

## Annex 24: Guidelines for Child participation

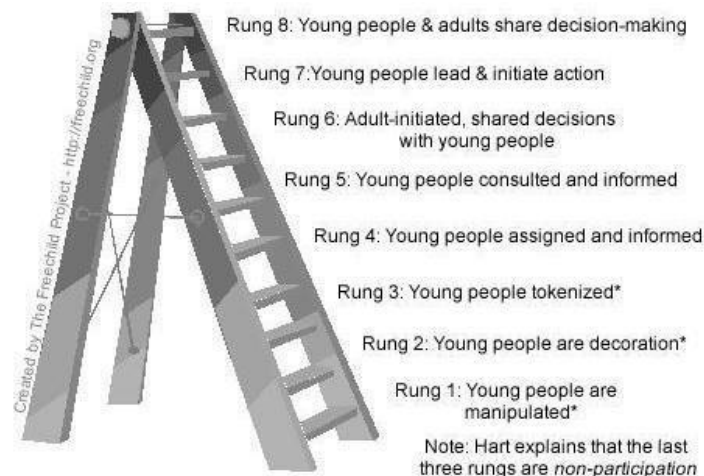
### Child participation

The participation of the child is one of the rights of the child (Convention of the Right of the child article 12). It is the right to be heard, to be involved in decisions taken about the care of the child him/herself, taking the age of the child into account.

However, child participation is often not accepted because of cultural beliefs or misunderstanding about what child participation means. Where child participation is applied it is often applied in a wrong way. Or where child participation is thought to be applied it is not child participation but or the involvement of children as a decoration or as tokenism or even as manipulation of children.

Hart (1997) developed the ladder of child participation to help us better understand child participation. It is a typology that can help us understand the way in which participation is a process rather than a product. It has turned out to be a powerful tool for the evaluation of child participation initiatives. The upper levels express increasing degrees of initiation by children. However, they are not meant to imply that a child should always be attempting to operate at the highest level of their competence. The figure is rather meant for adults facilitators to establish the conditions that enable groups of children to work at whatever levels on different projects. An important principle is to avoid working at the three lowest levels, the rungs of non-participation (Hart, 1997, 410).

Figure 16: Ladder of children's participation (Origin: Hart, 1997)



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

The ladder of participation is often used to represent levels of children's participation. However, it is important to be aware of the fact that what it depicts are not levels of

children's participation but the varying roles adults play in relation to children's participation.<sup>13</sup>

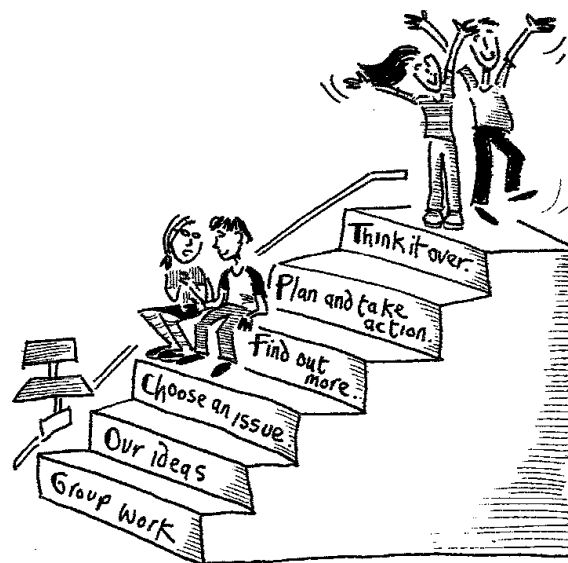
### Child-led community development

Children do not only have the right to participate but also have the ability to be agents of transformation. This is a move from cooperation to protagonism, a term commonly used in some circles especially in Latin America and India. It is a process of development of certain abilities and interventions in society. They develop abilities to understand their reality, to take critical look on it and to propose alternatives for its change; it is the search for an own space for action in order to establish new and different forms of relationships with adults and reach a higher degree of development.

### Children involved in development programmes

The Child to Child approach<sup>14</sup> is an approach that promotes the child-led community development through the development of skills to critically identify problems, outline possible solutions and interventions. It supports children in age of 9-13 and possibly up to 15 in developing and initiating community projects and awareness campaigns about issues that concern them. It is not about learning "expert knowledge" from others. Instead it is about building on the knowledge that children already have to address issues that are relevant to the children.

Figure 17: steps children follow in the process of analysing and addressing issues in the community



<sup>13</sup> Beers, H, Beyond article 12, essential Readings in children's participation, Knowing Children, 2006

<sup>14</sup> [www.child-to-child.org](http://www.child-to-child.org)

The approach recognizes that children are able to form and express opinions, to participate in decision-making processes and to influence solutions. This recognizes that children have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them. This means that community development

programmes need to learn from and engage with children on issues of concern to them. The process involves children identifying problems in their community and working to solve them. This view, that children have a valuable contribution to the improvement of their communities, underlies this approach. Adults have a crucial role to play in the promotion and facilitation of child participation.



***Child-led community development groups toolbox:*** workshop materials have been developed on the facilitation of child-led community development activities by children. Also see [www.child-to-child.org](http://www.child-to-child.org)

