

Children's Parliaments and Children's Councils in World Vision Programmes



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Introduction

Recently there have been many exciting opportunities opening up for children and young people to participate in children's parliaments and in children's councils. We have examples from around the world which are important to share: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Democratic Republic of Congo, India and Lebanon.

There are an impressive number of bright and inspiring children and young people who are interested in contributing to public debate and influencing decisions that affect their lives. These five child-led structures demonstrate how opportunities for children and young people's participation in different levels of decision-making processes are increasing. We are witnessing a profound change in paradigms related to child participation, with decision-makers changing their perception of children as objects of protection to agents of change and rights-holders.

These changes are the result of perseverance and determination of children and young people to participate in decision-making spaces and have their voices heard. They are also the result of the development of frameworks and programmes that seek to empower children and ensure the implementation of the principles contained in the UNCRC.

We believe that the children's parliaments are solid foundations from which to promote decision-making processes that are more collaborative and inclusive for children and young people. However, it is important to remember that children will be prevented from having their voices heard, unless, we as adults provide the conditions and support needed in order to make it happen.

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PROJECT GOAL

Ensure that the voices of children and young people are being heard by the decision makers in Bangladesh

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

1. Create an enabling environment where children can meet and share their views
2. Promote the principles of openness and transparency
3. Ensure democratic selection mechanisms that result in a diverse representation of gender, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status, etc.
4. Ensure that children parliamentarians are accountable to their peers
5. Establish linkages to the National Parliament



The Bangladesh Children Parliament

PROJECT CONTEXT

In response to the rising need to create a nation-wide children's network, Child Parliament was formed in 2003. Initially starting with representatives from only a few districts, it has now expanded to include representatives from all 64 districts of Bangladesh.

PROJECT APPROACH

The idea of Child Parliament originated from child councils that were formed to deal with local children's issues – Issues that could not be handled by the Union child Councils were taken to the Upazila (sub-district) Child Councils. Unresolved issues would then be dealt with at the District Child Councils.

The Child Parliament is a platform of young people aged from 12 to 18 years of age and its structure consists of 128 members from all 64 districts of Bangladesh.

The Child Parliamentarians are elected by members of the National Children's Task Force in each district. Each parliament is made up of one Speaker, two Deputy Speakers, and two Advisers. It also has a core committee of five members.



KEY COMPONENTS

Election of child parliamentarians through a process that reflects a true representation of their peers.

Accountability mechanisms help to ensure child parliamentarians are accountable to their constituents.

Interaction with the National Parliament creates clear channels for the decisions of child parliaments to influence the proceedings of parliament.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The Government of Bangladesh now supports members of the child parliament to participate as members of district Child Rights Monitoring Committees.

The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWCA), through Bangladesh Shishu Academy (BSA), has been providing facilitation, support and a recent commitment of financial support in the next financial year.

After seeing the impact of the Child Parliaments in Bangladesh, international work are making plans to collaborate with the child parliamentarians in order to expand its reach to the community levels (i.e., sub-district and union levels).

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the British Council are already collaborating with the Child Parliament by hosting "National Child Parliament" sessions.

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PROJECT GOAL

Maximise the opportunities to influence the policies that affect children and young people in Bolivia.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

1. Provides a platform for the participation of children and young people in the political processes of the country
2. Promote the rights of children in Bolivia.
3. Maximise the opportunity to influence the policies that affect children and young people in Bolivia.

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National Congress of Children and Young People

Influencing policies that impact children and young people in Bolivia.

PROJECT CONTEXT

In Bolivia, the socio-political participation of children and young people at the national level was initiated when child representatives from Bolivia participated in the United Nations General Assembly Special Session for Children in New York in 2002.

The National Congress of Children and Young People in its present form was first established in 2010. Although it is not officially mandated, its views and opinions are respected by policy makers. It is an evolving institution that provides a platform for the participation of children and young people in the political processes of the country.

PROJECT APPROACH

In Bolivia, the political participation of children and young people in a national parliamentary structure was strongly self-determined by the children and had an empowering impact on the young Delegates and Senators, including providing them with opportunities to develop their competence, negotiation and leadership skills as well as public speaking.

This impact was perceived not only in relation to the individuals but in some cases, also in relation to their position and the respect they gained within their communities.

KEY COMPONENTS

The members of the Congress include children of all age groups, from urban and rural areas and from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, with almost equal participation of boys and girls. Children up to the age of 12 years old are Delegates, and those aged 13 to 17 years old are Senators. The Congress is composed of approximately 130 Delegates and 36 Senators, representing the six regions of the country

The Congress members are elected either through a school-based election process or in a direct election at region-wide meetings of children and adolescents. The election procedure differs from region to region. It is monitored and facilitated by the Bolivian Alliance of Childhood and Adolescence.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Participation in political changes: Child members of the Congress developed a total of 147 law proposals in the time frame 2010-2013. Of these, 72 were adopted by the Congress. The law proposals were developed in thematic areas that concern children in their direct lives and living environments. A considerable number of the law proposals adopted by the Congress were taken into consideration by the Bolivian government for the national legal reform process.

PROJECT GOAL

To educate and promote the rights of children against all forms of discrimination and violations of their rights

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

4. Educate children on their rights
5. Instil the spirit of responsibility, community and accountability
6. Empower children to exercise their freedom of association
7. Advocate with national and international partners to support children, especially the most vulnerable
8. Work towards eradicating juvenile crime



Child Parliament (PARDE)

Equipping a new generation of children with moral and intellectual values necessary to address the challenges of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

PROJECT CONTEXT

Since 2011, child parliaments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have been organizing, children, youth, parents, and community leaders on the rights of the child as prescribed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

PROJECT APPROACH

Child parliaments in the DRC select children with the cooperation of the school system. Parliaments consist of 80% who attend school and 20% who do not attend school.

Children who want to be part of PARDE can ask to be considered by a written request from their parents. Children must be between the ages of 8 and 18.

The initiative supports the social reintegration of marginalized children, such as former child soldiers, back into the community. It also sensitizes youth on the fight against HIV / AIDS and other STDs



KEY COMPONENTS

The parliament body consists of 40 parliamentarians divided into ten clubs of 40 parliamentarians. Each parliamentarian is elected for a term of two years, which can be renewed once. Clubs elect members through a Steering Committee. Parliamentary children bear the titles "Honourable" and are guided by instructors.

The parliament is divided into seven committees including:

- The Law Commission
- The Commission of Health and HIV/AIDS
- The Board of Education
- The Commission of Disadvantaged children
- The Board of Games, Culture, Art and Leisure
- The Commission for Justice, Peace and Reconciliation
- The Commission of Environment and Natural Resources

All these committees work closely with the accompaniment of one or more Supervisors.

ACHIEVEMENTS

So far in 2014 alone, 2,371 children, 1,000 youth, 924 parents and 94 community leaders were educated on juvenile delinquency, anti-smoking, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy on minors, and HIV / AIDS.

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PROJECT GOAL

To create a global movement of and for children with disabilities by bringing children together, raising awareness about their rights and empowering them to bring about change

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

9. Provide a platform for children with disabilities to discuss the issues they face
10. Enable children with disabilities to learn their rights and entitlements from the government
11. Present their demands to the government, the media and other members of civil society

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National Forum of Children with Disabilities (CWDs)

Empowering children and youth with disabilities to bring about change in their communities at all levels

PROJECT CONTEXT

The National Congress of Children and Young People in its present form was first established in 2010. Although it is not officially mandated, its views and opinions are respected by policy makers. It is an evolving institution that provides a platform for the participation of children and young people in the political processes of the country.

PROJECT APPROACH

All children with disabilities are encouraged to participate in the state assemblies. Gender balance is taken into consideration. The percentage of CWDs could be 70% from rural and 30% from urban.

Children and youth have committed to:

1. Urging parents of disabled children to send them to school while also encouraging the CWDs who left school to continue with their studies.
2. Creating community awareness on the rights of people with disabilities
3. Working collectively towards the well-being of people with disabilities.
4. Motivating CWDs to be part of the social activities eliminating their inner inhibitions.
5. Creating opportunities for all children with disabilities to develop their skills and reach their fullest potential.

KEY COMPONENTS

When representatives of the National Forum of Children with Disabilities gather, activities are conducted through workshops and curriculums. A workshop will consist of multiple child-friendly sessions to articulate the views and opinions of children.

Workshops are facilitated by trained facilitators. It is important to maintain flexibility for the children to have fun, whether it is through dance or story-telling.

ACHIEVEMENTS

This platform offered an opportunity for children to get themselves heard from local to regional to national and even international levels.

This project is helping children to develop their self-confidence and self-esteem. The very presence of a forum for children with disabilities augurs well for future initiatives along these directions. Their goal is to work towards eliminating discrimination towards children on all grounds.



PROJECT GOAL

Create an adequate space for children to participate and meet peers from different backgrounds across social, religious and ethnic boundaries, especially the most vulnerable.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

1. Contribute to children's empowerment by involving them in decision-making processes about issues that affect them
2. Promote the informed, effective and responsible citizenship of children.
3. Build children's capacities on child rights, life skills, tolerance and diversity
4. Engage children in learning about social-justice-centred topics
5. Equip children with tools and knowledge to enable them to implement their own child-led initiatives and influence their communities and peers.

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Children's Council

Empowering and Connecting Children

Children's Council is a body of child members set up at the community level to provide a space for children to participate in grassroots and national levels advocacy initiatives and to promote informed, effective and responsible citizenship.

PROJECT CONTEXT

Lebanon signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child which proclaims that the best interest of the child must be the primary consideration in all decisions concerning the child, and the state must provide appropriate assistance if parents, or other legal guardians, fail in their duties. Despite the remarkable progress that has been made, significant challenges remain in relation to participation of children. Children in Lebanon are not recognized as decision-makers or as individuals with the power to express informed opinions and contribute to their communities.

PROJECT APPROACH

World Vision Lebanon Advocacy strategy focuses on raising awareness and promoting the application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The strategy recognises the empowerment of children to engage in advocacy work themselves as one of the most effective approaches, and it has a strong focus on mobilizing children, building their capacity to undertake grassroots and national level advocacy, and play a critical role in removing the barriers that prevent children from enjoying their rights. As such, the Children's Council aims to ensure children are cared for, protected and participating within their communities, as outlined in the Child-Well-Being Outcomes.

KEY COMPONENTS

Representation and peer election:

Local representatives are elected by their peers. The local representatives are members of the Assembly of Representatives, who in turn elect the Board members.

Capacity building of child advocates:

Children engage in learning on child rights, life skills, advocacy techniques and peace education.

Influence policies at the local and national level: Children are equipped with tools to implement their own child-led initiatives and engage in influencing decision-making and policy processes at the community and national level.

ACHIEVEMENTS

National campaign to end violence

against children: The Children's Council raised awareness about the problem this issue and to emphasise the key role that government play in addressing the causes of violence.

Children submit child-led report to UN

Human Rights Council: The Children's Council drafted their own submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Children's Council lobbies Queen Rania on the post-2015 agenda

The Children's Council developed a report that was submitted to Queen Rania in order to ensure that children are placed at the centre of the next generation of development goals.

