



# CHILD PARTICIPATION IN ACTION

**THE UMTAPO CENTRE'S**

***Peace and Empowerment Project***

SUPPORTED BY  
THE NELSON MANDELA CHILDREN'S FUND  
2011



#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lansdown G: UNICEF: Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-Making, 2001

Stephenson P: Roots Resources: Child Participation, Tearfund Publication, 2004

Save the Children, Sweden



# CHILD PARTICIPATION: WHAT DO WE MEAN?

Much has been written and discussed about CHILD PARTICIPATION. In children's programmes, typical questions raised are:

*What is the role of children in the project?*

*Will children be invited to the planning stage of the project?*

*Which children will be invited to participate in the project and how?*

*At what stage will children be involved?*

*How will children be prepared before they take part?*

These, in themselves, from the outset, are condescending because it places the children as outsiders to be incorporated.

Several provisions in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) reflect children's right to participation. Participation is one of the guiding principles of the Convention, as well as one of its basic challenges. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to participate in decision-making processes that may be relevant in their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard—within the family, the school or the community.

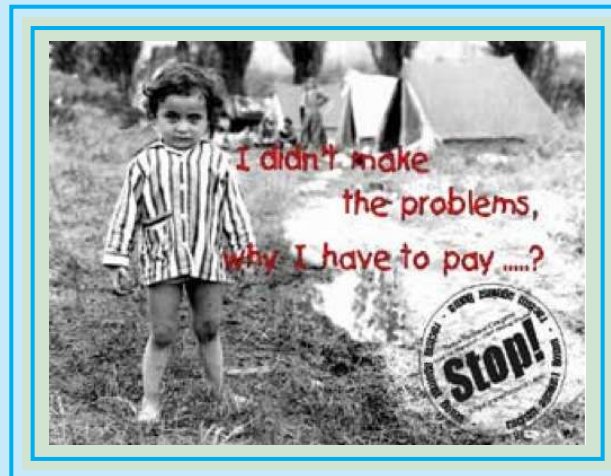
*At the core is Article 12, which insists on the 'visibility' of children in their own right.*

*The Implications of Article 12 is a substantive right, saying that children are entitled to be actors in their own lives and to participate in the decisions that affect them. But, as with adults, democratic participation is not an end in itself. It is the means through which to achieve justice, influence outcomes and expose abuses of power. In other words, it is also a procedural right enabling children to challenge abuses or neglect of their rights and take action to promote and protect those rights. It enables children to contribute to respect for their best interests.*

Listening to children and considering seriously what they have to say can hardly be said to be natural of interpersonal relationships or societal organization. The participatory thrust of the CRC demands a change in mindset towards children. Even adults who are sympathetic to the principle of enabling children to express their views may often feel uncomfortable with the ways, means and implications of putting this into practice.

The South African Constitution is one of the most progressive in the world in that it gives full recognition to children's rights. Although not outlined as a right in Section 28 of the Constitution, the right of children to participate in matters and decisions affecting their lives becomes obligatory through the government's ratification of the CRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

However, while the child-friendly constitution provides the space for positive change, children's rights (including to participation) continue to be violated in their everyday environments of family, school, and community. The non child-friendly mindsets and state structures are not geared for any interpretation or discourse around participatory approaches so that South Africa still lags far behind many other progressive nations in this regard.



Umtapo's view of participation is philosophically situated within the Freirean notion of Popular Education:

Popular education encompasses all concerns relating to people empowerment

Popular education prioritizes the poor, marginalized, deprived and oppressed.

Popular education is a continuous process of learning and unlearning. It is always self-critical.

Popular education enables people to articulate their own stories, ask their own questions, seek their own answers and define their own direction.

Popular education advocates participatory learning processes. It fosters "a sense of ownership" in people for their learning and recognizes them as partners in learning.

Popular education democratizes the creation of, access to, and the dissemination of information.

Popular education strives to reach the greatest number of people and the different segments of society.

Popular education motivates people to action towards social change and is transformative.

Popular education locates itself within, not outside of, people's operative frameworks.



Freire's emphasis on emancipation through participation has been used as a rationale for the participatory focus of development, as it is held that 'participation' in any form can lead to empowerment of the poor or marginalized groups from children to adults.

## SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN SOUTH AFRICA

### Women and Children in South Africa

To be a child in South Africa is to walk a fragile path to adulthood. The country is home to nearly 19 million children, many of whom are vulnerable. Two-thirds of all children live in poverty – many in homes with unemployed, single, chronically sick or elderly parents and caregivers.

Poverty collides with the country's severe AIDS epidemic, high unemployment and poor service delivery to create great hardship for thousands of South African families.

Much effort has gone into improving the welfare of children and their families over the past 15 years. South Africa has some of the most progressive policies and laws to protect children against child rights violations. The government is addressing the worst poverty through a massive social grants system, which grows in strength every year. Social grants increased from 2.5 million recipients in 1998 to 13 million in 2009. Much of the increase was due to the expansion of the child support grant, which reached nine million children under the age of 15 in 2009.

Primary healthcare is free for pregnant women and children under the age of six. The poorest children are exempt from paying school fees, a policy that aims to increase enrolment and retention of children who would otherwise be destined for a bleak future.

But despite the government's huge social investments, South Africa's entrenched structural problems, inherited from the apartheid era, continue to undermine children's survival, development and protection. South Africa is still a very unequal society, with the richest 20 per cent of the population earning two-thirds of the country's income. Many ordinary people are being left behind by the country's development. Progress towards the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is uneven, with children bearing the consequences of unmet promises.

Child survival is the gold standard for measuring the likelihood of achieving the MDGs. In South Africa, mortality rates for children under the age of five have remained almost the same over the past two decades. One in 15 children dies from diseases that could be prevented. Intestinal infection, flu and pneumonia are the major child killers and HIV-related illnesses account for a large proportion of child deaths.

A perturbing statistic is that 22 per cent of under-five deaths happen in the first month of life – the neonatal period – mainly as a result of poor quality of newborn care. If care of newborns and services to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV were improved and scaled up significantly, close to 50,000 babies would be saved every year from 2015 onwards.

The country's Expanded Programme of Immunisation (EPI) works to combat vaccine-preventable diseases. In 2009, the Department of Health introduced three new vaccines to prevent the most common forms of pneumonia and diarrhoea.

The District Health Information System showed that 84.2 per cent of children under one completed their primary course of immunisation in 2007/08. But an outbreak of measles in 2009, which affected more than 2,650 people,

raised questions. Survey findings suggest that immunisation coverage is much lower and that the EPI system is not functioning well.

Child survival and maternal health are two sides of the same coin. Children need healthy mothers for their own optimal health and growth. Sadly, maternal mortality in South Africa is high and on the rise. With it, babies are dying or becoming orphans. The latest UN figures estimate that one in 250 women dies during pregnancy or childbirth. AIDS-related diseases account for 23 per cent of all maternal deaths, followed by complications of pregnancy-related hypertension.

Pregnant women are dying despite high coverage of antenatal care and the fact that 95 per cent of women give birth in hospitals and other medical facilities. Around 38 per cent of maternal deaths could be avoided by providing better health services. This has spurred the Department of Health to introduce a 10-point plan to improve the quality of healthcare for mothers and babies and include a strong community outreach programme.

## **Basic education and gender equality**

The poor quality of education undermines children's ability and desire to learn. Many children experience a broken journey through school, interrupted by irregular attendance, absent teachers, teenage pregnancy and abuse and violence in and around schools. South Africa's high levels of poverty continue to deny thousands of children access to quality education. Around 27 per cent of public schools do not have running water, 78 per cent are without libraries and 78 per cent do not have computers.

Investment in early childhood development is beginning to yield results, although only 16.9 per cent of children under the age of five have access to day care, crèches, preschools and early childhood development centres. The government has put early childhood development high on its list of priorities, with funding for the sector projected to grow substantially in the next few years.

## **Child protection**

South Africa still has high levels of violence against its women and children, despite a world-renowned Constitution and a legislative overhaul that safeguards women's and children's rights.



Around 50,000 children were victims of violent crimes in 2008/09, according to the South African Police Service. Crimes of a sexual nature are the most frequent. Yet such crimes are committed in a climate of relative impunity: amongst the small proportion of rapes that actually get reported, no more than one in ten result in a conviction.

Social attitudes and behaviour at times condone child abuse. An example of this is parents' use of corporal punishment. Young children are often smacked, hit and, in the worse cases, beaten, despite evidence of the devastating and long-term impact such abuse has on children's self-esteem and development. Furthermore, a Department of Labour survey estimates that around 850,000 children in South Africa are engaged in some form of child labour, often of a hazardous nature or to the detriment of the child's full development. Other violations, which are often reported in the media, are harder to monitor; child trafficking, forced marriage and gang violence.

The country's high prevalence of HIV and AIDS has resulted in equally high rates of orphaned children. Around 3.7 million children have lost one or both parents, many to HIV-related illnesses. Most orphans live in extended families, already under stress due to the impact of the pandemic. Childhoods are stolen as children take on adult roles, drop out of school and go without healthcare and good nutrition.

UNICEF SA

## Statistics on Children in SA

In mid-2009, South Africa's total population was estimated at 49.4 million people, of whom 18.6 million were children (under 18 years). Children therefore constitute 38% of the total population. The child population has grown by about 6% (1.1 million) over the eight-year period from 2002 to 2009.

Exactly half of all children live in three of the nine provinces: KwaZulu-Natal (23%), Eastern Cape (15%) and Limpopo (12%). A further 17% of children live in Gauteng, a mainly metropolitan province, and 9% in the Western Cape. It is not uncommon in South Africa for children to live separately from their biological parents, due to labour migration and care arrangements that involve extended families.

The distribution of children across provinces is slightly different to that of adults, with a greater proportion of children living in provinces with large rural populations (Limpopo, the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal) and greater proportions of adults in the largely metropolitan provinces. Despite being the smallest province on the

map, Gauteng accommodates nearly a quarter (24%) of all adults, and 25% of households, but only 17% of children. This is because of the relatively large number of adult-only households in the province.

There have been striking changes in the provincial child populations since 2002. While there are slight decreases in the number of children living in the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and the North West provinces, the number of children living in Gauteng has risen by 18%. This may be partly the result of in-migration of children to join existing households, or new births within the province. Either way, the increase suggests a more permanent migration pattern. An apparent increase in the child population in the Northern Cape since 2002 is very pronounced due to the relatively small population in that province.

Children are fairly equally distributed across the age groups, with on average just over one million children in each year under 18. The gender split is equal for children, while that in the adult population is slightly skewed towards women (53%).

## WHAT IS THE UMTAPO CHILDREN'S PEACE & EMPOWERMENT (CPE) PROJECT ?

The project is based on children's participation, empowerment and mobilisation in three provinces in South Africa: Limpopo, Eastern Cape, Kwazulu Natal. Recognising that there were sufficient organisations in South Africa that conducted research, engaged in policy advocacy, and produced materials on children's rights and related issues, Umtapo used existing materials and its own experiences and structures in communities and schools to pilot a programme of children's participation in every facet: from the programme development to its roll out. This was expected to lead to the establishment of Children's Peace & Empowerment Forums in the community which would play a role in determining child safety strategies and how to deal with perpetrators. These forums would further link up and be supported by Umtapo's Ubuntu Community Forums which included out of school youth and community elders. In this holistic way, a safety net could be established to eradicate the scourge of child abuse and exploitation.

The specific objectives of the project were:

- To provide the space at the local, provincial, and national level for children and young people to take on leadership roles on issues affecting them

- To set up Children's Peace and Empowerment Forums in three provinces
- To facilitate the implementation of a national dialogue that will be conducted by children and youth in order for them to provide an authentic response to the issues that affect them
- To link the envisaged Children's Peace and Empowerment Forums with Umtapo's Ubuntu Community Forums that would identify and advocate for effective child protection strategies
- To lay the foundation for a national children's peace and empowerment movement

The project targeted a set number of communities/villages in the three provinces: Eastern Cape, Limpopo, and Kwazulu Natal. In summary, in order to achieve maximum child participation and decision-making, the activities were to include:

- A strategic planning workshop including children representatives from the 3 provinces
- 3 x Provincial Children's Dialogues
- 1 x National Children's Dialogue
- Setting up a Children's Peace & Empowerment Forum (CPEF) in the three provinces. Linking the Umtapo Community Ubuntu Forums to the CPEFs to engage in advocacy and the implementation of child protection strategies

## PROCESS

### I. The Beginning

The starting point was to engage a representative group of young people from the three provinces in a STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS so that they could decide the direction of the programme from the outset and have a sense of ownership of the project.

At a STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOP held on 26th FEBRUARY 2011 in Gauteng, Umtapo Centre brought together 26 vibrant young peace activists from its various structures with at least 50% of the children aged between 15 – 20.

They came from the Umtapo Peace Clubs, Community Peace Forums, and Tertiary Peace Forums in Limpopo, Eastern Cape, and KZN. The objectives of this workshop were:

- To deliberate upon and reach consensus on the need for the project
- To develop a plan of action for the provincial children's dialogues
- To draw up a time-frame for the build-up to the national dialogue

After two days of deliberations, the children decided that:

1. The role of the envisaged CPEFs (Children's Peace and Empowerment Forums) would be:
  - Advocacy and lobbying
  - Mobilising
  - Awareness raising and empowerment for a more just society
2. One national campaign theme would be embarked upon ie. **BREAKING THE SILENCE AGAINST CHILD ABUSE**
3. The initial provincial plans would include:
  - March - consultation meetings with various stakeholders and awareness-raising
  - April /May - pre-dialogues and production of promotional materials
  - June - Provincial Dialogues
  - July – November – establishment of CPEFs and campaign action
  - A National Dialogue (10th-11th December) International Human Rights Day



NB. Interestingly, the children were able to recognise that pre-dialogues were a necessary pre-requisite to the provincial dialogues, something which had not initially been conceived.



## II. Implementation

### Pre-Dialogues

Following the strategic planning workshop in February 2011, pre-dialogues began in all three targeted provinces. Between April and July 2011, 10 pre-dialogues took place enabling children to air their views and concerns around child abuse.

### Kwazulu Natal

Three pre-dialogues were held in Kwazulu Natal in May 2011. The schools involved in Umtapo's Peace Clubs programme were divided into three clusters: KwaNyuswa, Chatsworth, and Wentworth.

ISSUES THAT WERE RAISED	IDEAS FOR PROVINCIAL DIALOGUE
<p>Child Prostitution and how children are forced into these situations due to their circumstances.</p> <p>Emotional abuse: family, strangers and peers have a habit of abusing children emotionally.</p> <p>Human rights and its relation to child abuse.</p> <p>Domestic violence which affects children. Fathers who sexually abuse their daughters</p>	<p>An information package for the children relating to the issues that they have raised.</p> <p>A guest speaker known by the children but also able to relate to the theme 'Break the Silence Against Child Abuse'</p> <p>Inviting new schools who are not Peace Club members to the provincial dialogue so that they can spread the ideology</p> <p>The Peace Club members must design posters and paste them around their school premises and in their neighbouring schools</p> <p>They can ask for a slot on the local radio stations e.g. Izwi lomzansi FM, Vibe FM, etc.</p> <p>They can ask the church to give them a little time to address the public in particular the youth about the Provincial Dialogue</p> <p>Using social networks like Facebook, Mxit and Twitter to inform the youth</p>

## Eastern Cape

On 31st March 2011, a consultative meeting was held with the Umtapo CPE programme members and the Department of Education's (DOE) School Safety Programme. The purpose of the meeting was to present the CPE programme and get the support of the DOE.

On 13th April 2011, a meeting was held at Nosizwe High School where nine primary schools took part. Present at the meeting were two learners, an SGB member, and one teacher from each school. This was the first pre-dialogue in the province.

On 21st May 2011, a pre- dialogue with 10 primary schools was held at Elizweni Conference Centre in East London. About 60 participants attended the dialogue.

Two further pre-dialogues took place in July, 23rd and 30th respectively at Hector Peterson Secondary School involving 55 participants from nine schools, and at Sikhulule Secondary, involving 39 participants from three schools.

The following issues were raised

- Domestic violence
- Physical abuse by parents and community members
- Sexual Abuse
- The lack of peace amongst learners
- Racism
- Bullying at schools
- Verbal abuse by teachers and parents
- Child trafficking/prostitution

### Limpopo

A report-back workshop was held at the Makhado Council Chamber on 6<sup>th</sup> April involving various stakeholders. The workshop decided to divide the schools in the region for the pre-dialogues into 10 clusters.

*Example: Thohoyandou Pre-Dialogue: 21 May 2011*

Issues Raised	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Unreported cases of incest due to cultural values.</li><li>● Violence meted out to children.</li><li>● Poverty in families and their effect on children.</li><li>● Western influence propagated by the media.</li><li>● Lack of understanding of rights and responsibilities.</li><li>● Educators dating school children.</li><li>● HIV and Aids resulting in orphans in communities.</li><li>● Walking long distances to school making children vulnerable to abuse.</li><li>● Families raised by single parents and particularly mothers.</li></ul>	<p>Education, information and empowerment offered by NGO's and CBO's.</p> <p>Making dialogues ongoing activities to create a platform for information sharing.</p> <p>Initiating Peace Clubs where they do not exist.</p>

## Provincial Dialogues

Example: Kwazulu Natal CPE Provincial Dialogue

Saturday, 13th August 2011, saw the Olive Convention Centre in Durban's North Beach filled with over 1000 children, largely between 10-18 years of age. These children came from schools, children's organisations as well as children's homes from throughout KwaZulu Natal. The theme was: Breaking the Silence Against Child Abuse.

Dignitaries present included Councillor Simon Zwane from the eThekweni Mayor's Office who opened the event and Mr David Chabalala, Director of the Children's Rights and Responsibilities Unit of the Ministry of Women, Children and People with Disabilities, who was the guest speaker.

Others present included representatives of the Office of the KZN Premier, members of Life Line, and the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, Umtapo's programme partner.

In keeping with the objective of child and youth participation, the programme was directed by three young people who are former members of Peace Clubs and now part of Umtapo's Tertiary Peace Forum: Ms Hanna Kim, Ms Nompilo Khoza, and Ms Tenielle Abrahams. 16-year old, Niyanta Sookraj, of the Arena Park Secondary Peace Club provided a brief background and overview of the Children's Peace and Empowerment Project and its objectives. She also touched on the effects of abuse and the importance of combating it

Children from all walks of life entertained the audience with drama, song, poetry, and dance presentations related to the theme of the day.





Overall Recommendations from the Provincial Dialogues were:

- Children involving themselves in government programmes concerning children;
- Educating the masses on child abuse, and its impact on society and children;
- Understanding the abuser to understand the behaviour he/she portrays, noting that those who abuse are usually insecure individuals who have been abused themselves;
- Getting advice and assistance to break the silence when being abused;
- Respecting oneself was seen as a tool to lower the risk of girls being abused by their male peers in schools;
- Knowing that if the abuse is domestic, there are children's homes and shelters available for children to be protected;
- Not always looking at the problem from a gender perspective because not all males are abusers and not all females are victims;
- Communities should not turn a blind eye to issues of abuse in their communities but intervene;
- There should be clarity between discipline and abuse;
- Parents taking more responsibility and not neglecting their children;
- Preventing educators from taking advantage of young girls or boys at school;
- Getting help for abused children to get closure before they grow older and reciprocate the abusive behaviour
- Using social networks to create awareness on the issue of child abuse.
- Need for information through sex education
- Guarding against negative influence from peers
- Engaging in self-help projects
- Talking about issues - Speak out
- Saying "NO" when someone introduces you to drugs or buying you drugs
- Women taking on leadership roles