

EXPERIENCES IN ENGAGING WITH CHILDREN IN DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES: Process documentation of some organizations and networks

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List of Contents

Executive Summary

1. Introduction
2. An overview of the experiences of engaging with children
3. Critical reflections
4. Profiles
 - 4.1 NGOs
 - a) ABHAS
 - b) Ankur Society for Alternatives in Education
 - c) CHETNA
 - d) HAQ: Centre for Child Rights
 - e) SOS Children's Villages of India
 - 4.2 International NGOs
 - a) Plan International (India)
 - b) Save the Children Alliance (UK, Canada, Finland)
 - c) Terre Des Hommes (Germany)
 - 4.3 Campaigns and Networks
 - a) Campaign against Child Trafficking
 - b) Delhi Bal Adhikar Manch
 - c) India Alliance for Child Rights

List of Boxes

- What is meaningful Child Participation? Organizational Reflections
- Badhte Kadam Group, Kalka Mandir
- Bal Seva Sangam, Nizamabad, Andhra Pradesh
- Babu Bahini Manch's campaign to get school drop-outs back to school
- Discovery of dreams
- Parallel sensitisation workshops for adults and children
- Child Rights for WSF (CR4WSF)

List of Tables

- Broad trends and patterns of engagement
- The nature of engagement

Annexure

- I. List of People Interviewed
- II. List of Documents Reviewed

Executive Summary

Background and Introduction

The concept of children's participation has evolved over the last decade but the notion, either in theory or in practice, has not been able to make a significant dent in the collective mindset of the social and political institutions and the individuals who comprise of them. Most initiatives and interventions have arguably been confined to children's rights organizations and activists, and need to be appreciated and accepted by the mainstream society and the state in order to be scaled up. This is largely because of a lack of conceptual understanding and the appreciation of the value and practicability of children's participation.

HAQ: Centre for Child Rights and UNICEF India undertook a process documentation of some Delhi based non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international NGOs and networks working on issues pertaining to children and/or children's rights. This limited exercise collated their experiences of engaging with children and tried to identify the underlying assumptions, the nature, trends and patterns in children's participation towards initiating a process of learning about the issues considered critical for advocacy for and with children, capacity building and scaling up through discussion and reflection.

The organizations and networks that were a part of this process documentation have cross-cutting interests in terms of children's rights, and work in different ways at different levels. Some of them have a strong focus on the grassroots while others have been aiming at a presence and influence at higher levels either directly, as resource organizations or through networks.

The Objectives

The underlying assumptions that the study sought to explore or the broad objectives of the study were to see and know:

- How do organizations engage with children internally and how do they facilitate the engagement on issues with stakeholders outside the organisation?
- What is the nature of engagement with children? Is it process oriented? Or is it outcome oriented?
- What was the context within which the engagement with children took place or is taking place?
- What was the issue, if any, around which the engagement with children was structured or designed? And how was it identified?
- What was/is the role of children?
- How was the strategy for engagement and/or action developed?
- Preparatory process?
- What was the process of articulation of children's voices?
- Linkages with decision-making processes??
- What has been the outcome in terms of the process and impact on the lives of children, and on policies pertaining to children?
- What has been the role of "lead" (facilitating?) agencies and "support" agencies

The Process

Representatives from each organization were interviewed on the basis of which initial profiles were written. These organizational profiles comprising of the approaches and experiences were developed and shared with the respective organizations. On the basis of their feedback and suggestions and organizations' own critical reflections on the concept of children's participation an analysis was drawn up. The interim findings and analysis was shared with the participating organizations at a half-day workshop. The draft report is being revised and edited in the light of the comments received during the workshop.

The Findings

Through the course of the process documentation it was found that the grassroots initiatives usually work directly with children and try to respond to the local issues that impact on their lives. They seek positive and tangible changes in their lives and do succeed to some extent. Most children they work with are at risk or belong to marginalised and/or vulnerable communities, and generally respond positively to the opportunities made available to them. Creating a supportive environment, however, seems to be a struggle.

The international NGOs also constantly strive towards changes at the community level, while at the same time try and influence policy formulation at a global level around issues of children and their rights. They have succeeded in highlighting the issue of children's participation but while they are able to utilise their regional and global experience to introduce new perspectives and ways of engagement, their outreach and the ability to consolidate the micro-level interactions and to connect the micro with macro is dependent on the local partners. The networks and alliances, on the other hand, may not emphasise the immediate changes as they seek lasting changes in the lives of a broader constituency of children.

The resource organizations have multiple objectives as they seek to contribute towards developing ways and means of working with children as well as contribute to a pool of literature and resources which could be useful for different kinds of agencies and organizations working around child rights.

Keeping in mind the above trends and patterns of organizational engagement with children it can be said that different organizations and networks have evolved their own unique models of engaging with children. The ways in which they engage with children depend on specific organizational profile and structure. These approaches sometimes overlap while at times they also complement one another. Through the course of this process documentation different approaches of children's participation emerged. They highlight varying degrees and nature of engagements. Broadly the following ways of engaging with children emerged.

One of the ways in which most organizations practice children's participation, knowingly or unknowingly, is by *forming children's collectives and organizations* with an end in mind or for the sake of working with children. The rationale behind these children's collectives is that such an initiative will help us *recognize children's perspectives*. The recognition of their perspective or the fact that children also have a point of view would help *strengthen children's role as social actors*. Such a process then has the capacity to *strengthen the participatory potential of children* in the

larger democratic set up of the country. Once such form of intervention of including and involving children and listening to their voices becomes an organizational ethos then one could *create an enabling environment for children*.

This documentation highlights some of the critical questions and reflections that the organizations, alliances, campaigns and networks are themselves grappling with. It is imperative that we try and analyse whether children's participation is playing a meaningful role in the lives of children or is it merely an interventionist approach to serve organizational agendas and mandates. The questions that need to be explored further and addressed for meaningful children's participation include:

- How can children's participation be made intrinsic to an organization?
- How can children's growing expectations be dealt with?
- How can children's participation interventions be scaled up?
- What are the ethical and practical issues concerning children's participation?

An assessment of the impact of children's participation was beyond the limited scope of this process documentation. It would require a longer process of preparation, reflection, study and analysis, in addition to the unwavering commitment of participating organisations and networks to reflect critically for internal and wider learning. Nonetheless, the experiences of various NGOs and networks included in this process documentation suggest that engagement with children is resulting in a range of positive effects on children themselves and the communities they are a part of.

1. Introduction

The theory and practice of child participation has evolved considerably in the last decade or so but the notion has not been able to make a significant dent in the collective mindset of the social and political institutions and the individuals who comprise of them. It is largely because of a lack of conceptual understanding and the appreciation of the value and practicability of child participation. Advocacy for children and with children widely and on a wider scale suffers because there are few experiences to guide us and their value and applicability is defined to a great extent by their context and the issues, lifestyles and characteristics of the children who they have been working with.

A growing number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) committed to the realization of children's rights have been advocating for children's participation. Drawing by and large from their own perspective and experiences and of other organizations and increasingly from the framework provided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), they have been developing ways and means of enabling, strengthening and promoting children's role as social actors and their representation in development fora and discourse.

HAQ: Centre for Child Rights and UNICEF India undertook a process documentation of some NGOs essentially to pull together their experiences to get a sense of how organizations are engaging with children and beginning to deal with the wider issue of children's participation in order to generate discussion and reflection on advocacy for and with children, capacity building and scaling up.

In view of the short duration of this project, HAQ and UNICEF India developed a list of social development organizations and networks that had their base in Delhi.

- An attempt was made to include a variety of organizations (e.g. government, national and international non-governmental organizations and networks) that represent different project/programme constituents (e.g. communities and/or particular categories of children) and sectoral/thematic focus.
- The focus was on well-known organizations and networks that are contributing to the movement for children's rights by engaging directly and indirectly with children but the variety of approaches they employ is relatively less known.

The list was finalized after eliciting the interest of these organizations to participate. All the NGOs and networks agreed, with varying levels of interest, to be included in the process documentation exercise.

After eliciting the interest of organizations to participate, a preliminary investigation based on interviews with key members of the staff and secondary literature review was conducted. Of particular interest were two aspects of engaging with children in developmental processes:

- (i) How are children engaged within the organization? What have been the experiences and lessons?
- (ii) How have children been engaged and/or associated with the initiatives outside the organization, especially on broader policy issues? What have been the experiences and lessons?

Broadly, the following key questions were explored:

- How do organizations engage with children internally and how do they facilitate the engagement on issues with stakeholders outside the organisation?
- What is the nature of engagement with children? Is it process oriented? Or is it outcome oriented?
- What was the context within which the engagement with children took place or is taking place?
- What was the issue, if any, around which the engagement with children was structured or designed? And how was it identified?
- What was/is the role of children?
- How was the strategy for engagement and/or action developed?
- Preparatory process?
- What was the process of articulation of children's voices?
- Linkages with decision-making processes??
- What has been the outcome in terms of the process and impact on the lives of children, and on policies pertaining to children?
- What has been the role of "lead" (facilitating?) agencies and "support" agencies

The organizational profiles comprising of the approaches and experiences were developed and shared with the respective organizations. Before finalising the report, feedback was provided to the participating organizations at a half-day workshop.

Before the process was initiated, group discussions with children and various stakeholders had been envisaged. But during the course of process documentation, it was felt that more time was required if children were to be included meaningfully as informants. There inclusion would have been particularly critical if this had been a review of the organizations. As the scope of this exercise was limited to the documentation of the process, the number of NGOs and networks was increased. In all, this report comprises of eight NGOs and three networks and campaigns.

2. An overview of the experiences of engaging with children

This process documentation is an attempt to explore experiences of engaging with children, across a range of organizations based in Delhi. They included non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international NGOs with cross-cutting interests in terms of children's rights, and working in different ways at different levels and with varied linkages. Some of them have a strong focus on the grassroots while others have been aiming at a presence and influence at higher levels either directly, as resource organizations or through networks.

The grassroots initiatives usually work directly with children and quite often seek changes in their lives. The international NGOs, through their local partners also constantly strive towards changes at the community level, while at the same time try and influence policy formulation at a global level around issues of children and their rights. The networks and alliances, on the other hand, may not emphasise the immediate changes as they seek lasting changes in the lives of a broader constituency of children. The resource organizations have multiple objectives as they seek to contribute towards developing ways and means of working with children as well as contribute to a pool of literature and resources which could be useful for different kinds of agencies and organizations working around child rights. As all of them have both similar and differing perspectives on child participation, there is considerable potential for learning from their experiences. Together they constitute the larger support structure for children and child rights. Through their engagement with children they are promoting children as social actors, their expressions and perspective, and working on an enabling environment.

The following section presents a broad overview, at a glance, of the different programmes and interventions that various grassroots, international organizations and networks/campaigns, working with children, have undertaken.

ABHAS

- Active involvement of children and young people's organization in resolving local issues
- Expanding opportunities for girl children
- Bridging the digital divide
- Children's participation in the implementation of development programmes

Ankur Society for Alternatives in Education

- Recognising children's personhood and perspectives
- Self learning and contextualising knowledge through Shiksha Kendra (Learning Centre)
- Creative engagement of children as imaginative readers through Kitab Ghar (Library)
- Engaging young people in the generation of knowledge by demystification of technology - Compughar (Cybermohalla)
- Organization of younger children in Bal Clubs (Children's clubs)

Childhood Enhancement Through Training and Action (CHETNA)

- Promoting children's participation in the functioning of the organisation
- Formation of a federation of children's organizations (Badhte Kadam)
- Capacity building of children and staff
- Advocacy for child friendly policies by children through the media and networks

HAQ: Centre for Child Rights

- Promoting awareness among children about their rights
- Promoting expression by children
- Creating an enabling environment
 - (i) Advocating recognition of children's issues in the policy arena through policy research and children's perspectives
 - (ii) Public interest litigation
 - (iii) Orientation of organizations on children's participation

SOS Children's Villages of India

- Creation of a home for "out of home" children
- Promoting children's interactions with local communities
- Growing interest in engaging children for policy advocacy

Plan International (India)

- Children's forums
 - Bal Panchayats in Nizamabad, Andhra Pradesh
- Production of Video Films by Children
- Child Participation within the Organization
- Children's participation in Tsunami response

Save the Children Alliance

- Promoting expressions by children
- Promotion of child-led organisations
 - Children's Committee for Village Development (CCVD) and Children's Group for Development (CGD) in Jammu and Kashmir
 - Bal Panchayats in Osmanabad in Maharashtra
- Advocacy for children's participation
- Representation by children at various fora
- Children's involvement in capacity building exercises
- Children's involvement in the recruitment process
- Children's participation in disaster relief and rehabilitation (tsunami)

Terre Des Hommes (Germany)

- Working through local partners to address micro and macro social issues through a child centric perspective
- Building capacities of their own staff to understand child participation

Campaign Against Child Trafficking (CACT)

- Workshops for children
- Policy advocacy by children

Delhi Bal Adhikar Manch

- Inclusion of children in decision-making processes
- Children's participation in campaigns

India Alliance for Child Rights (IACR)

- Children's participation for policy formulation and advocacy
- Long term engagement with children for representation
- Articulation of children's issues by children

As the above programmatic overview suggests, different organizations and networks have evolved their own unique model of engaging with children. The ways in which they engage with children depend on specific organizational profile and structure. Some overlapping and complementary processes seem to be emerging.

Broad trends and patterns of engagement

Organizational structure	Relationships, partnerships and likely focus	Strengths	Challenges
NGO	Works directly with specific groups of children and communities; Greater concern with local issues	Ability to relate child participation with local context and specific issues	Sensitization of adult community members in order to work through/with them to seek or represent community specific contexts and issues
International NGO	Works mainly in partnerships with local NGOs; Grass-root level interventions are shaped by their reliance on local partners; Likely to focus on promoting children's participation through orientation, information sharing and capacity building	Innovative practices based on lessons from elsewhere, bring in diverse and varied expertise Resource base and outreach through the partners allows greater scope for promoting children's participation	Need to concentrate on building capacities and perspectives of local partners; Strive to nurture a long term, sustainable and organic relationship with the constituency of children that the local networks engage with
Networks and campaigns	Dependence on partners/members; Greater concern with macro level issues	Collective advocacy; Greater impact and visibility, issue driven	Sustain the spirit and vision of the "common causes" that need focused advocacy

The nature of engagement

Through the course of this process documentation different approaches of children's participation emerged. They highlight varying degrees and nature of engagements. The following section presents the different ways in which organizations and alliances engage with children.

Underlying assumption	Approach	Structure & mechanisms	Factors that seem critical if the assumptions are to be realised
Collectives empower	Organization of children	Informal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Platform that allows regular interactions Facilitation by adults (and by older children) Inclusion - effort to include children usually marginalised (e.g. younger children, girls, children with disabilities and seemingly less marginalised/relatively well-off children)
		Formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identity of children's organization that can hold them together Linkages within and outside the organization Inclusion
Children's views are valuable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> as informant as users of knowledge as researchers 	Understanding, recognizing & promoting children's perspectives	Creative facilitation of expressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empathy among the adults who are facilitating or are affected by children's views Facilitation & analytical skills among the adults
		Researches with children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empathy Inclusion Facilitation, interviewing, analytical & documentation skills
Children can make a difference	Strengthening children's role as social actors	Acknowledgement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A supportive adult constituency Universality – acceptance without conditions/caveats
		Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability of platforms & ideas Inclusion
		Facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitation skills & the ability to provide back-up support by adults Inclusion

Children's abilities, capacities & competences make a difference	Strengthening children's participatory potential	Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy comprehension by children • Access to and for children • Sharing with and among children
		Skills: analyses, negotiation, representation & leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative platforms & learning – adults' ability to innovate • Practical orientation of the interventions and activities • Inclusion

Organization of children

Long before children's participation came to be recognised in the children's rights discourse, many NGOs working with vulnerable children from disadvantaged communities did seek to empower them by organizing them. It was felt that individual vulnerability could be overcome in a collective where children provided and received support from one another, and were better able to respond to the issues and challenges in their lives.

Drawing upon their experiences and lessons, most organizations included in this study have sought to organize children into different formations, ranging from formal and structured organizations to the loosely organized forums/platforms and networks.

Some NGOs are trying to bring together particularly disadvantaged children (e.g. street and working children) by organizing them. These children share concerns and common issues, and their lifestyle enables them to seek and appreciate peer support much more than children who enjoy family support and relatively more privileged lifestyles. For instance, *Badhte Kadam* has been supported by CHETNA as a formal, structured and quasi-independent collective of street and working children. The expectation has been that these organizations of children would advocate for the resolution of their issues at different levels. Issues that come up through these children's organizations enables the NGO's to advocate on these issues, either on behalf of these children or with the children.

While most organizations seek to create spaces for advocacy by children, some of them try to utilise the spaces available in the democratic set up of the country. For instance, INGOs like Save the Children and Plan and their partners have been trying to replicate the model of *Panchayati Raj* Institutions in their *Bal Panchayats*.

Even though these organizations of children may not always be politically active agents, what they aim at is to create an acceptance and tolerance level, towards children, amongst the adult stakeholders within the community. In order to garner this acceptance they act as agents filling in the information gaps for the community, hence they try collating information for the benefit of the entire community by producing newsletters, films, videos.

Children's collectives and formations, which often act as pressure groups, address community specific local issues and also make such representations in national and

international forums whenever there is an opportunity. Interestingly the names of these children's collectives often reflect a local community flavour.

These children's groups often seek representations in national and international consultative processes, thus voicing collective concerns of diverse and varied sets of children. Such forms of representation enables a process of empowerment for these children which could be used in an effective system of governance that a democratic set up ensures.

Some of these organizations of children are empowering children, living in difficult circumstances by offering them peer to peer support and creating a space for the realization of their rights.

All these processes can be looked upon as strategies for advocacy 'for' and 'with' children, but what needs to be critically analysed is how can one expand such a constituency of meaningful child oriented action to include all kinds of children and not focus on just the underprivileged marginalized? What should be the nature of such an all inclusive organizations of children for it to be egalitarian and democratic across all socio-economic stratas?

Recognising children's perspectives

Children's participation in trying to understand their lived realities is important to acknowledge. One way of achieving this acknowledgement is to look at children as providers of information and knowledge. Certain organizations have done this through their program of training children as researchers and media practitioners. Such an approach inherently acknowledges the potential of children as young thinking individuals who also have a strong perspective. This perspective needs inclusion and encouragement.

Plan International (India) from its experience has come to realize that children can express the real issues of a community really well, often highlighting neglected aspects and offering newer perspectives. To facilitate their expressions, it has introduced video and film-making among children. Children take photographs and film what they wish to but through the use of this medium they bring in a wide range of information that is reflective of the community and their concerns.

CHETNA works with street and working children and it is a daunting challenge for the adult resource people and street animators to reach out to a large number of this constituency of children. Hence they are increasingly trying to extend the potential of those children who are already within the fold of *Badhte Kadam* to create a peer-to-peer network of support. Thus children are able to create newer points of engagement to form a collective voice, where the adult researchers may have a limited reach. This peer to peer approach is able to achieve a greater sense of kinship and belongingness for the destitute children on the streets, as factors of trust and support emerge from their own group of "friends", who also serve the role of being "resource persons" and mentors.

Although both ABHAS and Ankur are grassroots organizations working directly with children, they have very different models of engagement. ABHAS focuses on "community

children” from a specific area and tries to organize and train children to take up issues on behalf of “their people” and community. Ankur, on the other hand, seeks to nurture the individual spirit of every child that they work with in order for him/her to row up to be an independent, thinking being who has the confidence and the inner courage to question everything around him/her and seek accountability, as his/her basic right, from the adult stakeholders.

Save the Children also encourages the children’s collectives to produce newsletters by collating community relevant information thus giving them the platform to ventilate their own critiques, views and analysis on issues that are of most significance to these young minds.

Strengthening children’s role as social actors

Meaningful children’s participation depends on the ability of children to make choices and to articulate their views with minimal support from the adults. Given the reality of their lives and the social structure which defines and circumscribes their role and agency, it is difficult. Recognising this fact of life, many NGOs seek to promote the notion of children as social actors by projecting the possibility and feasibility among the general public.

- **Advocacy by NGOs of the potential of children’s participation**

Most NGOs have been trying to enhance the visibility of children’s organizations towards creating an acceptance and tolerance level amongst the adult stakeholders within the community towards children. In particular, they emphasise the roles they can reasonably perform and the responsibilities they can deliver upon. The effort is to highlight children’s engagement with community specific local issues and matters concerning their lives at the policy level through interactions and media.

- **Children’s participation in programme and project implementation and management**

None of the organizations have directly included children at the stage of implementing a project but some of the organizations are truly thinking of how far such a step is possible and whether it would be feasible to include children at the managerial and administrative level of an organization. Even though none of the organizations have included children formally in such a structure yet seeking children’s views at every stage is a very significant consideration for them. The caution that needs to be exercised at this stage is to see that children are not being used at the cost of them loosing out on their childhood.

CHEटना is very clear about the fact that children must be consulted and their prior consent sought if one thinks of introducing a new program or a project, be it a certain kind of a life skill workshop or a training module.

ABHAS encourages children to act as agents of change in/within the community. It has taken children’s consent to design their in house curriculum, as they thought children should have a say in what they want to learn, but they think children should not be included in anything more than this as they do not want to overburden them.

PLAN in a few other countries have children's advisory boards that are consulted for all kinds of managerial operations of the organization. They are thinking of replicating the same model of these children advisory boards in India as well.

Save the Children UK carried out this unique initiative of including children in the interview board of their staff members. This was successful in a few cases but then they discontinued this practice. One could follow up on this model, even as an experiment to see whether such a way of including children in the management of programs and projects is fruitful or not.

Strengthening children's participatory potential

All the organizations realize the importance of providing an egalitarian platform for the children where they can express their inner most thoughts and doubts, and which can help them grow up to be confident and self-respecting adults. In order to encourage a child to articulate his/her concerns, issues and aspirations, these organizations have consciously designed activities and programs that not only value participatory processes, but also create a conducive environment for the child to be able to discover his/her own, individualistic style of expression.

- **Expressions by children through creativity**

It is generally felt that children do not or cannot communicate in the same way as adults do. Apart from its ability to facilitate expressions, a creative process is considered more enjoyable and having potential for their personal development. Another way of looking at it is that children are contributing to what is still an adult led process and they need to get something out of it, especially if they are sparing their time and effort.

Various organizations are promoting creative expressions by children. Ankur believes that creativity is innate and each child will have a different mode of expression. They play upon this difference and hence do not have structured "workshop" models for children to articulate their concerns through creativity. Instead, their engagement is long term whereby children learn the importance of thinking and are always encouraged to do so. CHETNA follows the workshop model as integral to their functioning. Conducting workshops, capacity building exercises is their expertise, use of various creative tools to enable children's expression like role playing, using fun games and telling of childhood stories creatively using collages and so on.

HAQ: Centre for Child Rights has undertaken art workshops and clay modelling to help children express themselves. SOS Children's Villages of India also encourages children to use creative mode of expression whenever and wherever possible. SOS children often take part in elocution competitions, quizzes and other activities that are part of the school programmes. Plan International (India) has been able to introduce technology in its work and has encouraged production of videos and films made by children.

- **Developing children's capacities to be active and thinking social agents**

The risk of manipulation is quite high in interactive processes. To reduce the possibility, most organizations seek to develop children's abilities to analyse the situation and issues in order to develop well-considered and balanced perspectives.

ABHAS tries to build children's capacities so that they have they have a sense of their rights with their duties and responsibilities, which are intrinsic to enjoying the privileges of a 'right'. Strongly advocating for interactive processes directly with children, IACR is facilitating a vibrant model of children's parliament.

Creative expressions allow development of life skills among children. As mentioned earlier, Plan engages with children to express themselves creatively (e.g. video films) within their own communities in collaboration with its local partners. Through this process, it facilitates development of various life skills.

CHE'TNA has a strong component of creative enhancement of not only the street and working children they are involved with, but also of their staff members which include their street animators, resource people and even their peer educators. Their workshop model is structured around an annual "retreat" with their staff and children, where they believe in spending quality time together to build the spirit of the children's collective.

Creating enabling environment

All these organizations, networks and alliances and the resource centres have varied forms of engaging with children, whether through a direct interventional mode or through their indirect means of extending support as and when required. In all these forms of intervention, direct or indirect, what becomes significant is the fact children find their own means of expression and articulation over and above what the "formal" structure of the organization or even its program may have envisaged.

This possibility that has been realized by children on their own, through the course of an organizational support structure needs to be acknowledged and recognized and it is this very recognition of an enabling environment that one should consciously highlight.

In so far as processes of child participation have been able to create a secure and nurturing environment for the children, the impact of such a holistic approach can be experienced at various levels. This holistic approach of engaging with children that has emerged through the course of this process documentation always has an underlying assumption about what children are capable of doing or why do organizations follow the kind of programs that they do? Relying on this underlying assumption organizations work out various means and ways of actually realizing what they set out to achieve. These are the structures and mechanisms that organizations work with or work through. However in following this model of engaging with children there are certain critical considerations that need to be addressed and looked upon. The following table presents this nature of engagement.

The variety of experiences of engaging with children enables reflection on the value and role of the context of socio-economic development. These approaches are not mutually exclusive as they are pursued often in combination, albeit one or two may appear more important in the case of different organizations. Indeed, this emphasis contributes to the misconception that children's participation is all about their representatives making speeches at national or international gatherings, or about child-led organizations. There are other ways of engaging

with children which conform to the spirit of Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which have not been explored, investigated and disseminated. They could indeed address some of the concerns of the sceptics.

Impact of children's participation

An assessment of the impact of children's participation was beyond the limited scope of this process documentation. It would require a longer process of preparation, reflection, study and analysis, in addition to the unwavering commitment of participating organisations and networks to reflect critically for internal and wider learning. Nonetheless, the experiences of various NGOs and networks included in this process documentation suggest that engagement with children is resulting in a range of positive effects on children themselves and the communities they are part of.

On Children: By and large, children have become aware of their rights besides gaining knowledge of their responsibilities and duties. They are able to attain a degree of recognition and acceptance among adult stakeholders, within and outside their community. By discovering their participatory potential and utilising the opportunities made available to them, they acquire self-esteem, feel more empowered and valued by their families and peers. When children are organized, they have been able to comprehend the significance and the power of collective action.

On Community: Children's participation interventions have initiated a reflective process for the community to know that children are not mere dependents and certainly not a burden on their families and even the community. Children are slowly but gradually being accepted as capable of contributing to developmental and social needs of a community. They are being recognised as visible and potential agents of change who can make a difference where adults may fail.

The NGOs and networks themselves are growing in the process of engagement with children. Their vision and mission is becoming clearer as their community development interventions are becoming child centric. There is commitment to child-centred participatory approaches among an increasing number of staff and development workers. Pursuing children's participation has meant new questions are being asked at every stage which has ensured a distinct growth curve for these organizations.

3. Critical reflections

In the course of this process documentation, a range of questions emerged that needs to be addressed to chart out a future course of action for meaningful child participation. The next section takes one through some of these questions.

How can children's participation be made intrinsic to an organization?

All the organizations are deeply conscious of trying to inculcate child participation as an inherent organizational value. They are making substantial efforts to move away from tokenistic measures of merely seeking child representation and inclusion for the sake of participation. By providing adult facilitation and guidance, these organizations hope that the children would be able to evolve their independent thoughts and become equipped to articulate their concerns and issues, without parroting that which the adults tell them.

Thus even though there may be programmatic differences and variations in terms of how each organization is oriented and functions, almost all of them wish to approach and exercise child participation as an egalitarian, democratic, inclusive and discursive practice.

What should be the extent of children's participation?

All the organizations are of the firm belief that in all such matters that have a direct impact on a child's life, his/her personal views and ideas must be heard, considered, weighed and taken into account.

Even though the organizations are all for including a child in seemingly insignificant processes of his/her life, at the same time they also think that it is important to define the boundaries of child participation. A child may not necessarily have an innate understanding of what is right and what is wrong. Thus the role of an adult guidance becomes crucial. Certain imperatives that are required for a secure, healthy and safe growing up of a child are largely factors that adults are aware of such as security, protection, a world free of social, racial or economic discrimination, clean hygienic environment and so on. One may not necessarily involve children in debating about such broad categories that make for a holistic childhood because it is also the duty of adults to ensure such an environment to the children, in the first place.

However to keep the structures and mechanisms in place and to make them more child sensitive, children's point of view must be given ample consideration. Policy makers, government officials and even civil society groups ought to hear the children's perspective and take into account their future aspirations and dreams. The adult groups must be held accountable to the children and in ensuring this, children must seek peer collaboration and a united children's voice.

Should there be 'limits' to empowerment of children?

There has been a significant shift from viewing children patronisingly as objects of charity to the promotion of their role as social actors. The NGOs working at a grass-root level have experienced that adult stakeholders are able to understand and appreciate the value of children's participation when they see tangible, visible signs of change because of children's initiatives at the community level. As they accept and recognize the potential of children, there is greater willingness to provide children with spaces and opportunities.

However, a thin line divides children's role as social change makers from political actors. Most NGOs and networks seem to favour formation of children's collectives as pressure groups, which have a tendency of graduating into interest groups. A significant proportion of adult population continues to be resentful or uncomfortable with the idea of children as political actors. Furthermore, the organizations are also faced with the challenge of responding to the changing needs and aspirations of children growing into adults.

As grassroots organizations seek to extend organizational support and expertise to guide children, they are faced with their own limits. The questions pertain about the financial and human resources as well as conceptual understanding. For how long can they continue supporting these children, many of whom come to rely on them? Should they draw some boundaries in order to ensure that children's participation remains positive in spirit and action? Many activists concede that at times they wonder if some of the children have become just too aware of their rights without the corresponding responsibilities. This question is also pertinent as children do not remain children forever. Therefore, what is it that they must do and where do they stop? And to what extent can children's participation help in shaping their adulthoods.

How can children's growing expectations be dealt with?

Organizations committed to a long-term engagement with children have experienced that quite often the expectations of children, because of organizational intervention become very high. Sometimes some children may also become rebels and start questioning the organizations intent of creating this space of engagement. Organizations have looked at this phenomenon as a positive outcome of its endeavours, which helps in reflection on its own work. A way of overcoming this apprehension could be to look at child participation as an imperative to ensure transparency, accountability and commitment to one's work, a belief in acknowledging the child as an individual who is capable of being a part of his own decisions that affect him.

How can children's participation interventions be scaled up?

Child participation, as a concept is still at its nascent stage. Organizations trying to practice child participation are generally very cautious in their approach. Child participation could become an instrument in the hands of the organizations where children can then be used to fulfil organizational agendas and needs. While the children that an organization works with may have a sense of empowerment but the challenge is to try and negotiate with the adult members at each stage, whether within the microcosm of an "organizational ambit" or the larger community of people at large. If an organization employs children within its own decision making process, then the choices made by the children must be informed and independent of any adult influence. One ought to view child participation as an imperative

for the over all development of a child, but reiterate that cultivating such a “value” amongst adult members should be a steady and reflective process.

What are the ethical and practical issues concerning children’s participation?

There should also be an agreement on certain points between different agencies working on children’s participation to know how far can they follow and practice the notion in its true spirit. One needs to know it has actually made a difference to the life of children and knowing this is what is truly significant. There was a distinct feeling of unease among many interviewees about the interpretation of the principle of children’s participation. Is it just about the representation of a child or “is it about taking active part in something as just who you are.” This highlights the issue of treating children not as islands but as human beings who have a mind and body of their own and are evolving.

For various well intentioned adult groups who encourage participatory processes among children, participation usually tends to become something which is objective driven and this does not necessarily mean one is being “honest with children.”

One could also look at children’s participation the other way and see whether organizational staff is equipped to work with children. Amongst the staff of these organizations everyone may not have the requisite skills to work with children. This is a big challenge for all and building the capacities of staff members should become imperative before initiating measures of including children within the organization.

While resource centres and alliances may not specifically focus on activities related to child participation. However, by strongly advocating for the ‘rights of a child’ (from the ‘perspective of a child’), they seek to create an effective children’s pressure group that can influence and sensitize people to the needs of a child. Thus they consciously stress on inclusion and participation of children, at various stages of consultation and in policy formulation that have a direct/indirect impact on the wellbeing of children.

What is meaningful Child Participation? Organizational Reflections

“We need to ask ourselves as child centred organizations that is child participation important for us or for the children that we are working with? In the name of child participation, are we duplicating a teacher and a ‘class’ model, where we are talking down to children? Do we, as adults, promote participatory training or merely provide guidance and training through our work with children? I feel child participation has to be a healthy mix of these two elements.”

Razia Ismail Abbasi, IACR

“Child Participation should not be just programme centred; it ought to be a value that is inherent in the organizational philosophy.”

Sajid Ikram, ABHAS

“I think all of us are trying to grapple with Child Participation, in theory and practise. There is a need to adapt the UN CRC conventions according to our own local contexts and circumstances.”

Rajendra Dangwal, DBAM

“For us, child participation begins with trying to address and seek solutions for the larger socio-economic scenario within which children live. Thus we try to work on micro and macro issues of

poverty, marginalisation, rights of the underprivileged, but keep a child right focus and approach. The need is to highlight children's issues and organize a collective approach around it."

Sharmistha Choudhury, TDH Germany

"There are no right or wrong models of child participation. We all need to experiment a lot and discover for ourselves models that will work for a country as diverse as India. If there were no adults and the world only had children, I think they would be the stars."

Asha N. Iyer, Save the Children UK

"It may not be easy to quantify the change that a process like this [Bal Panchayat] has ensured amongst the children, but one can assertively say that when five children sit down to discuss a social issue, adults are bound to take note."

K. Vaidyanathan, Save the Children Canada

"Who will decide what the "Right" of a child is? We always prioritise the rights, of first a man, then a woman, and the child always figures last in our list of what a person ought to legitimately have. Child participation, for all of us at HAQ is an integral element that contributes to the personhood of a child; it contributes to his own recognition of his self worth. Child participation cannot and should not be restricted to a showcasing of children but ought to move behind such tokenistic measures."

Enakshi Ganguly Thukral, HAQ Centre for Child Rights

"The discourse of Child Rights is a denigrating discourse. One should be able to think through what one means in saying that a child has rights as a child can never distinguish between what he asks his parents and what he asks the state."

Prabhat Kumar Jha, Ankur

"Child participation starts with tokenism but we have to begin with some thing. We do not have a perfect model because there would always be a struggle for power in decision making. Different organisations understand participation differently. By encouraging and enabling questioning of adults by children we can promote participation... A common term for children's participation in governance could perhaps help with advocacy with the government."

M Sharif Bhat, Save the Children UK

This process documentation has highlighted some critical questions and reflections that the organizations, alliances, campaigns and networks are trying to grapple with. It is imperative that we try and analyse whether children's participation is playing a meaningful role in their lives or is it merely an interventionist approach to serve organizational agendas and mandates. Thus, it becomes important to question what it is that adults seek out of children's participation while on the other hand what are the children's stake in it.

Looking ahead

The organizations and networks that have been included in this process documentation represent a miniscule tip of the iceberg. There are many more who are doing equally or more interesting work. Furthermore, a process documentation done within such a short period is likely to be limited in its scope and depth. Nonetheless, the sample and the enquiry serve a valuable purpose as they help recognise and highlight areas where work is being done and what more is required.

Clearly, there is need for more reflection in the future if children's participation has to be promoted meaningfully as a universal value, a feasible and effective approach and a worthwhile experience for children.

So far, the efforts have been directed at the communities of children identified as being marginalised and vulnerable. Perhaps the focus has to be widened to include all children if scaling up is desired. This may necessitate a study of engagement with children according to age groups, gender, location (e.g. rural/urban) and other factors that may have a bearing of their participation and participatory potential.

There is need to explore more in-depth the impact of children's participation interventions especially in terms of democratic practices, changes in their relationships, institutional responses, qualitative (and perhaps quantified) changes in their lives and sustainability of the interventions, the processes they have triggered off and the changes they have claimed to bring about. For instance, what has happened to children who participated in national, regional and international events; what happens to children when they grow up and how do NGOs respond to the situation; and how do they deal with enhanced aspirations when the circumstances of children remain unchanged for a variety of reasons.

Finally, a candid and out-of-box reflection, sharing and learning is required. For instance, can children's participation be promoted only by working with children; there might be value in working with teachers, care givers and other adults so that an enabling environment can be built.

How children's participation could be mainstreamed as a value, distinct from being a programme or a project? There might be merit in the argument that a project/programme approach is inevitable and/or desirable when a new perspective is being introduced. Perhaps it is now the time to review this line of thinking as children's participation has found a place in the child rights discourse if not in the practice. It would be imperative for strategic mainstreaming of the value in existing policies, programmes, projects and mind-sets. Similarly, there is need to look at critically as the 'models' of engagement with children. There is a feeling in some quarters that adult 'models' are being replicated, arguably resulting in children being seen as 'mini adults' and being deprived of their childhood. Have the linkages of children's participation been explored with reference to youth and community participation in a given community or society? There is need for further enquiry, with time, opportunity and platform for candid reflection, sharing and learning.

4. Profiles

4.1 NGOs

a) ABHAS

Action Beyond Help And Support (ABHAS) was set up in 2002 when a team of professional social workers and development experts came together to work towards social progress through community participation and socio-economic development of the marginalised communities. As its interventions also seek improvements in the lives of children and young people, ABHAS works with children in the 12 to 17 years age group of Tughlaqabad village in Delhi.

Children's participation for ABHAS is an important component in its programmes. It believes that children have the potential of becoming social change makers, which can be realised through recognition of their personal strengths and power of collective action. For achieving this, adults must support and guide them. Through a constant process of consultation and exchange with the children, ABHAS has created insightful and child sensitive work strategies. The organization promotes adult-child partnerships in all its programmes and activities. Young people and adults collaborate for seeking solutions to the community's problems and issues.

Active involvement of children and young people's organization in resolving local issues

Through a 'community development' approach, ABHAS tries to promote a dialogue between adults and children within their own community for finding collaborative solutions to specific needs and concerns of these children. It has been observed that often these marginalised children try and ape the middle class children whom they see around them and many of their demands are based on 'trying to be like others'. While seeking to address particular realities of these children, ABHAS tries to make them comfortable with who they are within their socio-economic contexts.

For making children active partners in community development, ABHAS formed a group of children called Jagruk Manch. As the membership of the Manch increased and a growing number of young people from the community expressed an interest in it, the group was expanded and was called Jagruk Yuva Manch.

The Jagruk Yuva Manch actively works towards resolution of local issues. The non-availability of basic amenities such as water and sanitation is a major problem in the villages on the periphery of Tughlaqabad which are essentially unauthorised settlements. ABHAS encourages the young members of the Jagruk Yuva Manch to participate in the public campaigns and rallies organized by various networks, which also enables them to interact with other children's groups and child right activists.

In its engagement with children and young people, ABHAS emphasises that while rights are important their duties as responsible members of their communities must also be recognised.

Expanding opportunities for girl children

Many children are sidelined from the development processes because of their marginalised status. In this process, their potential for participation is compromised. ABHAS focuses on the issues of girls and many of its programmes are directed towards addressing their specific needs. A day care centre for girls and their younger siblings is a pilot initiative of ABHAS which has helped reduce the burden of child care at home and enabled girls to attend school. This programme, initiated in 2000, is believed to have contributed to a reduction in the girls' school drop-out rates as well. ABHAS seeks to mainstream girls who are out-of-school and/or have dropped out into formal education. It offers them non-formal education (bridge courses, coaching, and scholarships) and encourages them to take open school examinations conducted by the National Open School. In addition, life skills training workshops are held for adolescent girls in order to respond to their emotional and psychological needs.

An integrated approach to girl child's development entails medical care, financial assistance help and other recreational support activities. Around 50 young girls are being supported through this programme.

Narrowing the digital divide for the less privileged children

As technology is contributing to globalisation, it is also being recognised for its potential for widening the gap between the privileged and under-privileged. The latter because of the lack of access and the ability to use technology are increasingly pushed to the margins of society and economy and unable to participate and reap the benefits of economic growth. ABHAS is among the organizations that recognise the inevitability of the expansion of technology and the threat of social marginalisation.

In response, ABHAS has set up computer learning centres for government school going children from grades I to V so that they have hands-on experience of using computers before information technology is formally introduced in grade VI in their schools. In the last two years the reach of this initiative has been expanded to include school going adolescent girls as well. At the end of the training, ABHAS provides the children a certificate which enables them to explore further opportunities in life.

It has been observed that children generally are curious and adept at using technology, provided they have the access, opportunity and encouragement. This is proving to be true for the children who attend the ABHAS computer learning centres. The feedback from children suggests that they enjoy the experience as it allows them ample opportunities for socialisation as well as learning. It has singularly contributed to their self-esteem. According to Amirul, a 17 year old computer student at the centre, "I have been coming to ABHAS regularly for the last six months and I have never had a better time in my life. I have been able to make new friends here." Rukhsana, a 13 year old girl, corroborated Amirul's experience, "Apart from meeting new people, we all get to learn something new here everyday."

Many of the children and young people establish small-scale businesses (e.g. tailoring or opening a shop) or engage in various professions to earn a living. The ability to operate a computer adds to their confidence level and raises the possibility of their being able to use it in their profession. Sundari and Meenu (12-13 years olds) and Preeti (7-8 year old), exuding enthusiasm and confidence, shared that they could use the vocational training that ABHAS offers them (sewing/ knitting) to become self reliant young entrepreneurs and felt that ever since their training, the adult members in their families had started recognising their presence and influence in family matters. Vandana, undergoing vocational and computer training at ABHAS, says, “Once we pass our exams and get our certificates, we will be able to start something of our own. Through this training, we become equipped to start our own tailoring unit which we can operate from home. It is cost effective and our families also have nothing to complain about as we work from home and only contribute to the family income.”

Children’s campaign for a second shift in Tughlaqabad government schools

Although the government schools in Tughlaqabad are expected to conduct classes for children in two shifts, the evening shift was not taking place. As many children were missing out on education as a result, ABHAS began organizing non-formal education classes in the afternoon. It also provided an opportunity for initiating a dialogue with children about the state of formal schools and ways and means of improving them.

The children shared many problems in their school system. One major issue was the overcrowding of the schools while a large numbers of children were in fact not attending schools. The discussions encouraged the children to think of possible solutions to the problem of overcrowding while motivating the drop-outs to return to formal classes.

ABHAS helped children to conduct a survey in one *kuuchi* colony of Tughlaqabad area, where they identified 950 out-of-school children. Given the magnitude of the problem, the children decided to request the school authorities to implement the rule of conducting classes in the second shift of the school as well. They signed a memorandum and submitted their demand to the local MLA. The local authorities were compelled to take action and the second shift in the schools became operational. It was a significant victory for the children, which contributed to their motivation level.

Children’s participation in the implementation of development programmes

With a small seed grant ABHAS has set up a community library, which is managed and administered by the children. Children who attend the various programmes of ABHAS periodically assess the activities in terms of their utility and benefits to their lives as well as to their families and communities, and the changes that might be required to make them child friendly. ABHAS seeks to respond to the feedback and analysis by children in its programmes and activities.

ABHAS feels that it is important to take children’s perceptions into account rather than just implement a programme or any other activity with them which does not incorporate children’s views and aspirations. However they believe that in administrative functioning or in organizational matters, children should not be overburdened with work. Says Deepika, another core member of ABHAS, “In what to do, you must ask children for their opinions, but the other practical problems of how to do it like budgeting, networking etc., adults should take some responsibility”.

b) Ankur Society for Alternatives in Education

Ankur Society for Alternatives in Education has been working with children from urban communities in rehabilitated and slum settlements in Delhi since 1983. Child participation is integral to Ankur's discourse in its attempt to work on alternatives in education for children. All its programmes and activities are focused on the belief that children are independent, thinking and sentient individuals. They have their own unique point of view and a perspective which must be heard and respected within an egalitarian ethos of working with them. Thus, it engages with children by creating spaces of and by children so that they are able to express and articulate their experiences freely and without any inhibition or fear.

Recognising children's personhood and perspectives

Children from urban slum clusters and rehabilitated colonies usually tend to be looked upon as "marginalized" and hence underprivileged and deprived with lack of basic amenities and so on. In their work with children, Ankur moves beyond these presumptions.

Child centred initiatives and programmes of Ankur engage with children's active and playful imagination so that they find their own expressions, individuality and create their own meanings in life. This process enables a child's discovery of his/her self identity and personhood. Therefore, instead of admitting children to their programmes, Ankur "invites" them to be its part.

Children through the various processes that the programmes entail are able to explore diverse platforms to articulate and express their thoughts and raise questions. The relationship between the adult facilitators and the children is not a conventional "student teacher relationship" but a space for dialogue. By questioning children create their own environment of learning and growth. This process enables a child to create his/her own space which gives them the courage and the capacity to look at plurality of truths.

Shiksha Kendra (Learning Centre)

There is a dissonance between what children read and the lives that they lead. Ankur's learning centres try and bridge this gap that exists between the books that children read or are "made to learn" and the world that they live in. By stressing on the need to break this dissonance, Ankur encourages a creative encounter between the world of books and children's lived realities so that each child can find his or her own reason of engaging with books or learning.

The rationale behind such an initiative is that books and especially school text books are always supposed to be questioned upon and one never thinks of questioning with them. Ankur through their learning centre encourages and facilitates this process of questioning 'with' the text and not 'on' it. Reading text books in schools, one is always expected to come up with the right answer whereas in Ankur there are many answers to one question and many questions for one theme or lesson that children learn.

Kitab Ghar (Library)

For Ankur, the library or the reading room is not only a place for acquiring newer kinds of knowledge. The idea is to inculcate the value of using a reading room and the process of reading a book as a creative engagement that could be unique to each child in his or her own way. In their reading room children are encouraged to become “creative readers” where books are not meant to be read mechanically, instead they encourage children to share their own stream of imagination with the book that they read. They believe that a creative reader then has the capability of playing with any story. Through this process Ankur is trying to redefine the world of books for children.

Bal Club (Children’s Club)

Bal Club is a space for young children of the localities. These localities that children play in are fraught with innumerable risks and yet children never cease to play. These Bal Clubs are meant to be children’s own spaces where children can themselves find meanings and organic linkages between themselves and the world that lies outside them.

The children’s participation in decision making and running the club is stressed upon. These are self regulated spaces where children take ownership by determining the venue, the day and the date of the meetings, the name of the groups and the nature of their interactions in the clubs.

Compughar (Cybermohalla)

Cybermohalla uses computer, internet and digital technology through which children and young people can express, create and write their own stories. These stories reflect collective experiences of the entire community that these young people belong to. This process enables the creation of collective narratives of the entire community which are unique and original in themselves as they reflect the lived realities of people in these localities. Cybermohalla also helps the process of demystifying technology for these young people.

Thus Ankur’s perspective, initiatives and experiences rests on child participation and the capacity of children to be thinking individuals who are capable of discerning for themselves their own future course of action.

C) Childhood Enhancement Through Training and Action (CHETNA)

Initially an informal collective in the early 1990s by a group of socially aware and committed young people, some of whom were students of the Pantnagar University and active members of the NSS, CHETNA became a full-fledged NGO in 2001 and now works with street and working children in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal. The organization aims to create through action oriented programmes a society which is child friendly and where street and working children are empowered enough to fight for their own rights.

For CHETNA, children’s participation is critical for ensuring a sense of dignity among exploited, defenceless and vulnerable children living on the streets. Thus, all its programmes and initiatives have a direct interface with children. For making the interactions feasible and meaningful by acknowledging the different lifestyles of street children, CHETNA seeks flexibility in its ways of working.

CHETNA has consistently encouraged the process of child participation within and outside its organizational programs. According to Sanjay Gupta, the founder Director, “I wanted to specifically work on child participation and advocate the needs of children. The name CHETNA reflects our vision.”

Promoting children’s participation in the functioning of the organisation

When CHETNA was founded in 2001, five street children were identified and included its core committee. These working street children at different locations in Delhi came together to organize themselves formally to be able to articulate their voices and concerns. CHETNA, at all stages facilitated and encouraged such children’s formations.

To begin with, they are welcomed in the office at any time of the day and the staff is expected to listen to the child as a matter of priority. CHETNA also seeks to incorporate children’s participation in its organizational processes. Children take part in designing, implementation, finance and budgeting, monitoring and networking processes of CHETNA. A child representative is taken to the very first meeting with any donor agency, and during budgeting five members of *Badhte Kadam*, the children’s federation supported by CHETNA, sit with the adult staff to discuss money allocation of different programmes. They can also review the organizational functioning.

The process of involving the children in every stage of the organization and its functioning is fraught with its own challenges. Sometimes the freedoms accorded to a child to question each and every decision of the organization create situations of confrontation between adults and children. Sometimes the children’s questioning is not taken in the right spirit by the employees. Children’s participation has helped in resolution of conflicts and helped the organization learn and evolve. Once when some children expressed doubts about the utilisation of funds that had been collected for their welfare, after considerably deliberations CHETNA decided to open its accounts to scrutiny by children.

Sanjay says “we have to constantly remind our staff about their motivation of working in a child’s right organization.” Despite these occasional set backs, CHETNA sees these acts of questioning by children as being symbolic of their empowerment. “This questioning is our motivation to do good work. I believe that every moment of the organization, its highs and lows must be shared with children at all stages. This sharing is what makes us feel like a team,” reflects Sanjay.

Formation of a Children’s Federation

An outcome of these child led initiatives was the emergence of a working class street children’s federation in Delhi called ‘*Badhte Kadam*’ in 2002. *Badhte Kadam* aims to ensure the respect and dignity to every street working child. It tries to generate awareness about the working children’s rights and encourage participation amongst street children to express their needs and fight for that which they rightfully and constitutionally deserve. It seeks to network with all street children (who may not have a structured organizational presence yet in terms of collectives) to increase the ambit of *Badhte Kadam*’s influence.

Initially the membership of *Badhte Kadam* was restricted to a few children hawkers who sold magazines, incense sticks etc at some traffic signals in the city. These children came together

to form the federation of *Badhte Kadam*. Children, through their own networks with other working class children across Delhi managed to spread the awareness about *Badhte Kadam* and thus many more children became a part of this federation. This collective now has various branches in different parts of Delhi which includes the working children at traffic signals, slum clusters, shopping complexes and so on.

Badhte Kadam is now an independent entity (although still under the aegis of CHETNA) which reaches out to working street children through 40 different locations in the National Capital Region (NCR). The groups at these locations function independently but are also intrinsically bound together as units of *Badhte Kadam*.

Each group elects two children who represent them at the *Badhte Kadam* and elect its president. At a monthly meeting, the elected representatives discuss and share their experiences. The older members of the group take care of the younger ones and encourage them to be a member of *Badhte Kadam* and cultivate leadership qualities in them.

Badhte Kadam has independent letterheads and logo which helps to create its identity. It also brings out two publications which enables sharing of their views with others. “Balaknama” is a newspaper while “Bal Adhikar” is a newsletter. In their writings, children ventilate their opinions and critique issues such as the effects of child marriage and the symbolic significance of India’s independence day on the 15th of August in their lives.

Subhash, the current Secretary of *Badhte Kadam* came to Delhi from Bihar in 1995 and used to work as a hawker at a red light where he met the volunteers from CHETNA and got involved in initiating the children’s organization. Subhash very exuberantly stated, “Being a

***Badhte Kadam* Group, Kalka Mandir**

The Kalka Mandir group of *Badhte Kadam* comprises of 50-60 street and working children living on pavements or under sheds of the temple. The group meets everyday for educational and recreational activities in a room allotted to them by the management of the Kalka temple.

Says Ganesh, an 8 year old member of the group, “The priest was impressed and intrigued by our group meetings and he thought of ways in which he could contribute and encourage our initiative. Thus he gave us this room.” Sonu, another 10 year old shared that the group forms its own “rules and regulations” and the daily timetable, which the children follow.

The group organizes a formal “Group Meeting” every Friday where the issues and concerns that these children face (e.g. police abuse and labour exploitation by adult shopkeepers) are taken up and a course of action is charted out in collaboration with the CHETNA team. Veeru, a 16 year old vendor, reflecting on this process, says, “Whatever we decide we tell ‘didi’ (CHETNA facilitator) and she helps us in identifying ways in which we can resolve our own problems.”

Suresh and Beenu (15 year olds) and Pinka (9 year old) animatedly shared that “We like to come here because no one tells us what to do. We study when we want to and we play what we want. As a group, we also go out for excursions and trips to visit different parts of the city which is very, very exciting.”

All the members of *Badhte Kadam* Kalka Mandir contribute a monthly subscription - a minimum of Rs 2 and a maximum of Rs 5, to a resource pool that children can depend on for any contingency. The children elect a ‘president’ and a ‘treasurer’ from amongst themselves, who manage the affairs of the group and are directly accountable to the children

part of *Badhte Kadam*, I feel very empowered today.” He believes that *Badhte Kadam* has been accepted and recognised because “we are a federation, even the police is a little scared of meddling with us.”

Capacity building of children and staff

CHETNA looks at children as protagonists and assigns itself the role of a catalyst. As it seeks direct participation of children in all its activities within and outside the organization, its staff builds their capacities so that they are able to advocate for child friendly policies at several relevant forums provided by other civil society groups, policy makers, police, the judiciary and other such bodies.

They facilitate training programmes on life skills and livelihood skills for street children, which are participatory and where the use of innovative creative methods is encouraged. Creative tools such as role plays, collage making and drawing and cultural programmes and other fun filled activities are greatly appreciated by the participants.

Advocacy for child friendly policies by children through the media and networks

CHETNA encourages street and working children to interact with the media, police and other civil society groups, which have generally been sceptical of their ability to be so articulate and confident. According to Sanjay, these children have been able to successfully communicate their lived experiences and realities to different sections of society.

d) HAQ: Centre for Child Rights

The HAQ: Centre for Child Rights was founded in 1999 as a research and documentation centre with a focus on promoting the rights of all children. It has positioned itself as an organization that goes beyond specific child-centred themes (e.g. early childhood care, child labour, basic education) and seeks inclusion of children’s rights in the larger development and policy debates by making the connections between the macro and micro level issues. It is emerging as a public advocacy forum and a support base for other organizations by engaging in public information campaigns, policy advocacy and capacity building of organizations working with or for children through its organizational networks. It seeks to reach out to policy makers, the judiciary, government officials, parliamentarians, media groups and others at different levels.

According to Enakshi Ganguly Thukral, the Executive Secretary, children’s participation for HAQ remains a value and a means rather than a project driven activity or an end in itself. Although none of HAQ’s programmes are directly focused in addressing child participation, it is recognised as the basic premise and an integral theme of its work. Research, documentation and advocacy pertaining to children and governance and child protection (the two broad themes that HAQ programmes have consistently focused on) aim to creating a larger inclusive platform where children are encouraged to articulate their voices in a medium that they are comfortable in. This platform is seen as a forum through which children’s concerns and issues could reach out to adult stakeholder agencies like the policy formulators, the judiciary and the civil society groups, thereby making them accountable to children and their rights.

Promoting awareness among children about their rights

The experience of the HAQ team has been that when children are engaged with directly, most of them are able to articulate their 'needs'. However, HAQ aims to communicate to them that the Constitution addresses some of their 'needs' by providing them with legal rights. It seeks to provide children with information and encourages them to seek their 'legal right'. It does, however, try to explain to them that there is a difference between 'needs' and 'wants' and that all their needs cannot become their rights. It orients them towards reflecting upon and identifying their unaddressed needs which ought to be converted into legitimate legal rights for them.

Meanwhile, HAQ also acts as a Legal Aid and Resource centre in order to help the children in need of legal assistance. It also acts as a watchdog to monitor the role of the judiciary and advocates for appropriate legal reforms and laws that are sympathetic to the needs of children. The organization is also trying to collate information on the status of juvenile justice in Delhi so that it can concretely argue for a child sensitive judicial system.

Having legally assisted eight cases related to children's justice ranging from instances of child sexual abuse, trafficking to unlawful confinement of children, HAQ in collaboration with Joseph and Joseph, a law firm is closely monitoring and documenting the workings of the Juvenile Justice Board in Delhi to suggest recommendations and comment on the anomalies with regard to the Board's functioning.

Promoting expression by children

HAQ's founding members and current Executive Secretaries, Bharti Ali and Enakshi Ganguly Thukral, had been involved earlier in consultative processes with children where creative mediums were used to enable children to express themselves easily. These included: a Campaign against Child Labour (CACL) public hearing in 1997 where working children shared their perceptions and views on the support mechanisms required to bring about improvement in their lives and a public hearing on the PROBE Report (Primary Report on Basic Education) in 1998 where the report findings were shared with children who were then encouraged to question and comment.

Drawing upon that experience, HAQ has sought to evolve creative methodologies like art workshops to encourage the children to express themselves, their opinions and needs, in their own unique manner. In an attempt to encourage children to voice their opinions and concerns with regard to the lives of children in the cities and to offer innovative, creative alternatives to the given condition, HAQ facilitated a session with students who participated in Child Friendly Cities- Children for Peace Train (organised by Times Foundation), in September- October 2005.

Promoting children's representation in policy discussions

HAQ seeks to include children in various consultative processes with regard to policy formulation and information dissemination on issues that affect them in some way or the other. We also consciously partner with other organizations in order to share and deepen the knowledge base that we seek to create around the issues of child rights."

At World Social Forum 2005 in Porto Alegre, as a key partner in the CR4WSF alliance of civil society groups, HAQ facilitated the process of identifying and encouraging children's

representatives chosen from various countries such as Columbia, Brazil, Peru and India to come forth and discuss their views on the condition of children in their countries and suggest possible solutions for a better world. The panel titled “Children’s Rights to Equitable Resources- Understanding the Present, Envisioning the Future” saw children raise issues of resources, policies and laws, focusing on the conditions of young people in their respective countries. The children in the forum also debated with the adult panellists present, over the potential changes that should be adopted at policy levels to adequately address the needs of children. The three Indian child panellists also spoke in other platforms of the event, presenting their views with regard to child trafficking, child labour and child participation and also interacted with the media.

Creating an enabling environment

(i) Advocating recognition of children’s issues in the policy arena through policy research

The HAQ team has been voicing the concerns of children and their rights in different government and non-governmental committees and fora. It has been vocal in the discussions on the National Commission of Children. It has contributed to the India report for the UN study on Violence against Children. It has facilitated the meeting on Declining Sex Ratio at the invitation of the Department of Women and Child Development at NIPCCD for raising awareness about the serious situation in the north Indian states of Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh. HAQ was also one of the key initiators of the Campaign Against Child Trafficking and till 2005 served as its secretariat.

Various researches and documentation they undertake regularly on issues of child labour, child trafficking, child protection, children and disaster, children’s right to adequate and secure housing and elementary education are creating an information base which can be employed effectively as an advocacy tool and used for policy formulation and action. Since 2000, HAQ has been analysing and critiquing the Union Budget from a child rights perspective. Two of their publications ‘Says a Child...Who Speaks for my Rights?’ and ‘Children in Globalising India: Challenging our Conscience’ interrogate the status of children in India by critically looking at issues related to health, education, protection, juvenile justice, child trafficking, disability, adoption and child participation. The range of publications on children’s rights they bring out regularly supports their efforts.

(ii) Public interest litigation

In 2005, HAQ along with the M V Foundation and Social Jurist filed a PIL in the Supreme Court challenging the existing Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act as being contradictory to the Right to Education as guaranteed by Article 21 A of the constitution. They have also initiated a public campaign highlighting the issue- the CLPRA campaign, along with other civil society groups.

(iii) Orientation of organizations on children’s participation

In order to disseminate information and to sensitise and equip other child-centric organizations to actively and effectively engage with children’s rights issues, HAQ conducts capacity building workshops and training programmes with civil society groups, government officials and policy makers. One such workshop for some of the partner organizations of Terre Des Hommes (India Programme) in September 2005 focused on children’s

participation. By employing participatory techniques, HAQ facilitated the exchanges between children and adults at a three-day workshop. Children associated with these NGOs articulated their experiences, thoughts and perspectives on children's rights issues through creative mediums such as puppetry, clay modelling and painting.

e) SOS Children's Villages of India

Even though child participation is not a formal 'programme' or a 'project' driven activity, through small yet significant steps of providing a child with a family and including him/her in all the decision making processes, SOS Children's Villages, India ensures that a child is placed in the centre of all that may impact him directly or in the future.

SOS Children's Villages is an intensive long term family care programme committed to looking after children who are orphaned, separated from very poor single mothers, of social-political conflict zones as well as children below poverty line especially in the third world context. SOS Kinderdorf International, the umbrella organisation works in 132 countries across the world. In India, the first SOS Children's Village was set up at Greenfields, Faridabad, in 1964. Today there are 39 SOS children's villages in different parts of India. It also run 122 allied and community outreach projects, including kindergartens, medical/social centres, vocational training centres, Hermann Gmeiner¹ schools.

The main mandate of SOS Children's Villages is to provide protection, integrity and family care to the abandoned or orphaned children so that they grow up to be confident and self reliant adults. Accordingly, it seeks to instil the value of family based child care as a support mechanism to cater to children without parental care. Through its work with communities, SOS Children's Villages believes in strengthening the foundations of the biological family so that the children do not have to face abandonment due to external pressures such as poverty, trafficking and so on.

While SOS Children's Villages believes that every child must be reintegrated with their biological families, it is firmly resolved to provide alternate foster care and parenting to those children for whom reintegration with their natural families is not possible due to various reasons. SOS has tried to carry forth the family value systems of a lasting and a reliable emotional relationship. Archina Dhar, Director, Advocacy at the National Coordination Office of SOS-India, says, "Ours is a long term foster care programme. It is not an orphanage and children entrusted in our care are not available for adoption. Ours is a long term engagement with our children".

Creation of a home for "out of home" children

SOS Children's Villages usually have about 15-20 homes or cottages where a group of 8-10 children live under the nurturing guidance of a "SOS care giving mother". These mothers undergo a rigorous two year training programme before their placement in these villages.

Besides financial support, SOS Children's Villages provides them with the appropriate professional specialised advice, counselling and psycho-social support through trained

¹ Hermann Gmeiner was the founder father of SOS

experts such as educationists and psychologists. They in turn, as the head of the families, have the responsibility of meeting the basic necessities of children, e.g. nutrition and health care, a good and secure environment and comprehensive quality education, all of which is geared towards the holistic development of a child. Under the caring guidance of SOS mothers, needy children in each 'SOS family' are given a home environment and the freedom and independence that a child might enjoy with his/her natural parents under normal circumstances.

As the mothers try to create a family-like environment, child-adult and child to child communication becomes extremely important. Children are actively involved in making decisions within their own SOS families. A child participates in the daily everyday household functioning of his/her SOS family and community life at large. The SOS mother and other caregiver members facilitate the process of providing the right kind of information to the children so that they can make well informed decisions with regard to their own lives. Their views are heard, their voices valued and their opinions are given importance.

After the boys reach a certain age, they are shifted to youth villages where they learn different vocations or take up higher education, depending on what profession they might want to pursue. But the girls, due to reasons of protection and security, stay back. SOS Children's Villages of India also has a "marriage cell" which supports the SOS Children's Village director in finding a suitable match for grown up children once they attain adulthood and can marry and find their future partners. Many of these children grow up to become professionals. Some who want to study further are given scholarships to pursue higher education abroad. A "permanency future plan" is drawn out for each child, in direct consultation with him/her, where the child is allowed to gauge his own strengths and weaknesses, weigh the options for the kind of professional choices he/she would like to make and accordingly they are guided in realising their dream, with help from their SOS mothers and the other organizational staff.

Participatory pedagogical activities in SOS Children's Villages ensure that the child interests and concerns are being taken into account. This is intended to ensure that the child grows up to be a confident, independent thinking individual, with deep family bonding with his SOS family members.

SOS Children's Villages of India's engagement with children is a long term one. Even after they become adults and pursue their respective professions, the family attachments and kinship with the SOS family never dissolves. Thus, over the years SOS families have been growing and many needy children have been able to enjoy a safe and protective growing environment.

Children's involvement with their communities

Through youth care programmes, SOS children who reach adolescence, help out in various activities, at a village level. A community link is fostered to ensure that a process of social reintegration of these children into society at large can be initiated through cultural and social interaction and exchange of services with the other members.

SOS-India has also diversified its programmes depending on what practices can best serve the interests of the under-privileged children. In order to increase their reach and include

more and more children in need of help within its ambit of care, SOS-India has initiated an outreach programme whereby children living in vicinity slums of a Children's Village are invited for four hours daily, to the SOS children's village . Through interaction with the resident children of the SOS Children's villages, these outside children get an opportunity to interact and learn from their peers. Children from the outreach programme are provided with free basic informal education, mid day meal and playtime activities. Dance festivals, cultural programmes, and other such activities are undertaken jointly by the SOS children and those from the slums in order to give these marginalized children an opportunity for learning, mingled with fun.

SOS Children's Villages also reaches out to children in need of assistance and care in situations like that of socio-political conflicts or natural disaster hit circumstances. By setting up health centres, medical camps, child relief centres and helping the community with rehabilitation programmes, SOS provides help to the children, who are often the most adversely affected, in such difficult times. Recently SOS-India has lent active support to the Tsunami hit families in India and to the J&K earthquake hit families.

After attaining adulthood, some of SOS children help at an organizational level and are co-opted within the administrative structure of SOS-India as well. If anyone wants to pursue a self-reliant business or profession, SOS help its youth to in setting up their enterprises by lending economic help and social support.

Growing engagement of children in policy advocacy

SOS has begun encouraging children to enter the debates and policy formulation processes around children's rights through active advocacy. SOS believes that the nature of information and views that these children can offer, from a child centric perspective, can add a lot of value to the kind of advocacy efforts being made in order to ensure child rights, nationally and at an international level as well. Children from SOS-India participated in the activities initiate by CR4 World Social Forum, as a first step towards putting forth their opinions and issues, to a larger public.

SOS Children's Villages of India believes that for every child, child participation must begin at home. By providing needy, orphaned, estranged children with a caring surrogate families, healthy community environment and equal opportunities, it ensures stable, warm and emotional support to its children. A child is consulted in all the decisions that help shape his present or his future. Even within an SOS family, the care-giver Mother, works closely with her children. A child's views, thoughts and demands are given a patient hearing. He/she is ensured safe and free environment where the child can express fearlessly. SOS Children's Villages of India believes that giving a child the confidence to think independently and encouraging him to take his own decisions in smallest of the matters that govern his life, are significant steps towards child participation.

SOS Children's Villages of India is of the view that up to a certain age a child requires adult counselling and guidance but in all the decisions that affect him or her immediately, like what he should study, what are his interests that can be pursued to a constructive end and so on, it believe that the child must be heard and allowed to take his own decision.

In the future, SOS Children's Villages of India hopes to actively involve children in their own child-led advocacy initiatives so that they can contribute effectively to the ongoing discourse on children's issues. By encouraging advocacy for, by and with the children, it hopes that the marginalised children will become more visible, their voice a collective strength which the others will have to respond to and take into account.

4.2 International NGOs

a) Plan International (India)

Plan, a child centred community development organization, that works in 62 countries across the world, began working in partnership with various local organizations in India in 1979. In the last few years, it has diversified into two different organizations - Plan International (India) and Plan India, a locally registered NGO focusing on children in especially difficult circumstances. Plan in India works in 13 Indian states through local NGO partners.

Plan believes in integrated development in all spheres, and children's perspectives and participation are significant elements in its work. Consistent efforts are made to include children at various stages in the activities and programmes within the organization. Children's advisory boards have been established in a few donor countries (and is now starting one in India), to advice and review organizational functioning. Verity Corbett, the Programme Support Manager of Plan India Country Office, says, "Since Plan has always been involved with children, all organizational learning processes have been heavily influenced by the concerns of these vulnerable children that we reach out to".

Inclusion of children's perspective in community development

Plan's involvement with children for development is a long term engagement where the focus on one community in a particular geographical area for a long period of time. They try to communicate the value and importance of child participation to their partner organizations and all their programmes carry forth the approach of a "child centred community development" which then feeds into the all the community development programmes that these local partners conduct.

Plan's partners work on issues and problems that are community based. In extending its support to these organizations, Plan provides them the direction to look at the same issues from a children's perspective. What children think and say ought to be incorporated as an important element of community's assessment of its own social and economic conditions. The objective behind such a strategy is to promote children as active and leading participants in their own community life. All Plan supported programmes follow the 'child-to-child' approach, which complements community development programmes of the local partners.

Plan's seeks a dynamic and democratic dialogue between adults and children within a given community through wilful inclusion of the latter in decisions that affect them. Thus, an inclusive model where adults as well as children from a community engage in the dialogue is encouraged. Children's voices are given value and importance so that a comprehensive

understanding of their realities, ideas, experiences and insights by adults could enrich development processes.

Children's forums: Bal Panchayats

Plan has promoted the formation of children's forums or children collectives to help children become empowered and self reliant and to enable a healthy exchange of ideas and opinions with the adults of the community. These Bal Panchayats (the name could be different in accordance with the local parlance) are modelled on India's system of local governance and children in the 10-17 years age group are eligible to be members. They elect the president, secretary and a reporter for a period of six months. They decide on the community issues that need attention, set goals and find ways of accomplishing their objectives.

Bal Seva Sangam, Nizamabad, Andhra Pradesh.

The children of this collective were encouraged to use different media to understand their community issues and find solutions, and in the process build their own capacities and competencies. Over a period of time, this group was able to collect information regarding government schemes for benefiting the farmers. Through regular media monitoring, the children of one particular village were able to collate all the related information and produced their own wall paper in order to spread community awareness on the scheme. Because of this collaborative effort, these villagers were one of the few communities to be most informed about this new government initiative. Says Vijay Shankar, Development Education Co-ordinator of Plan, "Even the collector was most surprised to see so much work being put in by the children which reaped direct benefits for the community".

Through the Children's Parliament in some areas, children learn to exercise their democratic right to vote and elect their representatives, who in turn elect their leader in the form of a Prime Minister. The PM in turn forms a Cabinet of Ministers, each of whom handles a particular portfolio like, health, education, culture etc. Through this, children not only become aware of various issues affecting their community but also become responsible citizens who are capable of articulating and representing their needs and opinions to a larger audience.

Children's representation at national and international forums

Children working with PLAN have also made representations articulating the collective voices and concerns of children across India at various national and international forums.

Facilitation of children's initiatives

By asking the kids what their issues and problems are rather than telling them what to do through the partner organizations, Plan facilitates the process of identifying issues of children as well as the adult community, and together they try to find a middle ground for dialogue and collaborative solutions between the young and the old.

Babu Bahini Manch's campaign to get school drop-outs back to school

A children's group in Bihar called Babu Bahini Manch (BBM) had been grappling with the rising number of school drop out rates. They decided to address this problem by pursuing parents and families and coaxing them to send their children who had dropped out of school to continue with their education. A persistent effort on the part of these children forced the parents to consider their requests seriously. Eventually this turned out to be a much more effective pressure tactic as most families found it easy to simply readmit their children to school than to handle the children's group constantly pestering them every day at their doorstep.

- **Children – community dialogue**

Plan, through its partner networks and the communities they work with, organizes consultations with children in order to get a first hand account of what they deem to be important issues requiring urgent attention. The experience has been that children come up with incredible issues, issues that adults will not speak about, such as child protection and violence, caste and discrimination and so on. On the basis of children's feedback and community's reaction to it, Plan works out a "list of issues" for each community, which they then try to address through their partner organizations.

- **Production of video films by children**

'Children have something to say' is a children's video film project that reaches out to the most disadvantaged children across India. This project imparts the skills, confidence and the means to children to express themselves and to inform the community about issues concerning them through the extremely powerful visual medium of films. Films made by children are shown back to the community. These films have also been shown in film festivals across the world and have won many awards.

- **Children's participation within the organization**

A country strategic plan has been developed for the organization through a triangulation of data with inputs given from networks, organizations, children associated with the Plan projects and the organizational staff of Plan, and the children's consultations were a critical part of this. In order to have a direct and effective involvement of children, Plan in India is now seeking to set up "child advisory boards" as has been practiced in other countries.

Children's participation in tsunami response

Immediately after the tsunami struck southern India in December 2004, Plan identified partners to work on the issues affecting children and began supporting child care centres and immediate counseling. Efforts were also made to engage children in the response. These efforts have encouraged children to become more aware and pro-active in their participation in community processes and raised hopes that the community would consider their opinions and needs more seriously and that they would be able carve out a niche for playing a larger role in the development of the community.

Group trauma counseling by children: In various affected regions, interactive cultural events and exchange programmes were organised by about 1,500 children in 60 children's clubs which involved theatre and dance for group trauma counseling.

Children as design architects: In the consultations on housing designs with various beneficiary groups - Panchayat leaders, Self Help Group (SHG) members and others, special emphasis was on children's opinions. 14 year-old Arivu said: "Children are always only meant to play or study, more than that nothing else. I hope this consultation helped us to contribute to community development".

A Film on Tsunami by Children: In an attempt to look at children's opinion of the tsunami and the subsequent reconstruction efforts, six children from two of the worst affected villages of Nagapattinam got behind the camera to make a 20 minute film. With an

introduction by eminent filmmaker Govind Nihalani, the film presents an overview of the children's happy-go-lucky life and how their lives changed forever one fine morning with the tsunami. "Every child's life in this region has been affected by Tsunami, either directly or indirectly," says Pakya, the child anchor of the film, taking viewers through some of the benefits children received immediately after the disaster. Articulating their points of view, the children talk about the temporary benefits of the shelters created for them and exude optimism that they are being consulted for the design of the permanent shelters. In one such consultation featured in the film, the children through models show the kind of houses they would like to be built. "The children's assessment of what has been done so far and what needs to be done must be taken seriously. They must play a significant role in the decision making process," says Mr. Nihalani.

Children's Social Audit: Plan in India is working with children through partners to conduct an audit of the Tsunami relief and rehabilitation process. The children are actively engaged in the audit process wherein they play a leading role in the monitoring of community rebuilding and adding their perspectives to the process. This project is already underway for a period of three years and will be carried out in six phases, covering 15 villages from Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu. Realizing that children can participate much more meaningfully once their capacity is built, so far about 30 young photographers have been trained in the use of the camera which they have used to capture their thoughts on the initiatives being undertaken. The photographs taken by the children highlight that children see the world differently and can provide meaningful insights. Some of these photographs were exhibited at Plan's First Year Tsunami Response event. As more children will continue to be trained through workshops under this project and as their work will be shared with stakeholders at the community, state and national levels through a traveling photo exhibition and film etc. not only will children build their capacities to participate but also the community members will become aware of children's capacities to build child friendly communities.

Amazing Kids programme

Being carried out in phases with the help of One World South Asia, this programme seeks to create skills and opportunities for communication at the grass root level for children through various media like radio, camera, cartoons, computer training and villupattu (a traditional folk media). The idea is to promote local voices, ideas and knowledge while using innovative approaches to solve local issues and to provide a platform to share best practices in a sustainable manner. Various methods like story telling, radio recording techniques, behaviour change communication and the use of the internet are being adopted. The response of the participants has so far been very enthusiastic and positive who express themselves quite freely with the aid of the various media.

Children as Awareness Ambassadors

Children have actively helped in spreading awareness on various issues (e.g. health, hygiene, safe drinking water and sanitation) in the interest of the communities they belong to and in doing so have also represented their needs. But above all, they emphasise their need for education, recreation and a space to be able to voice their opinions and participate in decision-making processes in the community. The setting up of a Children's Parliament by Plan and its partners in some areas has also hastened this process.

In March 2006, about 3,300 children participated in the World Water Day Celebrations organized by Plan and its partners. They took part in the rallies holding plaque-cards on safe drinking water, water conservation, rain water harvesting and the importance of sanitation, drawing competitions and planted over 500 coconut saplings which they would be taking care of.

b) Save the Children Alliance

Save the Children Alliance comprises of 32 independent national Save the Children organizations drawing their mandate from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and working in more than 100 countries. Most Save the Children organizations began revisiting the children's agenda from a rights perspective in the early 1990s, when was felt that children had perhaps been relegated to the margins in the development programmes despite some 'child-focused interventions'. The concern was to strengthen the rights perspective consciously through 'child-focused approaches' to bring about significant, lasting and positive changes in children's lives.

In India, Save the Children UK, Save the Children Canada, Save the Children Finland and Save the Children US currently have programmes, mostly in partnership with Indian NGOs. Albeit Save the Children Sweden and Save the Children New Zealand do not have an office in India, they provide partners technical and financial support respectively. They have differing but complementary thematic priorities, approaches and strengths. As Alliance, they have been coming together and are supporting and gradually making way for Bal Raksha Bharat, the Indian member of the international Save the Children Alliance.

Save the Children organizations in India have tried to promote children's participation in different ways, either drawing upon and adapting the experiences of others or innovating. It has been considered as intrinsic to the process of recognizing children's rights both as a value and a programme. Ultimately, they seek to promote children as social actors who can influence the decisions that directly affect them and thereby become partners in action.

Representation by children at various fora

Save the Children has promoted children's participation at the highest levels of policy making. It facilitated the participation of children's representation at a number of consultations at the national, regional and international levels. Drawn from some of the most remote areas and marginalised communities – the "catchment area" of the programmes of partner organizations, these children are elected/selected through a variety of democratic processes.

While representation by children from India has helped establish the value and importance of children's perspectives and protagonism, there are concerns whether same organizations and same set of children are speaking on behalf of all Indian children. It is recognised that weak follow-up to some extent defeats the purpose of children's representation. It would perhaps be useful to review and reflect on the process to make it more representative and sustainable.

Another concern is that these children could be becoming misfits of sorts. By all accounts, these children come back empowered if their confidence and articulation is any indication. However, while they grew with exposure to information, experiences and interactions peers and others from different parts of the world their immediate surroundings remained more or less unchanged. In Ladakh, it has been observed that the reaction of their peers ranged from awe to taking their advice and so therefore elevated their social status. Nawaz Ali, the boy from Kargil, who participated in the UN Special Session on Children in New York, was a member of a Children's Committee for Village Development (CCVD) and the Chief Executive Counsellor of the Children's Council for the Development of Ladakh (CCDL), a representative body of all CCVDs in the region. He is now an advisor to this body. However, the experiences of Ritu, the other representative to the Special Session, are not known because soon thereafter Save the Children UK phased out of the project in Chakrata hills in Uttaranchal, the area she hailed from, and lost contact with her.

Promoting expressions by children

In 1994, Save the Children UK invested in a learning process to develop staff capacities in child-centred participatory research methodologies. It was built on the premise that children can provide vital information that could make a positive difference to a research and/or a programme planning exercise, that there are ethical and practical issues that must be recognised and that children should not be seen merely as informants but can be very effective researchers. Organizational changes and staff turnover prevented the development and expansion of this corpus of knowledge but the importance of expressions by children and listening of their voices was recognised.

Children's organizations, interactive processes and representation in various forums are one way in which Save the Children encourages and supports girls and boys in articulating their issues and concerns. Indeed, production of newsletters is an activity that finds favour with most children's organizations. In some programme and project areas, children and young people are encouraged to bring out their newspapers.

- Save the Children UK has assisted the CCVDs and CGDs in Ladakh and Kashmir valley through trainings of members and printing and distribution of their newspapers. "Bacho ki Awaaz" is produced in Kargil, "Are you aware of it" in Leh, and "Nanhi Pukar" and "Nanhi Awaaz" in Kashmir. Articles from these papers are also published by the leading newspapers in Kashmir.
- The Bal Panchayats supported by Save the Children Canada produces its own newsletter which has a wide dissemination amongst children, schools and even the adults of the community and outside. Save the Children Canada opted to contribute information about children's rights issues (e.g. allocation of funds for education and the health) that could be collated and disseminated by children among general public.

Promotion of child-led organisations

Children's participation has been introduced gradually over the years in Save the Children programmes in India, with the primary focus on the formation of children's groups. In 2006, Save the Children UK had 650 children's groups that it worked with across the country.

Bal Sansad and SWRC: Some of the partners of Save the Children UK, e.g. the Social Work Research Centre (SWRC) had innovated Children's Parliament as an effective tool in non-formal education. But it needs to be conceded that they did so without any technical input from Save the Children, which had been funding some of the night schools whose children actively participated in the Children's Parliament. Later on, SWRC was able to make logical connections between its work with adults as part of the right to information campaign and with children through the Bal Sansads. Initially designed as an extended role play that helped children understand the local governance issues and structures in a child friendly manner, it evolved into an interesting and significant model of children's empowerment. SWRC's partners in different states (e.g. Orissa, Uttaranchal) adapted this model in their work with children. Other organizations, including Save the Children, were also influenced by this experience.

The Bal Sansads encouraged and enabled children to ask questions about matters that concerned them (in this case the functioning of the night schools and later the local development issues such as availability of water...) and expect answers from the adults. SWRC allowed itself to be questioned by children's elected representatives, in what is considered an exercise in accountability. By participating in the election process, children learnt first hand about people's power. By participating in the deliberations in the Bal Sansad, children learnt about the functioning of a representative democracy.

Children's Committee for Village Development (CCVD) and Children's Group for Development (CGD) in Ladakh: The North West India programme (comprising of Ladakh region, and later the Kashmir valley) was the first region where the "seeds of children's participation were sown" consciously by Save the Children UK. In the mid-1990s, the organization had undergone a major overhaul and was open to a new way of working. Organizations of children were gaining currency among organizations promoting children's rights as a result of the experiences elsewhere. In Ladakh, the context was also favourable with the Leh Hill Development Council having been formed in response to people's aspiration for autonomy.

As the staff was initially apprehensive about the reaction of adults, children's groups and formations were introduced in only three villages. The initiative proved unsuccessful because, in retrospect, these children's group were formed without consulting with the adults. Learning from this setback, the staff took the adult community members into confidence in the next phase. They tried to explain what they meant by child rights and children's participation. Some people accepted it, others did not. Only after convincing the adult community members did they work once again towards the formation of children's groups in the villages. Furthermore, they tried to give it a structure and direction.

These groups followed the structure of the Leh Autonomous Hill Development Council that had been set up by the Jammu and Kashmir State Government. As in the case of the state's structure, these children's groups also underwent a process of election and nomination of their representative members. They created their own executive and a general body in which any child between the age group of 6 months to 18 years could be a part of. Indeed, the decision to include children as young as 6 months old was taken by child members.

Children's Committees for Village Development (CCVDs) are now representative bodies of all the children in a community which are formed with adult consent although not initiated by adults. The CCVDs were first initiated in Leh and Kargil districts in the Ladakh region in Jammu and Kashmir. These CCVDs are further organized into district level federations – the Children's Council for the Development of Leh (CCDL) and Children's Council for the Development of Kargil (CCDK).

Influenced largely by the success of CCVDs in Ladakh, Save the Children UK promoted Children's Groups for Development (CGDs) in the Kashmir valley with its interventions with working children in urban areas. Albeit by 2006 the organization did not confine its work with child labour in the valley, the groups continued to be called CGDs to give them an identity distinct from the Ladakh based CCVDs.

These bodies provide “a development forum where children are mobilized as participants rather than aid recipients and can promote their own rights”. There is an attempt at equal representation of age groups, males/females, school going/non-school going children/young people depending on the composition of village communities. The adult members act as facilitators and catalysts. These committees function as democratic institutions and hold regular meetings, keep their own records, plan activities and so on. These children had to undergo trainings and workshops.

Save the Children UK has conducted various trainings for the village level committees and the district level federations to provide the members with the conceptual framework for active citizenship. These include orientation on their roles and responsibilities, workshops on ‘seven life skills’ including situation analysis, planning, implementation through programmes and activities (such as Theatre for Development (TfD) that could help make their experience joyful), fund-raising, administration and financial management, and exposure visits. According to Deen Khan of Save the Children UK, the training are not very well structured but have helped in the critical reflection and reform of children's groups into organizations. Upon reaching adulthood, the CCVD and CGD members become members of the advisory committees which act as peripheral support bodies to help the functioning of these committees.

In order to promote their acceptance as agents of social and political change in the community, Save the Children UK has encouraged children to align themselves with the existing structures comprising of adults (e.g. women's groups, traditional village committee and panchayats). Albeit adult alliances have children's representative, there is no guarantee that their voices would be recognized. Increasing the acceptance and tolerance level of these children's groups amongst the adults is still a challenge. Nonetheless, a CCVD representative attends the official meetings of state government committees that deal with matters concerning children (e.g. the education plan and the budgeting sessions). Thus, in principle, children's points of view have been acknowledged and are being addressed in the planning process. Indeed, their participation in the relief and development activities after the earthquake in Kashmir in 2005 received appreciation from the adults.

Save the Children UK had also considered registration of the union of children's organizations but the idea was not pursued as it was felt that it would unnecessarily burden children.

Bal Panchayats: Since 2002, Save the Children Canada has supported the formation of children's committees known as the Bal Panchayats in 55 rural villages of Osmanabad district in Maharashtra. Children, both boys and girls, participate as office bearers of these village-level Bal Panchayats. Not only do they initiate but also plan and execute programmes and events which help raise and address child related issues. A few children are selected as resource persons and facilitators.

The Bal Panchayat members engage themselves in constructive developmental work (e.g. addressing issues of violence against children) and use the platform to interact with adults, often questioning them and holding them accountable for community actions. Large scale absenteeism of teachers, smoking especially during auspicious occasions such as the Ganapati Puja, cleanliness and hygiene are some of the issues that concern children's lives and sensibilities and which they have chosen to highlight. In the bargain, they have garnered immense respect and support amongst the adults in the communities. The then regional commissioner of Aurangabad, impressed with the vibrancy of this model, issued an official government circular sanctioning an official space for the functioning of these Bal Panchayats in the villages.

The Bal Panchayats also act as spaces that the children identify with and develop a bond which is distinct from being in school or being at home. They often gather at the Bal Panchayat offices where they do their homework together and have fun without worrying about electricity and space constraints which they face at home. It has been observed that children initially come just for fun (and the odd T-shirt they got from the programme) but over a period of time their interest is generated and some of them begin taking growing interest in social issues. Many of them have evolved and are confident of making impressive presentation at international gatherings. Two children from the Bal Panchayat went to Kathmandu in 2006 for an international session on Bal Panchayats where they made presentations.

Besides producing a newsletter, the Bal Panchayats also have a media forum which interacts with local media practitioners to promote information about their work. This has helped in the creating a demand for the formation of such Bal Panchayats in the neighbouring areas. Bal Panchayats are helping demonstrate that children can be integrated with the ongoing process of development and can be meaningful contributors of change.

Children's collectives in Rajasthan: Save the Children Finland has formed children's groups alongside the existing Village Development Committees (VDCs) in 320 villages in Rajasthan. Its staff members facilitate articulation and promote self-expression among children and simultaneously works towards social recognition for their collectives by training and sensitizing the adult members of the VDCs on children's rights.

‘The discovery of dreams’

A programme called “discovery of dreams” was initiated by Save the Children Finland in 2004 as part of the child survival and development programme. It is based on the assumption that the limited choices available to children from poor and marginalised communities, especially in the rural areas, contribute to a narrow world vision. The programme, therefore, aims at giving them an opportunity to articulate their dreams and aspirations that could enhance his or her emotional quotient and self esteem. The adult facilitators seek to instil a vision and provide young people a gamut of choices about who they can be as individuals and professionals. About 190 children have participated in the interactions, which are considered critical for the creation of an environment that encourages and enables every child to participate. A reflection of this echoed in the voice of a girl from among these children who when asked about what she wants to become said “I want to be a fighter pilot.”

Advocacy for children’s participation

Through studies conducted in different countries, Save the Children has always encouraged children’s participation within their own spheres (e.g. budget, education). Since Save the Children has had the technical expertise on children’s participation, they have supported and helped other NGOs to build their capacities on this issue. All Save the Children organizations promote child friendly approaches and perspectives among their local NGO partners.

The staff of Save the Children organizations concede that they are still learning as different programmes are evolving different ways and means of promoting children’s participation – perhaps appropriate given the size and diversity of a country like India. Indeed, they are cautious about saying what is right or wrong. There is recognition that children’s participation is an “abstract concept” that needs to be demystified, practiced and promoted.

Children’s involvement within the organization

Save the Children UK has also tried to include children in its organizational functioning in different ways. In the North West India programme, the action plan developed by the Children’s Council for the Development of Ladakh (called CHILD – Children’s Initiative for Ladakh Development) is taken into account in the planning and design. In West Bengal, two young volunteers were involved in capacity building exercises for partners. They were an integral part of Save the Children programme planning and designing, and gave crucial inputs to the projects that were being run in collaboration with other NGOs. Both were class 5 drop-outs and Save the Children also supported their education. “Even though this partnership was fruitful, we realised that though we were good with child to child activities, we were however limited in more complicated processes of directly involving children within the organizations”, says Asha N. Iyer.

Another innovative experiment has been children’s involvement in the staff recruitment in some of the Save the Children UK’s offices which resulted in some interesting experiences. On one occasion, a child in the panel in Delhi strongly recommended against the selection of one adult candidate because she did not like his behaviour, body language and felt unsafe in his presence. Although the adult panelists failed to understand her apprehension, they respected the child’s reservations and rejected that particular candidate. In retrospect, her hunch proved right because six months later there was an adverse report against him appeared in the local newspaper. While this might be considered a positive experience, in other cases the children could not make effective decisions. Furthermore, before they sat on

the interview panel, children had to be briefed about why they were there and what they had to do. This attempt provided some insights if not any conclusions.

Children's participation in staff recruitment

In the selection of Kargil Development Project (KDP), besides taking a written test and participating in the group discussions the candidates with the panel had to visit the field and interact with children. The feed back from children and observations of the panel were critical.

The practice has been discontinued because of differing opinions among the staff members about its merits. There was some questioning about the extent to which the concept of children's participation could be extended. Many staff strongly felt that to engage children "merely for the sake of children's participation is totally wrong."

Children's participation in Tsunami relief and rehabilitation

On the 27th of December 2004, a day after tsunami struck the southern coast of India, Save the Children Canada reached the affected site with a substantial aid package. Recognising that survival was the immediate concern of the people but also realising that the disruption of children's link with school education could have long term consequences, child-friendly multi-purpose centres called 'Pailagams' were built – initially to serve as temporary shelters but gradually to be used as learning centres for children.

The relief and rehabilitation process was based on the perceived and expressed needs of the children. Indeed, the entire process of setting up the learning centres was extremely participatory. The suggestions that came from the traumatised children during the psycho-social assessment were incorporated in the design of these centres. Thus, the centres had ramps rather than steps as children were scared of the expanse of the sea. All the blackboards were small and the electrical appliances and connections were shock resistant. None of the rooms had locks. Of course, standard play equipments were provided. More than 8,000 children have benefited from these centres and inroads have been made into a community affected by such a horrific disaster.

The experience has been that although the engagement with children is possible during disasters, the process of engagement is weaker. This is because the support structures in such situations are very fluid and the immediate needs like food, water and shelter take precedence over everything else. The empowerment that has resulted through Bal Panchayats is a product of long-term engagement. However, in disaster situations children take well to the support structures but whether they will be able to utilize it optimally is yet to be seen.

c) Terre Des Hommes (Germany)

Terre des hommes is an international federation of national Tdh chapters, that views itself as a citizen's initiative against injustices, especially those faced by children in distress, and works for creation of a just and peaceful world for the present and future generation of children. Tdh Germany is one such chapter initiated in 1967. It began its India/South Asia Programme in October 1975.

The Tdh Germany - India Programme presently supports more than 160 small organizations, many of whom work in remote areas. These projects are mainly concerned with promoting children's rights, empowering women and children, promoting people centred and sustainable models of development. They involve a wide range of strategies and activities - working with child labourers with the aim of educating and empowering them and their families, campaigning for the eradication of child labour through changes in the laws; offering relief and support to other vulnerable children, promoting equal status for girl children and women through legal aid, shelter, education and vocational training, campaigning for the rights of displaced and marginalized groups and building alliances with different groups to oppose injustice and discrimination.

Although Tdh began discussions in the mid 1990s, it has made concerted efforts to promote children's participation in its work with the partner organizations essentially in the last three to four years. This has entailed discussions and debates on CRC and children's participation during partners' meetings. Many partners have had limited understanding but some have been facilitating children's participation in various ways.

Promoting understanding among staff and partners

Tdh envisages the value and processes related to children's participation to grow by supporting and promoting the work being done by its partner organizations. It believes that children's participation should be an integral part of organizational philosophy rather than a project driven activity. However, it is in the learning mode. It is in the process of developing a holistic organizational understanding so that it can introduce active children's participation in its programmes with the partners.

Recognising that organizations working with children have a crucial role and that their staff members need necessary understanding and skills if they are to encourage children's participation, Tdh has since 2005 begun making concerted efforts to build understanding about the conceptual and practical dimensions of children's participation among its staff members, partner organizations and children. It has organized training programmes in collaboration with HAQ Centre for Child Rights and Save the Children, Sweden. Attempt is made to involve both adults (staff of the partner NGOs) and children (from the communities or the children's groups that they are working with).

Meanwhile, Tdh staff have been monitoring the work of the partners and exploring how they could provide timely and appropriate inputs and support interventions to promote children's participation for their development. During the evaluation of a Tdh workshop for partners in Maharashtra and Goa, it was felt that the participating organizations should organize workshops in their own regions/work area to reach out to organizations working on children's issues even though they may not be associated with Tdh. Two such workshops were organized.

As the process of learning continues, there remain some concerns among the staff. There is disagreement with the position taken by some organizations that could justify children's 'right to work' in the name of their participation, as it could deprive children on other rights (e.g. health, education and protection). Then there are reservations about the practice – how can children's participation be implemented? What is likely to be the response of the adults in the community, and if the organization (Tdh) and its partners are prepared and competent

to deal with their reactions and consequences? In view of these concerns, Tdh insists on equal participation of the adult community members (such as teachers, headmasters and Panchayat members) in the programmes related to children.

Promotion of children's forum – Bal Manch

Tdh's approach has been child-centric within a wider developmental perspective. According to Sharmishtha, many of Tdh partners work with children but were not aware that in their processes by encouraging formation of children's groups they have been promoting 'children's participation'. Indeed, many of them have been promoting and supporting Bal Manch². The involvement and level of participation of children in these forums varies, depending primarily on the experience of the facilitating organizations and the role undertaken by children. Nonetheless, these forums create platforms which give children an opportunity to express their views, raise issues, make complaints, evolve ideas and advocate on issues which are closely linked with their lives. Children work on strategies to ensure their participation in decision making at different levels. The efforts of Tdh and partners are geared towards children's participation in the institutions such as the family, the community, the schools, local governance structures and the civil society organizations.

Creating an enabling environment for children's rights and children's participation

At one level, Tdh lends support to a host of field-based, grass root organizations and people led initiatives. At another level, it provides financial and organizational support to networks and campaigns such as Campaign against Child Trafficking (CACT) and Campaign against Child Labour (CACL). This is an opportunity for voicing of the issues and concerns of children belonging to poor and marginalised communities in the discussions and debates on developmental issues, which impact on their rights and well-being and contribute to the campaigns for enabling socio-cultural and political environment.

Children's participation in disaster situations

Tdh in collaboration with Tata Institute of Social Sciences had organized an International Workshop on Rights of Children in Disaster Situation where the concept of children's participation was widely discussed. After disasters, be it tsunami in Tamil Nadu, floods in Orissa, or earthquake in Gujarat, Tdh has prioritised children's issues and its interventions have sought to create a safe environment, child friendly spaces so that they can express their opinions and enhance the capacities of children's groups.

² Shaishav and Ganatar in Gujarat, Dilasa, Balprafulta and Yuva Mitra in Maharashtra, Human Welfare Association in Uttar Pradesh, Nirdesh and Bhoomika Vihar in Bihar, Asare, Aralu, Kids and RLHP in Karnataka, CSED and SNEHA in Tamil Nadu, Ankuram, CAMEL, ARD, SARDS and HELP in Andhra Pradesh are among the Tdh partners who have actively promoted children's right to participation.

4.3 Campaigns and Networks

a) Campaign against Child Trafficking (CACT)

The Campaign Against Child Trafficking (CACT) is a network of civil society organizations from about 17 states which seeks to end child trafficking in all its forms. It views child trafficking as both the cause and consequence of violation of children's basic rights and aims at ending sale and purchase of children as commodities. It was launched formally in India on 12th December 2001 as a part of the International Campaign against Child Trafficking (ICaCT) after a series of four national level consultations.

CACT has been working towards the recognition of the issue amongst the policy makers, government functionaries and the general public at large and is currently seeking an extension of the legal definition of trafficking in India and a comprehensive legislation that recognizes trafficking in all its forms.

Through its various programmes, CACT has tried to address all aspects of trafficking from the point of view of children. It strongly advocates for elimination of child trafficking either *with* direct involvement of children or through lobbying *for* children. In its scheme of things, children's participation implies providing the right kind of information to children and adults so that they become active agents in the prevention of child trafficking. Simultaneously, it seeks to create an environment in which children are able to articulate their views on child trafficking which has many sensitive dimensions. This is done through various outreach programmes and advocacy.

Sensitisation of adults

CACT tried to work with children's groups in villages organized as "Bal Panchayats" but in view of the opposition from adults of the community had to change tactics. Given the fact that Panchayats are seen as political bodies and adults had apprehensions when children were involved, decided to address these formations as "children's groups" and "informal collectives". Furthermore, through adult-child workshops, CACT encouraged the village Panchayat elders to work in tandem with these children.

CACT strives to sensitize the adult communities on the issue of trafficking through advocacy. Through formal and informal interactions and workshops, organized through the network partners, it seeks to inform and motivate adult groups about the value of respecting the personhood of a child and to prevent their trafficking as a commodity.

Parallel sensitisation workshops for adults and children

CACT in collaboration with its member NGOs conducts community-level workshops in various states with both children and adults. This parallel process of addressing the child and the adult is considered important for sensitising people about children's issues with regard to their rights. Usually these workshops of four to five days duration begin with basic questions (e.g. who is a child?) and then proceeds to trace the history of the movement for children's rights, highlighting the role and content of the CRC and the genesis of the notion of children's participation. They conclude with discussions on the ways and means of effectively ensuring children's participation.

The frequency of these workshops depends on the need and the requirement of the network partners and the workshop content is structured according to the identified needs and requirements of such inputs, in a particular area/ sphere of work that the partners are engaged in.

The national secretariat of CACT has developed a users' manual for people/organizations working against child trafficking and produced IEC materials such as desk calendars, posters, stickers in order to spread public awareness about the issue.

Monitoring of child trafficking by children

Since children were usually the first to know if any child was being lured on the pretext of work in the city, CACT thought it would be useful to train these children's groups as a monitoring body to keep a check on child trafficking within their villages. The children's groups were encouraged to act on any such trafficking incident either independently or by informing the relevant adult authorities. This proved to be effective in including children in stopping child trafficking to a certain extent. In one instance, five girls from Haryana knew of two minor girls in their village who were being married off and their timely intervention with the help of the Sarpanch of the Panchayat prevented the child marriage. CACT recognizing this act of bravery advocated for these five girls to be included as recipients of the National Bravery Award.

Organization of public events with children

CACT also works directly with children through workshops and public events. The children are involved in public events like poster making competitions, organizing cultural programmes on the founding day of CACT on 12th of December, producing leaflets, handouts, stickers, T-shirts conveying the social message of preventing child trafficking across the country. On one such event held on 12th December, the children who had been victims of child trafficking shared their experiences by narrating personal testimonies creatively through street plays. A public memorandum was prepared with the children, which was then circulated among various influential MPs and other ministers in Delhi. It is through such measures that CACT has been able to build a strong advocacy base by involving the children.

Policy advocacy against child trafficking with children

Listening to children and taking their opinion into consideration is central to CACT's mandate. In the Asian Social Forum held in Hyderabad in 2002, CACT provided a platform to a group of children, who were victims of child trafficking, to share their experiences directly. CACT took these experiences to strongly advocate for an extended and inclusive definition that could look at trafficking in all its forms. States Vipin, "Usually the most visible and recognized form of trafficking is child labour and prostitution. But we want the law to recognise other forms as well such as forced child beggary, traditional form of prostitution such as devdasi tradition, child marriages and so on"

Various members of CACT have represented the issues of children such as HIV/AIDS, Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, organized workshops on child trafficking such a media personnel, government functionaries and representatives, police, NGOs and grassroots level workers and communities in various states including North-East India. But

concerted attempts are also made to ensure that children's views are adequately reflected in the deliberations.

As the children were being left out of any consultative process of the executive and the legislature on the proposed amendments to the Child Marriage (Restraint) Act, CACT facilitated a consultative process with a forum of street and working children called "Badhte Kadam" to elicit their views and forward to them to the government. "Bal Adalat" was also organized in October 2005 to inform the children on the amendments being proposed and to seek their view on it. These outcomes were then shared with various Parliamentarians and now the Parliamentary Standing Committee has been forced to look into the proposed amendments to consider children's views. In this manner, CACT seeks to operate as a strong pressure group on behalf of children to lobby against child trafficking and to bring about legal amendments to address trafficking.

Child Rights for WSF (CR4WSF)

Child Rights for World Social Forum 2004 emerged as an umbrella group of about 80 organizations of children and networks and alliances working for children's rights within and outside India as a challenge to the development discourse that favours globalisation and market forces. It was a coordinated attempt to reflect the centrality of children in the development agenda and an opportunity to project children and young people as an asset rather than a liability population.

The promoters of CR4WSF believed that the vision of a better world and the conception of sustainable development had to be based on child-centredness, which is possible only if children have a defining and determining role to play. The platform of WSF was seen as an opportunity to link the issue of children's rights with other movements working for the rights of the poor and the marginalized. Thus, they came together to create a platform for interaction and engagement among the diverse NGOs and networks towards exploring commonalities and finding ways of sustaining their efforts collectively.

Organization of children's forum

At the World Social Forum 2004, the CR4WSF arranged a session on the theme "Children's Rights in a Globalizing world: Who is responsible? Who is accountable?" At this very well attended session, children shared their perspective on various issues, including how to make the world fit for all children. Prior to this session, manifestations by children through plays and songs and various interactive sessions such as kite making, painting and drawing were also conducted. They also attended an international youth camp where film screenings, discussions, street play and cultural events were performed. Child journalists produced "a walking news bulletin" during the course of WSF.

It was an attempt by CR4WSF to show the world that "children are a meaningful constituency." But today its promoters are critically reflecting on their own processes regarding how to take the children's agenda forward. The following are some of the lessons that they have identified from the past experience:

- More thought and experience is required for determining what children can do, how they can express their views better, and how they can be as accepted as serious stakeholders in the development processes. This entails process orientation and high level of innovation.
- Conversely, adult organizations need to seek a more active volunteer leadership and make children a visible entity and whose presences are acknowledged and recognized at different forums.

b) Delhi Bal Adhikar Manch

Delhi Bal Adhikar Manch is a forum of about 24 NGOs who work on various issues related to children in Delhi. It was formed in 1997-98 when about some partner organizations of Child Relief and You (CRY) came together with the objective of providing a platform for children. Later other organizations joined the network which seeks to raise a collective voice advocating for children's rights and well-being. It is a state alliance partner of NAFRE.

Almost 60 per cent of the Manch members work directly with the children in the urban slums and rehabilitation colonies while the others are advocacy groups championing the cause of children rights, either through direct involvement or indirect representation of children. The partners have considerable experience of working with and for children and have managed to include children in their administrative and decision making structures. Being a network, the Manch relies essentially on the partner organizations for any engagement with children.

As a forum they meet once every month to discuss not only issues that directly impact children but also debate over all other topical and relevant social problems such as urban poverty alleviation, relocation of slum clusters, privatisation of water and electricity and other such concerns. They believe that children's wellbeing cannot be looked at in isolation and is deeply affected by the socio-economic and environmental factors around them.

The Manch seeks to develop an integrated view of children's development by relating it with their immediate surroundings and widening its own platform. Even though the forum strives to arrive at concrete solutions to the larger social issues, yet they remain focused on addressing these problems from the perspective of children.

Inclusion of children in decision-making processes

The Manch seeks to include children in its decision making processes by creating children's watch groups in various local communities so that they can be an active part of the social and political processes that directly impact them.

In the present administrative structure, representatives from the partner organizations rather than the communities form the district body of the Manch. Towards involving the communities, the Manch is keen on creating smaller administrative units at the community level, who could then find representation in the district body. Similarly, by forming community youth forums, the Manch hopes that some young people could be elected to the district body as well.

However, achieving this level of engagement with the communities or the young people has been a challenging process. Says Rajendra Dangwal, "Till now we have not been able to include children or youth in our administrative structure. The main reason has been constraints of various kinds that the partner organizations face". Administrative limitations, resource crunch, time management and on occasions, ideological conflicts between different groups are some of the factors that the Manch has to face and yet try and move ahead with. He estimates that it would take at least two more years before the Manch is able to involve children actively in its functioning.

Children's participation in campaigns

The Manch has been associated with many child rights campaigns such as CACT and CACL. It led an active campaign to ensure 25 per cent reservation of children below the poverty line in private schools in accordance with the High Court order. Various marginalised communities across Delhi were informed about the High Court order, and mobilised and motivated to use the Right to Information Act to get further related information on the issue. The adult members were actively encouraged to comply with this order and enrol their children in private/public schools so that they could get good education. On 28th February, 2006, a massive rally was organized in Delhi where about 60,000 representatives from civil society groups, activists, child rights' workers and children from grassroots communities marched from Ambedkar Bhavan to Jantar Mantar to campaign for the 'Common School System'.

c) India Alliance for Child Rights (IACR)

Since its inception as a collective of rights oriented NGOs, IACR has been trying to strengthen relationships amongst a variety of civil society organizations which work for children's rights and seeking positive leverage with the government for effective policy formulation. It has been contributing to the ongoing national plans and voicing recommendations on any bill or legislation to be passed by the government. Increasingly, it is devising ways of addressing socio-economic contexts of development from a children's perspective.

Commitment to children's rights entails that children be considered an important resource. IACR has worked with its partners to include child-centric views and perspective on all social issues that they engage with. It is essentially advocating for 'respectful' participation, a small but significant step in the Indian society where the value of participation in terms of informing let alone seeking consent is not there – especially when women and children are concerned. It considers children to be a group of individuals, like many other marginalised groups, who have a point of view that needs to be acknowledged and respected.

In its own work, IACR has been building a conscious interaction with children increasingly by approaching children as "younger equals". It strongly believes that in order to pursue a thinking engagement with children, the adults must be weary of "talking down" to them and must treat them as younger equal counterparts. In the interactive processes, therefore, efforts are made to make children analyse the different everyday contexts that they inhabit, so that they are challenged to think for themselves.

Children's participation for policy formulation and advocacy

IACR's constituents are children's rights organizations who tend to focus on the poor, marginalised and vulnerable children. It is therefore imperative that IACR has sought to include these children in its policy advocacy.

IACR is currently deliberating over the 11th National Plan with special focus on Delhi in order to give children scope for visibility and participation. While it is preparing submissions for the UN Special Session on children's right to be heard in September 2006 together with

its members, it is also holding a parallel consultative process with children in order to prepare possible statements which the children could present. It is expected to mark the presence of the South Asian constituency of children on the right to be heard and is an attempt to perceive the millennium development goals through the child rights perspective.

Planning for Children's Participation in the India Social Forum

IACR has begun work through its Delhi based partner organizations towards representation by children at the India Social Forum to be held in Delhi in November 2006. The local partners, which work with children across various pockets of Delhi, have organized groups of children from their own areas who then interact with children from other areas. IACR facilitates these interactions.

This exercise has been undertaken to ensure representation and consolidation of differing perspectives of children from different areas and different contexts about the immediate problems. It is based on the experience that children tend to have a local perspective and need to be exposed to other perspectives to be able to develop a more comprehensive and balanced perspective. Thus, children belonging to different socio-economic groups are being brought together.

The process of representation is democratic and creative. Groups of children from each area select their own representatives. These representatives from different areas meet and further select a smaller body. This body then develops a presentation of what children are thinking about in the city of Delhi.

The selection process is an interesting role play – a young parliament of sorts, in which children assume and enact the characters of different adult stakeholders like community elders, government officials like the local commissioner and MLAs.

Various other interesting methods have been deployed to share and exchange information about what children would like to speak or talk about. For instance, each group of children have been given cameras and taught to operate. They are expected to take pictures of whatever they want to talk of about their localities. Such a photo journey is eventually expected to make for an interesting representation.

This has been a meaningful endeavour because it reflects an intergenerational exchange of a democratic consultative process where children have been able to put forth their own goals and aspirations. Through this process, children elicit opinion but also actively participate and analyse the issues. They are being heard on their own terms, which under normal circumstances, is overlooked.

Kanchan and Sonia, young residents of Tughlaqabad village, who have been a part of this process since its inception, say that, "We have fun here and also find this exercise very useful. It is very nice to meet other children and young people from various parts of Delhi and to share our perspectives on children's rights."

Pinky, Sambul and Anita, reflecting on their involvement with this process shared that, "Using the medium of photographs has been very exciting and challenging at the same time. This process has been an eye-opener for us as well because we have been able to see our own community and its problems in a new light. After our various interactions with other children, we now strongly believe that children can make a difference and the Delhi of our dreams is possible."

IACR intends to increase their constituency to all kinds of children and to include the non crisis community of children as well. They want to tap children to see what they are thinking and do not merely want to reach out to them. An average school going child from an

average family is usually taken to be served and provided for, and therefore sidelined by NGO programmes and projects. But IACR would like to bring such children in its ambit because by the very virtue of never being consulted and left out from participatory processes they could be deprived. Accordingly, a support structure for all children is being sought to be created which could enable representation of issues and problems of all communities of children and holistic articulation of all of children's concerns.

Annexure I. List of Interviewees

Archina Dhar, SOS Children's Villages of India
Asha Iyer, Save the Children UK
Bharti Ali, HAQ: Centre for Child Rights
Deen Khan, Save the Children UK
Deepika Gupta, ABHAS
Enakshi Ganguly Thukral, HAQ: Centre for Child Rights
Jaya Shrivastava, Ankur
K. Vaidyanathan, Save the Children Canada
Parul Soni, Save the Children Finland
Prabhat Kumar Jha, Ankur
Rajendra Dangwal, Delhi Bal Adhikar Manch
Razia Ismail Abbasi, India Alliance for Child Rights
Sanjay Gupta, CHETNA
Sajid Ikram, ABHAS
Sharmishtha, Terre Des Hommes (Germany)
Sharmila, Ankur
Subhash, CHETNA
Verity Corbett, Plan International (India)
Vijay Shankar, Plan International (India)
Vipin Bhatt, CACT

Amirul, Anita, Rukhsana, Sundari, Meenu, Preeti, Sambul, Kanchan, Sonia and Vandana, children associated with ABHAS and with IACR

Ganesh, Sonu, Veeru, Suresh, Beenu and Pinka from *Badhte Kadam* Kalka Mandir, children's organization associated with CHETNA

Annexure II. List of Documents Reviewed

Name of the Organization	Referred Publications
ABHAS	Organization Brochure
Ankur	Annual Report Apr. 2004- Mar. 2005
CHETNA	Organization Brochure <i>Bal Hitaishi Police Kaise Bane</i> <i>Balak Nama – Badhte Kadam</i> Newsletter
HAQ centre for Child Rights	Organization Brochure Annual Report Jan 2004- Dec. 2005
SOS Children's Villages of India	<i>A child right's to a family</i> <i>SOS Messenger – Newsletter</i>
Plan International (India)	Organization Brochure <i>Positive Frames - Reflections from the street</i> <i>Shaping their own destiny</i> Plan Newsletters Oct – Dec.2003 & Aug. 2005
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Save the Children UK	Fewkes, Jacqueline H. M. & M. Sharif Bhatt. "Our Voices... Are you listening" <i>Children's committee for village development.</i>
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Terre Des Hommes	Organization Brochure Annual Report 2005 South Asia
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CR4WSF	<i>The group on children's rights in a globalizing world – a position report</i>