

The Regional Advisor commented in the April 2004 workshop that this definition was too strongly based on Article 12 of the CRC to be an adequate definition of children's human right to participation – in other words his Utopian vision. The phrase 'participation in all sorts of activities' is used as if

it were explanatory rather than descriptive. Participation is asserted to be a right, emphasizing expressing opinions to adults, according to a general reading of Articles 12 and 13 of the CRC. Yet the essential human right to participation, as self-determination in the context of citizenship, is not referred to.

Our examination of historical documents in Chapter 2 showed that three contextual elements shape the current Vietnamese environment for children's participation:

- A gradual, cultural appreciation of the meaning of human rights;
- Political history, current changes and future vision;
- Understanding of the place of the CRC in legislation and policies for children.

Viet Nam has a nascent, but still unclear, vision of the importance of the young as national citizens, which accounted for the restricted (and event-based) definition used in our research protocol (Appendix and Glossary):

> The term is often used to mean involvement in decision making and planning, within activities, projects and programmes. However, for the purpose of this research, it means 'presence in a meeting or process' regardless of the roles and responsibilities involved.

Although this was the operational definition, researchers do not consider it to be adequate. Far from it. As a group we leaned towards the more Utopian vision of the Regional Advisor, in which being present in a meeting or event is only a means of promoting participation, which is:

> ... not a political campaign that puts children first, as children's liberation proposed, but a process of creating a society that is inclusive of young citizens (Milne, 1996, 41).

Among 'experts' who responded to the research, four defined participation in ways that reflect this wider view, yet without taking on the revolutionary perspective. But – as seen in Chapter 4 – respondents who had been closer to the capacity-building process were more in tune with the Regional Advisor and researchers.

A small number of research respondents regarded children's participation as an activity initiated by foreign donors and organizations. One SCS Viet Nam

employee even suggested that international NGOs and UN agencies are in competition with each other in Viet Nam to be the most successful in promoting children's participation. Although it was not possible to provide conclusive evidence from data analysis, researchers suspected that some of the 'buy in' to children's participation may be finance-led and that this is related to the event, or activity, orientation – once the event is over participation has been 'done', without penetrating further into social awareness and cultural practices. There were also indications in the data that both internal and external agencies see participation more as a way of solving social problems and programming dilemmas than as a right. Thus there is a risk that children's participation may be viewed as a box of tricks for facilitators to use at events, rather than an end in itself, much less as a way of life

Nevertheless, the highest number of 'expert' definitions (11 out of 24) reflected the success of the capacity-building programme, based on some earlier national efforts, in combining training in children's participation with training in children's rights. Although (like other respondents) their definitions appeared to be based more on the CRC than the human rights of children, they were adept at listing rights to information, giving opinions, and freedom of expression, as for example in the response from a youth in the region:

> It is the basic right of every child to have access to information and freely express his/her informed opinion on matters that affect him/her, and for that opinion to be heard and taken into consideration in decision making at various levels of the child's environment.

Children's participation is thus recognized as a right, and incorporated into practice, but without clarity about meaning and purpose. Yet we would suggest that participation has to have a purpose – it is not limited to activities or events. Otherwise, however much children are in charge of an event, meeting or even organization, they are unlikely to change anything – they remain decorative. Further stages of capacity building need to move towards a deeper consideration of what participation is supposed to achieve in practice, grounding it in children's everyday lives rather than in limited-life events, which requires a greater understanding of the rights involved than can be encompassed by CRC Article12.

Conclusions

Turning to the specific objectives of the capacity-building programme, as we have seen, in 2000, the areas in which children participated in SCS and SCA work in Viet Nam had been:

- Research undertaken by SCS and other SCA members, although children were providers of information, rather than research partners;
- Practical support in projects (although to a lesser extent) depending on the context and activities involved;
- 'Exceptionally' in decision-making processes (Beers, 2000).

In response to this relatively-limited practice of children's participation, the general objective of the SCS Viet Nam capacity-building programme was:

> To stimulate a process among our partners towards the general perception of children as social actors whose opinions make a difference in research, when doing situation analyses and in the planning process (ibid 4).

This, of course, stops short of mainstreaming children's involvement in programming and organizational structures, as well as of the institutionalization of children's participation in the life of their families and communities. But, SCS clearly recognized that the process was bound to be gradual, and could only succeed one step at a time.

The overall research questions, on which this research assessment was based, were derived from standards established in the workshop on 22 April 2004. All three processes studied had fulfilled their general objectives, while recognizing that further questions had been raised. Through the SCS-implemented activities, both adults and children in Viet Nam increased their understanding of children's participation. Adults, by their own self-reports, significantly changed their views about children and developed ambitious visions of future children's participation. Partly because of the low research response rate from 'experts' in the region and internationally, it is not possible to make causal relationships between the programme in Viet Nam and the work of the Regional Advisor elsewhere.

It is clear from the data that the programme led to increased understanding of children's viewpoints and aspirations, and to their opinions being taken into consideration. Nevertheless, at this early stage in awareness raising, it seems that the fact that children have valid and interesting opinions is accepted – often to the surprise of adults – rather than the viewpoints being taken into consideration by adults. This is a significant move towards children being regarded as 'competent social actors', although this concept from European social science is difficult for Vietnamese adults to comprehend. Nevertheless, there is a basic social idea that children bear the burden of future society, and awareness that they are not just passive recipients.

The research found that individual lifetime learning about children's capacities and rights is an important area through which awareness can be raised. Childhood and parenthood proved to be continuing threads in internalizing ideas about children's rights to participate, which may indicate that Early Childhood Development programming might be a crucial point of entry for capacity building at local level.

Children's rights to have their opinions heard and taken into account seem to be well-understood by most research respondents who had taken part in training workshops, although there appeared to be a need for learning to be reinforced by more continuous and reflexive training, as in the case of the facilitators for forums.

One concern of researchers was that, although the right to participate was widely recognized, little attention has yet been given to children's right to reject the opportunity. At the same time, even the most enthusiastic 'child participation' advocates tended to use terms such as 'give' and 'allow' when discussing children taking part in various (adult-organized) activities.

Nevertheless, both child and adult respondents referred to the confidence-building effects of children's experiences of participation at many different levels. Although 'confidence' was not measured, it appears to be related by respondents to ability to speak to adults directly as well as to 'speak up' in public. In addition, children seem to be building confidence that adults do hear them and will listen, and that their opinions are regarded as valid and interesting. In this respect, however, it can also be seen that many adults, particularly within Government structures, require capacity building in listening to, hearing and acting upon what children have to say.

In general terms, organizers of the various activities described in this Report tried to ensure inclusive participation. It is interesting and instructive to see that girls predominate in events and activities. Gender equality was an early concern of SCS Viet Nam programme managers, but, as one Vietnamese staff member commented in interview, by 2004 (after girls had been prioritized), discrimination by gender became a less important concern than discrimination according to ethnicity, 'the original objective is now out of date.' It was difficult to tell accurately from the data collected for the forums whether or not children with disabilities and ethnic minority children had equal opportunities to participate, including the requirement for their specific needs to be taken fully into account by organizers. Data indicate that younger children were excluded from most activities, indicating that, as one respondent remarked, 'We need to know more about how to organize children less than seven years of age. We lack experience with them, even though we know they can express themselves meaningfully.'

The research also considered the relationship between the capacity-building programme and the integration of children's participation into research and programming. In this respect, it appears that, although staff of the organizations and agencies involved have changed their attitudes towards children, there is no evidence of organizational change that incorporates children – or even the majority of staff – in levels of management. Although it is beyond the scope of this research assessment, SCS might well reflect on the basic research questions related to rights-based programming (Theis, 2004):

- How participatory is our organization, questioning the involvement of stakeholders, including children, in organizational decision making and assessments?
- Is there an overall participatory approach to decision making and strategic planning among colleagues?
- How empowered do staff 'feel'?

Our final observations are grouped according to context, rights considerations and the capacity-building programme itself.

Context of the capacity-building programme

- There is a global crisis in the burgeoning 'children's participation' field; a crisis that is characterized by:
-
  - A split between what is done/advocated for child workers and debates/activities in the field of citizenship;
  - Demands for political correctness that lead to the requirement for children to be present in international meetings without sufficient preparation or protection;
  - Debates about the ethics of participation that leave the door wide open for critics of 'child participation' to stop it happening.

- International support for the capacity-building programme is variable in its usefulness (too many toolkits with no tools in them other than rhetoric);

- Very few people (in 'the business') really appear to believe in children's participation. Yet a political correctness of 'knee-jerk' responses is notable in the research data. It is not clear if this is a result of the programme or because respondents felt they had to give 'correct answers'. Unanimity agrees to a certain extent on more sensitive issues such as girls' education. When tested or probed, opinions on children's participation appear to be superficial and/or confused.

- Perceptions of children's participation include how children 'should be' and vary across age groups and cultures. 'Western' or Westernized adults (25-60 years) appear to be idealistic rather than pragmatic (for example 'strongly disagreeing' that children should obey adults). Save the Children professionals appear not to be well-informed about children, but to set unrealistic goals.

Rights and participation

- Rights in general, and children's rights in particular, are poorly understood, including by people whose main employment focuses on children's participation, many of whom have developed their own interpretations and understandings;

- In Viet Nam, children's participation is not well understood, although the idea (whatever it is) is well accepted. The reasons for the lack of understanding are not based in 'traditional attitudes', despite the way outsiders use this as an explanation;
- 'Participation' is a moving target, which tends to be variously described rather than confidently defined. Because they are descriptive, definitions are teleological;
- 'Participation' is often closely related to or even confused with the CRC on the one hand and children's needs on the other (or both) rather than seen to be rooted in human rights;
- Forums were 'compelling evidence' for children's ability to participate;
- Children's participation is regarded as a children's activity – not related to adults' participation rights – since (thus far) there is no evidence of shared (adult-child) participation. Nevertheless, it is stated by many that children should be involved in adult organizations (but with some caveats).

The capacity-building programme

- No negative impacts are reported in this research and in general the aims (albeit vague) have been achieved, but most information gathered refers to processes rather than to results and, with no baseline data it is difficult to assess impact other than by recall (through the timeline and ladder tools, for example);
- Positive impacts remarked upon seem to have been due to a large extent (especially in the region) to the personal efforts and energies of the coordinator. Thus an important recommendation will be that a strategic plan for institutionalizing and de-personalizing capacity building should be made and implemented. This also needs a consistent enabling environment at national, regional and international levels, taking local ideas and initiatives as the building blocks;
- Perceptions of the capacity-building programme activities are extremely varied and not always correct;
- Possibly related to this, although the programme is well accepted and has generated interest, it may not have generated enthusiasm, largely because it has been focused on one person rather than promoted by Save the Children as an integral part of all programming.

Recommendations

On the basis of the analysis of data from this research assessment we make the following specific recommendations.

Strategic plan

Develop a strategic plan for institutionalizing and de-personalising capacity building in children's participation:

- An enabling environment;
- Based in local ideas and initiatives, systems of governance and civil society;
- Appropriate institutional structures in SCS;
- Sophisticated/appropriate communication systems for distributing information.

Plan for enhanced/extended capacity building

- Training and reinforcement of training in facilitation for adults and for young people, including manuals based on actual experiences;
- Ensure that training has a broader base, so that it results in people understanding participation, rather than giving 'correct answers';
- Base training on human rights, to improve understanding of the context of children's participation, including:
  - History and chronology of human rights
  - Promoting better understanding of the history and mechanisms of the CRC
  - History and chronology of 'participation' as a human right and within development practice
  - Developing locally appropriate (and where necessary children-appropriate) publications and other materials for capacity building;
- Standardize global tool kits and manuals for local, practical understanding and application.

Planning for further children's participation

- Provide more opportunities at all levels (especially commune) for children to participate through giving their opinions on current issues, ensuring that these opportunities are:

  - Integrated with adult decision-making bodies and activities;
  - Well, and appropriately, covered by the media;
  - To these ends, provide training in children's participation for decision makers and media.
- Reduce competition and emphasis on results within children's participation as a whole;
- Involve children in planning children's participation, including selection processes, meeting planning and setting agendas;
- Promote the development of commune-level children's groups/councils;
- Link with/build on experiences in District 4 HCMC;
- Develop materials for preparing children for participation;
- Ensure sustainability and follow-up, including financial support.

'Children-friendly' planning

- Build on experiences of District 4 HCMC, to develop further children-friendly districts (urban and rural);
- Research the idea of 'children-friendly' through exploring children's opinions;
- Promote better understanding of children's participation within the teaching profession and educational structures;
- Develop mechanisms through which all children are integrated into participatory processes in schools;
- Link and network the activities of Children-Friendly Districts and Children-Friendly Schools.

Enabling environments

- Develop materials that clarify, in local terms, the global debates on children's participation, specifically the use of terms such a 'citizen' and 'democracy' within different forms of governance in SEAP region;
- In collaboration with other agencies and government counterparts, develop minimum standards for preparation and protection of children who participate in meetings outside their local communities;
- Training for 'chaperones' and translators;
- Contribute to establishing clear standards and guidelines for adult behaviour and responsibilities with respect to children's participation;
- Establish, promote and implement children-friendly complaints procedures.

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APPENDIX

Protocol Document
(research tools)

With the exception of Research Tools 1 and 2, all data collected using the tools described in this Protocol will use a Standard Observation Sheet to record the circumstances in which data collection took place, and attach the sheet to the data from each data-collection session

Standard Observation Sheet

Data number:

Date:

Time:

Place:

Researcher(s):

Research tool:

Sample/participants:

Factors affecting data collection

Researcher(s):

Research participant(s):

Interruptions/observers:
Weather, noise and other environmental factors:

Other:

Research Tool 1: Secondary data

Research makes a distinction between primary data (collected during a particular research process) and secondary data (which already exist). Secondary data include books, published or unpublished reports, situation analyses, rapid assessments, theses, laws, statistics, information from the internet, records, media articles, videos, photographs or films. Each group of researchers in the research team will be responsible for collecting, reviewing and analysing the relevant data.

HCMC

- Project documentation.

Forums

- Reports from the three Forums:
  - Notes from the children's forum 'Meeting in August, Hanoi';
  - The children's forum on HIV/AIDS 'Children speak out on HIV/AIDS';
  - Report from the children's forum 'Children Speak out on Education'.
- Reports from two workshops sharing experiences on children's participation: the first and second time;
- Training workshop journals of facilitators;
- *AIDS and the Community* Issue 5 (64).2004
- www.savethechildren.net/vietnam;
- A video about the forums;
- The children's forum 'We Speak on HIV/AIDS'. CPYC, SC and NASL
- Work plans, notes, reports, correspondence, plans of operations, evaluation reports for each forum, and similar activities designed and implemented by other organizations.

Overall project

- Project documents (Save the Children Sweden, Ha Noi) from 2000 to present;
- Beers, H. van, 2002, *Children's participation: Experiences in capacity-building,* Stockholm, Save the Children Sweden;
- Beers, H. van, various dates, documents from SNV project in Kenya;

- Downloads of documents on children's participation received by international researchers from H. van Beers since 2001;
- Published documents and report of children's participation in the SEAP region since 2000;
- Published documents and internal documents of the Save the Children Alliance, Children's Participation Working Group from inception;
- Key publications on children's participation from 1981 to present;
- Reports of the Vietnamese research teams.

Instructions to researchers for analysing secondary data

Analysis of secondary data is a systematic process of examining the source of the information, why it was collected and what methods have been used to store, analyse and publish the results.

Origin

What is the source of the information? Is it simply information referring to one point in time? If so, how does it relate to other information? Information will vary depending upon the purpose for which it was collected. Each organization collects information according to its definition of, and interest in, children.

Collection and recording

Does the report contain information about the methods? How suitable were they? It is important to know about the specific questions asked, definitions used, conditions under which research was carried out, sample sizes and how they were chosen, use of control groups, characteristics and training of researchers and composition of the research team, recording methods, language and definitions used.

Organization and storage of data

It is important to know how the secondary data are stored: in report form or on computer databases (or both).

Processing

Where appropriate, researchers should make an inventory of available data, showing what exists, how it has been processed and by whom, in order to

compare methods and results easily. What different ages were given for childhood in different documents? How were these different ages presented in tables? What age groupings were used for data collection and presentation by different agencies (government, UN agencies, NGOs)? How easy is it to compare figures between agencies?

Accuracy

Researchers should check that the statistics they find in secondary sources are consistent, viable and up-to-date, including if the numbers in the columns of tables add up to the numbers given as 'totals', or whether numbers in graphs and tables are consistent with figures given in the text, and if percentages are being given for very small samples of people. Important clues to the reliability of the data can always be found in the clarity with which tables and graphs are titled, with proper reference to the source and year of data. Are tables clear and unambiguous?

Quality of analysis

Examine whether the analysis in previous research used the data appropriately and whether the conclusions reached were based on the data and relevant to the research questions. Conclusions must be based on available evidence rather than on pre-existing beliefs.

Compare different secondary sources with each other and with the data that are collected later during the fieldwork. Try to prepare lists and tables with significant information from different sources, in order to compare data and assess their reliability.

Dissemination

Does the agency collecting the data have more than one means of disseminating information and more than one group of readers for reports? It is worth examining examples of the full range of publications and other products of research and comparing the information they include. Are there differences between the information shared with staff of an organization and what it publishes in the media, for official consumption or for fundraising?

Research Tool 2: Research diary

Aim To record details of research process.

Researcher Individual researcher.

Method Notes and sketches recorded daily.

Equipment Plain ruled notebooks that can easily fit into a bag, provided on recruitment.

Researcher instructions

Each researcher must keep a personal research diary from the start of the research process. A research diary is used every day to record, as appropriate/relevant:

- What happened today;
- Ethical issues;
- Problems and possible solutions;
- Questions and possible answers ('hypotheses');
- Impressions and feelings;
- 'To do' lists;
- Names and addresses of contacts;
- Brief unstructured observations;
- Records of conversations;
- Ideas about the meaning of what happened;
- Comments about the fieldwork or the research in general.

Recording in a research diary

Each day's entry should be dated and each page numbered. Most researchers develop a system of symbols that help them to distinguish one kind of entry from another - for example:

?? = Check this;

☐ = Remember this;

☺ = Person to contact

▸ = Do this

☺ = Done

- Researchers should have their diaries with them at all times;
- Diary writing should not be left to the next day;
- Some records can be made as they happen;
- Leave a wide margin on each page for later indexing;
- If researchers feel that they do not want to share some of the details in their diaries they can enter passages that are important for the research on a computer file, and index this for sharing with others.

Research Tool 3: Observation check list

Aim	To supplement other tools by deliberately assessing 'children-friendly' aspects of environments used by children
Sample	All environments used by children visited during research
Researcher	Individual researchers
Method	Checklists of aspects of the physical and psychological environment to guide researchers' observations.
Recording	Checklist attached, written by researchers during or immediately after fieldwork visits, by hand or in electronic form
Materials/equipment	Checklist schedule – one for each visit

Researcher instructions

- Use the checklist as a guide to observation during a visit, and/or as a reminder afterwards;
- Focus on aspects that enable or disable children's participation;
- Add as much detail as possible;
- Do not limit observations to the checklist;
- Do not use the checklist in an obvious or officious manner;
- Where appropriate make an electronic versions or photocopy of the checklist for sharing with other researchers;
- Assign data number.

Observation checklist 1:
Data number

Place
Date
Time
Researcher

Enabling physical environment	
Do children have their own space to meet?	
Are there adult-only places where children cannot go?	
Do children have access to equipment, such as computers and photocopiers?	
Do adults and children eat separately?	
Do adults and children have separate hygiene facilities?	
Do children have space to store their clothes and other belongings?	
Is there a suggestion box?	
Other comments	

Observation checklist 2 : Interactions between adults and children

How do adults and children interact?	
Do children appear confident in approaching adults?	
What do they approach adults for?	
Who sits/who stands?	
Equal numbers of adults/children?	
Equal numbers gender (adults and children)	
Ethnic minority children?	
Children with disabilities?	
Who speaks most?	
Who takes decisions?	
Who gives instructions?	
How much time/attention do adults give to children?	
Other comments	

Research Tools 4-7: Core research tools

Research tools 4-7 comprise a group that should be used as far as possible with all research participants (adults and children). The overall aim is to explore ideas about children's participation within different groups, using a variety of methods that can be triangulated.

In general these tools should be used in the order in which they appear in the final Protocol:

Research Tool 4: Attitude survey
Research Tool 5: Sentence completion
Research Tool 6: Ladder of participation over time
Research Tool 7: Timeline: Learning about children's participation

These should be among the first tools used during data collection sessions, and in some cases may be the only tools used. In other cases, they may be preceded by an unstructured interview (Research Tool 9) to establish context; complemented by the Observation checklist, and/or followed by another research tool (for example Research tool.

The entire core set of tools can be used with a group of adults or children, like a series of 'school tasks', in which the researcher hands a recording sheet to each participant, making sure that name and other personal data are recorded on each sheet, and only collecting the full set of four sheets from each participant at the end. The set of data for each participant (together with any other tools used) can be attached to the relevant informed consent form, and a Standard Observation Sheet completed for the entire data set – or photocopies of the Standard Observation Sheet can be attached to the individual sets. Data numbers should be cross-referenced between data sets.

Research tools 4 and 5 should be used in all cases – tools 6 and 7 as time and circumstance allow.

During the piloting stage, researchers found that some groups of adults began to argue with the statements in the attitude survey and/or to discuss possible endings for the sentences in Research Tool 5. Such debates and discussions are useful data and can be recorded in research diaries or on audio tape – provided that participants have given their permission for the use of a tape recorder.

Research tool 4: Attitude survey

Aim	To explore attitudes to children's participation among a wide variety of respondents
Method	Standardized attitude survey form (attached) using statements with which the respondent records agreement of disagreement.
Sample	Adults and children, working individually either self-completed or completed by researcher. Groups of adults or children may complete the form simultaneously, without consultation, in the presence of a researcher or researchers.
Location	Variable, including during face-to-face session, during group session, or through email.
Researcher(s)	Working as individuals or in groups, face to face or through email
Equipment	Attitude Survey form (1 for each respondent) Research Diary

Researcher instructions

- Seek informed consent if this has not already been obtained;
- Use the attitude survey form according to the instructions on the sheet, adapting instructions to respondents according to circumstances;
- Note in research diary any comments the respondent may make about the statements;
- Thank the respondent;
- Complete a standard observation sheet (one may be used for the entire set of Core Research Tools;
- Number data.

Attitude survey form

Data number
Age
Gender
Occupation

Please read the following statements and, in each case, circle the response that is closest to your own reaction to the statement:

1. Children do not have the ability to make decisions

Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree

2. Children's participation is not appropriate in Vietnamese culture

Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree

3. Children do not understand about rights

Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree

4. It is disrespectful for children to express opinions to adults

Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree

5. Children should be represented on the management of adult organizations

Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree

6. Children should obey adults

Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree

7. Children should give their opinions when they are asked

Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree

8. Educating girls is not worthwhile

Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Research tool 5: Sentence completion

Aim	To explore attitudes to children's participation among a wide variety of respondents.
Method	Standardized sentence completion form using statements with which the respondent records agreement of disagreement.
Sample	Adults and children, working individually either self-completed or completed by researcher. Groups of adults or children may complete the form simultaneously, without consultation, in the presence of a researcher or researchers.
Location	Variable, including during face-to-face session, during group session, or through email.
Researcher(s)	Working as individuals or in groups, face to face or through email.
Equipment	Sentence completion form (attached) (1 for each respondent) Research Diary.

Researcher instructions

- Seek informed consent if this has not already been obtained;
- Use the sentence completion form according to the instructions on the sheet, adapting instructions to respondents according to circumstances;
- Note in research diary any comments the respondent may make about the statements;
- Thank the respondent;
- Complete a Standard Observation Sheet (one may be used for the entire set of Core Research Tools;
- Number data.

Sentence completion form

Data number

Age
Gender
Occupation

Please complete the following sentences in your own words, working quickly and writing the first words that occur to you.

1. Children's rights are....
2. Children's duties are....
3. Children can participate from the age of .....
4. Children should not ....
5. Children should....
6. Children should participate in.....
7. Children should not participate in....
8. Children's opinions are....
9. When children make decisions the result is.....
10. Adults have a responsibility to.....

Research Tool 6: The ladder of participation over time

Aim

- To gather data on research participants their perspective on, understanding of and aspirations for children's participation;
- To provide stimulus for:
  - Group unstructured interviews (Research Tool 10);
  - Individual unstructured interviews (Research Tool 10 and 11);
  - Individual structure interview (Research Tool 9)
  - Focus Group Discussion (Research Tool 13).

Sample

Opportunistically, all adult participants, some children if possible

Researcher

One or more researchers

Method

Ranking

Recording

Ladder of participation sheet, notes in research diary, back-up on audio cassette if discussion occurs

Materials/equipment

- Informed consent forms
- Ladder of participation sheet (in English or Vietnamese as appropriate) – note HCMC uses a slightly different layout
- Standard observation sheet (s)
- Tape recorder
- Batteries
- Tape

Researcher instructions

Show the ladder of participation sheet to participants, covering up the explanation/folding the sheet vertically so that only the ladder shows. Find

out if the participant(s) are familiar with the ladder. Explain the idea behind the ladder and point out that the rungs are stages in children's participation. Make sure that they do not think the rungs are a series of questions. Encourage them to look at the explanations for each rung if they need further information.

Say: *This ladder of participation was developed in 1993 by Barbara Franklin for Save the Children Sweden in Viet Nam. It shows different levels of children's participation. Can you think back to the turn of the century in 2000 and think what rung you personally were on then (not your organization)? Please mark that rung with the year '2000'. Now think about where you are now, in 2004 and mark the rung with '2004'. Finally, mark where you would like to be in 2010.*

Allow participants to take their time, and be prepared to

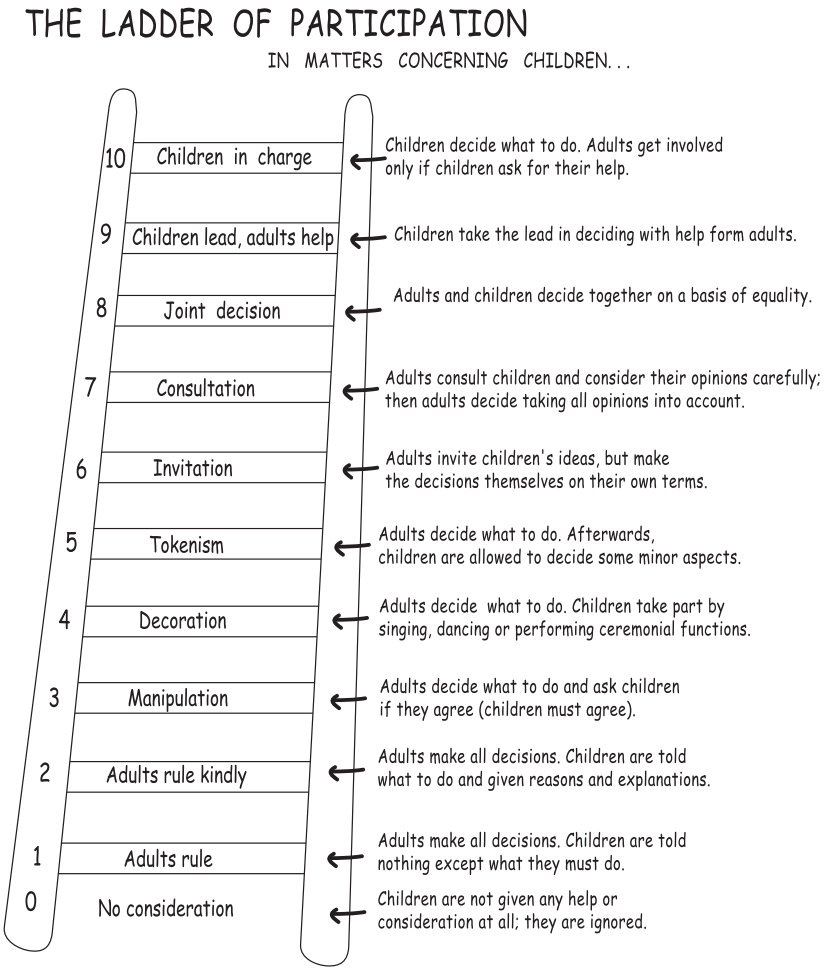
(i) engage in discussion
(ii) allow participants to distinguish between, for example, theory and practice by marking more than one rung for each year.

Variations in researcher's wording are acceptable. It is important that the participant understands the ladder and what he/she is being asked to do.

Ladder of Participation

Data number

Age
Gender
Occupation



Research Tool 7: Timeline: Learning about participation

Aim	To explore the ways adults have learned about children's participation, including the influences of training courses and publications.
Method	Standardised Time Line form.
Sample	Selectively with adults only.
Location	Variable, including during face-to-face session, during group session, or through email.
Researcher(s)	Working as individuals or in groups, face to face or through email.
Equipment	Time Line form (attached) (1 for each respondent) Research Diary.

Researcher instructions

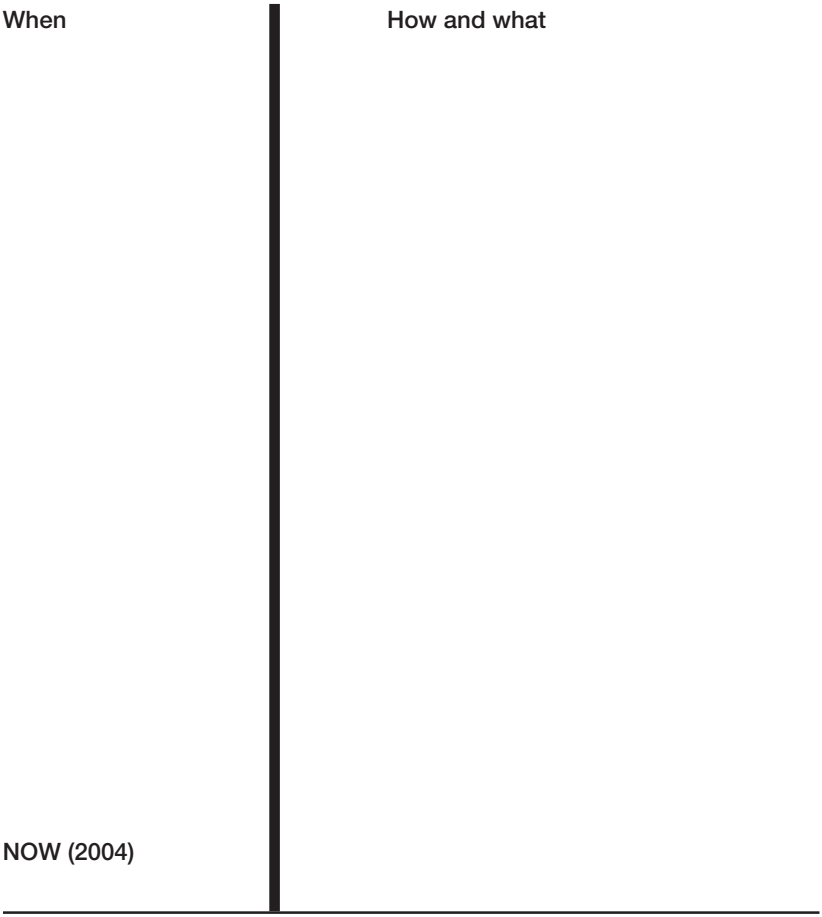
- Seek informed consent if this has not already been obtained;
- Use the Time Line form according to the instructions on the sheet, adapting instructions to respondents according to circumstances;
- Note in research diary any additional comments the respondent may make;
- Thank the respondent;
- Complete a standard observation sheet (one may be used for the entire set of Core Research Tools).

Time line

Data number

Age
Gender
Occupation

Please use this line to show when, how and what you have learned about children's participation.



Research Tool 8: Role play followed by prompt questions

Aim	To explore children's experiences of and views about their interactions with adults in participatory activities
Sample	Two to eight children who have been involved in the project/programme
Researchers	At least two Vietnamese, two international consultants (no translation for the role play)
Equipment	Notebooks, standard observation sheet, informed consent forms for children (up to 16)
Place	Quiet room, with no interruptions and sufficient light

Instructions for researchers

- Seek informed consent.
- Ask children to prepare a role play/drama to show the way(s) they interact with adults in the project; suggest that they might prepare two scenes – one positive, one negative – although they can chose to only show one. Tell them that the role play should last a maximum of five minutes and that they have 10 minutes to prepare. If there is a large group of children and sufficient time they may be split into two groups.
- During preparation do not supervise.
- Watch the role play, without intervention or comment, but taking notes if necessary. No translation is required for international consultants.
- Applaud the play when it is finished. Then sit down with the children.
- Ask questions and record the children's replies in notebooks (tape recorder may be used as a back up). Questions may include:

What was happening in this role play?
Who were the people?
Did this really happen? / Is this typical of dialogue between adults and children?
How did [a particular character] feel when this happened?
Try to explore any changes that have taken place as a result of the project's activities.

- Thank the children, return any chairs/tables or equipment to where they were when you began the role play.
- Number data, fill in standard observation sheet.

Research Tool 9: Structured interview

Aim	To explore adult understanding of children's participation with particular reference to the SCS capacity-building project 2000-2004
Sample	Individual staff member of SCS, International Save the Children Alliance and counterparts in Vietnam, SEA and internationally
Researcher	One researcher
Method	Face-to-face interviews, interviews by telephone and self-completed email, using the same schedule; may be combined with other tools (including sentence completion and attitude survey by email)
Recording	Interview schedule, notes in research diary, back-up on audio cassette

Materials/equipment

Informed consent forms (2 per respondent)
Interviews schedule (attached) (1 per respondent)
Standard Observation Sheet
Notebook
Research Diary
Tape recorder
Batteries
Tapes

Researcher instructions

- Seek informed consent (including to recording method)
- Administer schedule, explaining questions and adding prompts where necessary
- Complete standard observation sheet
- Number data

Electronic version of structured interview can be seen in Appendix 1.

Structured interview schedule
Data number

Researcher	Response
Name	
Age	
Gender	
Organization	
Position	
Duties	
Where is your office based?	
What is the geographical scope of your work?	
How many years have you worked for your current organization?	
How many years have you been in your current post?	
How would you define children's participation?	
What is the origin of the idea of children's participation?	
What is the relevance of children's participation to your work?	
How often do you and your colleagues discuss children's participation?	Often Sometimes Not at all Other
Have you had personal experience of children's participation in the course of your work?	Yes/No
If so, what form did this take?	
Have you attended any courses or training on children's participation?	Yes/No
If yes, please list them	

Researcher	Response
What changes, if any, did these make to the way you think about and work on children's participation?	
Have you ever read any books or articles on children's participation that have influenced your thinking?	Yes/No
If yes please list them	
Do you know about the work done by SCS in Hanoi in capacity building in children's participation between 2000 and 2004?	Yes/No
If No, the interview ends here	
If Yes	
Please can you briefly describe what the work includes?	
How did you find out about this project?	
Have you had direct contact with this project?	Yes/No
If yes, what form has this contact taken?	
Has the project influenced your own work?	Yes/No
If yes, in what ways?	
Do you feel that your own work has contributed to the project?	Yes/No
If yes, in what ways?	

Researcher	Response
Please circle the most appropriate assessment, in your opinion, of each of the following aspects of the project	
Cost-effectiveness	Very good - good - satisfactory - poor - very poor - don't know
Children's rights	Very good - good - satisfactory - poor - very poor - don't know
Understanding of children's participation in Viet Nam	Very good - good - satisfactory - poor - very poor - don't know
Understanding of children's participation in SE Asia	Very good - good - satisfactory - poor - very poor - don't know
International understanding of children's participation	Very good - good - satisfactory - poor - very poor - don't know
Understanding of children's participation within the International Save the Children Alliance	Very good - good - satisfactory - poor - very poor - don't know
Benefits for children	Very good - good - satisfactory - poor - very poor - don't know
Please use this space for any other comments you may have about this project	

Research Tool 10: Semi-structured interviews (individual or group)

Aim	To explore adult understanding of children's participation with particular reference to the SCS capacity-building project 2000-2004
Sample	Staff of SCS, International Save the Children Alliance and counterparts in Viet Nam, SEAP and internationally, as individuals or groups; Forum organizers Forum facilitators Children
Researcher	One researcher (possibly two for group interviews)
Method	Face-to-face interviews, interviews by telephone using standardized topics to be covered for each category of interviewee; may be combined with other tools (including sentence completion and attitude survey by email)
Recording	Notes written by researcher, back-up on audio cassette

Materials/equipment

Informed consent forms (2 per respondent)
Interview schedule(s) (attached) (1 per respondent)
Standard Observation Sheet
Notebook
Tape recorder
Batteries
Tapes

Researcher instructions

- Seek informed consent, including to recording method, explaining the topics to be covered;
- After putting respondent at ease with general conversation say that you will now begin the interview, using the appropriate schedule of topics/questions (see below);

- Switch on the cassette;
- Record Name date of birth, age and occupation of interviewee (record school children as 'student', those seeking employment as 'unemployed', people who stay at home to do household tasks as 'housewife/husband';
- Begin with a question on the topic of most relevance to the interviewee (with the exception of interviews carried out by international researchers);
- Allow the interviewee to speak uninterrupted, using prompts where necessary but not intrusively. For example 'When was that?' if the speker appears to finish, but not to interrupt the flow of speech, in which case questions about when, why and how can be noted and asked when the interviewee has finished that topic;
- If a speaker covers one of the topics on the list before being asked about it, do not ask for repeat information;
- Do not express your own opinions or contradict the interviewee, although you may ask questions/make comments such as 'I may be mistaken, but I thought that took place in March rather than May';
- When the interview is finished, ask the interviewer if he/she has any questions for you, and record both question and answer;
- Make it clear that the interview is over, thank the interviewee and switch off the cassette and close your notebook;
- The conversation may continue 'off the record' - and must remain so. If the interviewee says something you would like to record ask their permission, and if this is given open your notebook and turn the recorder on again;
- Complete standard observation sheet;
- Number datum.

Question schedules for forums research team

For SCS Resident Representative

1. When did programmes, activities and projects on children's participation begin to receive attention in the organization?
2. What contents do the organzation's trainings on children's participation emphasize?
3. Participated in which children's forums in Vietnam? Children's activities during these forums? Opinion on children's participation at that forum.
4. General evaluation of each forum: the results, the organizing work.
5. Lessons drawn from the forums.
6. After the forum, what plans were made in the your organization's work to advocate for children's participation?
7. Evaluation of the collaboration between the Alliance and Plan in the forums.
8. Factors posing difficulties to children's participation in Vietnam.

For officers and staff in organizing committees

1. Forums you have participated in? With what role with you participate and what tasks were you responsible for?
2. Children's activities in the forum. Your assessment of the children's activities.
3. Your evaluation of the forums: the organizing work, general results
4. The relationship between adults and children in the forums.
5. Requests and ideas contributed to organizing the forums and activities on children's participation.
6. Your agency's future plans for programmes and activities working for children's participation.

For facilitators

1. Please tell us about the activities that took place at the forum.
2. How did you participate in those activities?
3. What was that forum's strength?
4. What was the forum not as strong in?
5. What changes did the forum bring for adult facilitators? With children participating in the forum?
6. How is the relationship between adults and children in the forums?

7. What lesson did you draw from the forum, and what have you applied to the reality of your work and life?
8. What changes do you think should be made for the forum?

For children who participated in forums

1. What forum(s) did you participate in?
2. What were your activities in the forum? Your memories of and feelings about the time you spent participating in the forum?
3. Difficulties during your participation in the forum.
4. Comments on the organization of the forums.
5. The process and method in which you were selected at your place?
6. Preparation activities prior to participating in the forum. Difficulties.
7. Your relationship with facilitators and organizers of the forum.
8. Your activities after the forum.
9. Personal changes after participating in the forum.
10. Your hopes and desires.

Overall research (international researchers)

For staff of SCS and partners in Viet Nam, adults only, individuals or in groups

With respect to [participation activity], in your experience:

1. What worked?
2. What didn't work?
3. What would you do differently next time?

Research Tool 11: Topic-driven interviews with Regional Child Participation Advisor

Aim	To explore the experience and personal assessment of the Regional Adviser before and during the capacity-building project
Method	Series of informal interviews, taking place in the Regional Advisor's home outside work hours, in the form of discussions around a series of pre-defined and pre-agreed topics These interviews began after the Regional Advisor and the Researcher had each completed the Core Research Tools
Sample	Regional Advisor
Researcher	One researcher (the same researcher each time)
Recording	Written notes (in Research Diary) backed up by tape recording

Topics

1. *Personal history* Regional advisor's personal history of involvement in children's participation
2. *Key definitions:* participation, capacity building, enabling environment, social actor...
3. *Management issues:* line management, training, sustainability, cost-effectiveness, regional/national, replication
4. *Process:* Annual review, changes in TOR/objectives, non-discrimination

Research Tool 12: Drawings of experiences in CFD and forums

Aim	To provide children with additional opportunities to express their experiences of participation
Method	Individual drawings, supplementing other methods
Sample	Participating children (opportunistic); individual drawings but usually made when children are in a group
Researchers	Two
Equipment	Paper, felt tip pens or crayons, flat surface to draw on

Researcher instructions

1. Obtain informed consent to use of this method, including discussion of whether drawings can be used in reports and children's names be used;
2. If necessary, ask a few questions to remind the child of the activity that took place. For example, Where did that activity take place? When?
3. Suggest that the child think about impressions he/she had after participating in the activity, and to make a drawing about it;
4. Do not interrupt the child when drawing;
5. Praise all drawings;
6. Ask the child to interpret the finished drawing to a researcher;
7. Record the interpretation on the back of the drawing, together with the child's age, gender and the activity that is the subject of the drawing;
8. Thank the children;
9. Complete a Standard Observation Sheet;
10. Number data.

Research Tool 13: Focus group discussion

[insert details]

Schedule for forums researchers

For forums organisers

1. Forums participated in?
2. Evaluation and assessment of forums:
    - preparations phase
    - children's participation in the forum
    - collaboration within the Alliance in organizing
    - collaboration between organizations and partners
    - the appropriateness of forum activities
3. Personal impact of forums
4. Methods of work and preparation for forums
5. Difficulties of officers who participated in organizing forums
6. Partners' participation
7. Lessons drawn from organizing the forums
8. Plans to develop programmes and activities for children's participation

For children who participated in forums

1. What forum(s) did you participate in?
2. What were your activities in the forum? Your memories of and feelings about the time you spent participating in the forum?
3. Difficulties during your participation in the forum
4. Comments on the organization of the forums
5. The process and method in which you were selected at your place?
6. Preparation activities prior to participating in the forum. Difficulties
7. Your relationship with facilitators and organizers of the forum
8. Your activities after the forum
9. Personal changes after participating in the forum
10. Your hopes and desires

Save the Children fights for children's rights. We deliver immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide.

Save the Children works for:
- a world which respects and values each child
- a world which listens to children and learns
- a world where all children have hope and opportunity.

Children's participation is a relatively new field, in which lessons are continually being learned. Crucial elements for developing good practice are documentation and evaluation of programmes that aim to promote children's participation in all areas of their lives. Since 2000, Save the Children Sweden in Viet Nam has operated a programme to build the capacity of adults at all levels in facilitating children's participation with the long-term aim of raising awareness of children's potential for political participation, not only in Viet Nam but regionally and internationally.

In order to build the basis for planning future programmes to further children's participation in Viet Nam and elsewhere, Save the Children Sweden commissioned the research assessment described in this Report, which combined three simultaneous research processes using a single research protocol to assess:

- Children-friendly activities in Ho Chi Minh City
- Vietnamese national forums for children
- The impact of the capacity-building programme in Viet Nam, the Southeast Asia and Pacific region, and globally.

The research process was rights-based, including children's views and experiences, using appropriate methods and ethical procedures. It was also participatory in that it included the Programme Advisor at all stages of the research. Building on previous documentation of Save the Children's promotion of children's participation, the information in this Report will assist other efforts to ensure that children's participation becomes both an everyday reality and a high-quality, meaningful experience for the children and adults involved in similar proceses worldwide.

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