



Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
(Article 12, 1)

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Promote the girl-child's awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life. Actions to be taken by governments and international and non-governmental organizations:

(a) *Provide access for girls to training, information and the media on social, cultural, economic and political issues to enable them to articulate their views;*

(b) *Support non-governmental organizations, in particular youth non-governmental organization, in their efforts to promote the equality and participation of girls in society.*
(Section L.8, 284)

The Right to Participate and the Girl Child

At the Opening of the UN General Assembly's Special Session on Children, 8 May 2002, the delegates representing the Children's Forum presented *The Children's Statement* in which the children of the world declared:

We are the world's children.

We are the victims of exploitation and abuse.

We are street children.

We are the children of war.

We are the victims and orphans of HIV/AIDS.

We are denied good quality education and health care.

We are victims of political, economic, cultural, religious and environmental discrimination.

We are the children whose voices are not being heard: it is time we are taken into account.

We want a world fit for children, because a world fit for us is a world fit for everyone.

The children went on to describe a world fit for children.

In this world, we see the active participation of children:

- *raised awareness and respect among people of all ages about every child's right to full and meaningful participation, in the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,*
- *children actively involved in decision-making at all levels and in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating all matters affecting the rights of the child.*

In order to promote the active and universal participation by all the children in the global family as agents of social change, we need to ensure that there are viable forums and structures in place that encourage and facilitate the appropriate involvement in decisions that affect their lives.

Facts to Consider

Model Practice from India

The Neighbourhood Community Network initiated a system for participation in India's southernmost district of Kanyakumari whereby children are organized into more than 7,000 neighbourhood parliaments and are federated through representative structures at the village, panchayat (an inter-village civil governance structure), block and the district levels. UNICEF, Chennai, India, has been very much involved in this effort.

A World Fit for Children

Children including adolescents must be enabled to exercise their right to express their views freely, according to their evolving capacity, and build self-esteem, acquire knowledge and skills, such as those for conflict resolution, decision-making and communication, to meet the challenges of life....
(32, 1)

MDGS

Goal 2: *Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling*

Goal 3: *Promote gender equality and empower women*

2005 World Summit

We commit ourselves to respecting and ensuring the rights of each child without discrimination of any kind...
(Outcome Document, 142)

WGG Girls' Participation Group

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Each neighbourhood parliament includes about thirty families and the children and adolescents hailing from these families. Children and adolescents in these neighbourhood parliaments come together to respond to the problems affecting their own neighbourhoods and the other levels of the federation. The parliaments focus on children's rights and help children to discuss their visions and plans for a better world.

We have seen from this experience that children, when encouraged to dream, can accomplish a great deal. Their commitment to the ideals of fraternity and justice is obvious. We believe that a global, multi-tier federation of such neighbourhood parliaments could be an effective strategy for the promotion of the participation of children as agents of change in their own lives, families, communities and nations, and help them feel they are part of a growing global community.

The experience of the Neighbourhood Community Networks in Kanyakumari is echoed in practices such as the Basic Communities of Latin America, community-based monitoring through the "neighbourhood clustering approach" in the Philippines, and the "ayalkkootams" or neighbourhood assemblies organized by the Government in Kerala, India.

Actions to Promote Girls' Participation

- National governments should develop viable, small neighbourhood forums and networking structures at the local and national levels to ensure the active and universal participation of children in decision-making so that they develop the knowledge, skills and values necessary to become active agents of social change in their own communities.
- The United Nations should develop global forums in which children can contribute to shaping policies and programs which affect their lives, their families and their communities.
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should welcome the participation of children, especially girls, in their activities and contribute to the establishment of a global, multi-tier federation of neighbourhood parliaments to promote participation of children as agents of change.

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