



The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF)
P.O. Box 1179, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia
Telephone : +251 11 662 8192/96
Fax : +251 11 662 8200
E-mail : info@africanchildforum.org
Website : www.africanchildforum.org
www.africanchild.info

Child Participation Strategy for Eastern African Countries



ACPF



Child Participation Strategy for Eastern African Countries

May 2015

THE AFRICAN CHILD POLICY FORUM (ACPF)

ACPF is an independent, not-for-profit, pan-African institution of policy research and dialogue on the African child.

ACPF was established with the conviction that putting children first on the public agenda is fundamental to the realisation of their rights and wellbeing, and to bringing about lasting social and economic progress in Africa.

ACPF's work is rights-based, inspired by universal values and informed by global experiences and knowledge. ACPF's work is guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and other relevant regional and international human rights instruments. Specifically, ACPF aims to contribute to improved knowledge on children in Africa; to monitor and report progress; to identify policy options; to provide a platform for dialogue; to collaborate with governments, intergovernmental organisations and civil society in the development and implementation of effective pro-child policies and programmes; and to promote a common voice for children in Africa.



The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF)

P.O. Box 1179, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Tel: +251 116 62 81 92/96/97/99

Fax: +251 116 62 82 00

Email: info@africanchildforum.org

Websites: www.africanchildforum.org

www.africanchild.info

© 2015 The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF)

Suggested citation:

ACPF (2015). *Child Participation Strategy for Eastern African*. Addis Ababa: The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF).

Design: MK Advertising and Printing

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Strategy was developed through a long and consultative process with the input of various individuals and organisations at different stages. ACPF acknowledges with gratitude the individual contribution of Ms. Stella A. Odongo and Prof. Julia Sloth-Nielsen to the drafting the first and final versions of the Strategy respectively. We are grateful to the participants at the Consultation Workshop on the Draft, which was held in Addis Ababa on 2 - 3 October 2014. The contributions of the participants were highly informative and invaluable in validating the country specific information and further developing the background Study that informed this Strategy. The contributions of ACPF staff; Annalies Borrel, Clemence Muzard, Gamuchirai Tagwireyi, Kidist Ejerssa, Nkatha Murungi, and Lemlem Fiseha and to the drafting of the Study and Strategy as well as in organising the validation workshop are duly acknowledged.



Save the Children

This Strategy was prepared by ACPF with the financial support of
Save the Children International.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
Child Participation Strategies for Eastern Africa	1
Background and Rationale	1
Scope	1
Target Group	1
Vision	1
Goal	1
Objectives	2
Principles	2
Guiding factors for effective child participation	3
Strategies for promoting child participation in Eastern Africa	4
Strategy 1: Domestication of international and regional standards on child participation	4
Strategy 2: Enhance and/or put in place nationally recognized governance processes,	5
Strategy 3: Ensure inclusion of especially vulnerable children in child participation mechanisms	6
Strategy 4: Ensure safety and protection of participating children	6
Strategy 5: Reduce negative attitudes and beliefs on child participation and promote	7
Strategy 6: Create an evidence-base and enabling learning environment to facilitate and inform effective child participation processes	7
Monitoring and evaluation	8

CHILD PARTICIPATION STRATEGIES FOR EASTERN AFRICA COUNTRIES

Background and Rationale

The implementation of child participation as set out in international and regional child rights standards calls for purposive and concrete measures beyond the mere ratification of the instruments or recognition of the existence of the right for children to participate. The implementation of the right to participation entails both the duty to take action to eliminate barriers or enable children to overcome them, and the responsibility to abstain from actions that hinder children's participation. Though the primary responsibility to ensure child rights vests upon the government, child participation takes place in a range of settings and ways and involves a wide range of actors.

The findings from the recent *Study on Child Participation in Eastern Africa* reveals that while there is a general recognition of the right of children to participate and its usefulness for the broader protection of children's rights, the measures to ensure that the right is implemented are generally insufficient, inadequately coordinated, and not institutionalized through national structure structures and systems. Furthermore, there is no common strategy to ensure the achievement of child participation in the region.

This document encapsulating *Child Participation Strategy for Eastern Africa* is therefore intended to provide governments, CSOs, UN agencies and other actors working on child rights in Eastern Africa with a basic framework for integrating and advancing the rights of children in Eastern Africa to have their views taken into account in matters that affect them. The Strategy seeks to provide guidance with respect to the legal, policy and programmatic interventions that will enable children's perspectives to be more systematically heard and reflected upon in Eastern Africa.

Scope

The *Strategy* is intended to apply to the Eastern Africa countries covered in the study (Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia (including Somaliland and Puntland), Tanzania, and Uganda).

Target Group

The *Strategy* targets governments, CSOs, child-led initiatives, and communities working to promote the rights of children.

Vision

The vision of the *Strategy* is to guarantee the right of every child in Eastern Africa to participate in child rights governance and other mechanisms that facilitate their systematic inclusion and enable their perspectives to be taken into account.

Goal

The goal of the *Child Participation Strategy for Eastern Africa* is to provide a framework for Eastern African countries to ensure that child participation is more systematically practiced in child rights governance mechanisms as a contribution towards the realization of their rights.

Objectives

The objectives are to:

- i. Establish guidelines on child participation in Eastern Africa
- ii. Strengthen regional and national institutional frameworks, commitments and capacities for child participation in Eastern Africa.

Principles

The following principles shall guide the promotion of child participation:

- **Transparency and honesty:** Children should be provided with full but age-appropriate information and be given a genuine opportunity to influence decision making. Children should know the background, purpose, risks, and possible outcomes of their participation, before they can decide whether or not to participate. They should be clear about the limits of their influence and should be given feedback once decisions are reached.
- **Relevance:** Children should participate on issues that are relevant to them (such as health, education, recreation, safety and security), and that draws on their knowledge and competencies. Adults should listen to children's views and support them to participate appropriately in decision making processes. All child participation initiatives should be based on the concept of child participation as a fundamental human right and therefore an obligation and not merely a gift by sympathetic adults. Child participation should not be offered or withdrawn as a reward or punishment.
- **Safety:** Methods and techniques used as well as the environment in which children are enabled to participate should be child-friendly, safe, and encouraging for participation. Children involved in participatory processes should be protected as defined in child protection policies and procedures.
- **Non-discrimination:** All children regardless of sex, disability, fortune, ethnicity, gender or all other grounds recognised under the CRC and ACRWC should be provided with an equal opportunity to participate. Efforts should be made to ensure that all children, particularly those who are marginalised, children from poor families, children with disabilities and children who are orphaned and vulnerable, have the opportunity to participate.
- **Early Involvement:** Children should be involved from the earliest stage of any initiatives so that they have the opportunity to shape or influence both the process and the outcomes.
- **Voluntary involvement:** Participation should be voluntary and children should be allowed to leave or stop participating at any stage during the process. For example, taking children out of school to attend a conference without their agreement or active involvement is not an ethical form of participation.
- **Best Interest of the child:** All child participation should give effect to article 3 of the UNCRC and article 4 of the ACRWC which calls on State Parties to ensure that in all actions concerning children, their best interest is a prime consideration, that children are adequately protected in all actions taken by them or by adults in their favour, and that adults working for the care and protection of children are competent especially in matters of safety.
- **Accountability:** Children should receive feedback on the extent to which their views have been taken into account, and on any follow up process after they have been assisted to participate.

A minimum number of considerations need to be in place to facilitate meaningful child participation (see Figure 1) . These include:

Figure 1 Guiding factors for effective child participation



Awareness creation - Families, communities and public officials must be aware and have a shared understanding of children’s right to participate and what this implies in terms of putting in place the appropriate mechanisms. Awareness amongst children, parents, communities and decision- makers has the potential to reshape traditional (negative) attitudes about the participation of children and reduce the misconceptions that hinder the promotion of child participation.

Capacity building - Effective child participation implies the need to put in place capacities, in terms of policies, skilled personnel, infrastructure and institutional mechanisms. There is a need to develop the capacity of both children and adults to facilitate meaningful child participation at all the levels. The capacity building process should start with a comprehensive capacity needs assessment which will form a basis for the capacity enhancement initiatives. Governments need to provide sustainable and continuing pre- and in-service training for all professionals working with and for children on how to implement child participation.

Guidelines and standards - Lack of common guidelines and standards for child participation was identified as one of the factors affecting genuine child participation in the Eastern African countries. To streamline and systematize child participation, there is need for standards on ethical and meaningful participation at the national level.

Institutional frameworks - There is need for institutionalisation of child participation in decision making through permanent organizational structures in schools, communities, local government, other government agencies, and in policy processes. Children should be involved in on-going processes, discussions and organizations in their own country as a matter of practice. A legislative basis for children’s parliaments and similar devolved structures is desirable.

Resource allocation - Facilitating the meaningful participation of children requires adequate resources. States ought to develop, allocate, and share the resources necessary to support child participation. Such resources include time, financial, human and organizational resources and a variety of materials and tools.

Research and learning – child participation should be the subject of on-going research, with the results influencing future initiatives; monitoring and evaluation should be built into child participation processes.

Strategies for promoting child participation in Eastern Africa

Informed by the principles and parameters described above, the Child Participation Strategy for Eastern African includes the application of the following six strategies to promote and implement child participation in East Africa:

- Strategy 1:** Domesticating of international and regional standards on child participation
- Strategy 2:** Putting in place nationally recognized governance processes, guidelines and mechanisms that enable child participation to be deliberate, systematic and accountable
- Strategy 3:** Ensuring inclusion of especially vulnerable children in child participation mechanisms through targeted measures
- Strategy 4:** Ensuring safety and protection of participating children
- Strategy 5:** Reducing negative attitudes and beliefs on child participation and promoting positive cultures, practices and beliefs
- Strategy 6:** Creating an evidence-based and enabling learning environment to facilitate and inform effective child participation processes, with data collection and evaluation as a basis for future initiatives

These strategies are described in more detail below:

Strategy 1: Domesticating of international and regional standards on child participation

How to implement this strategy

- Ratify relevant international and regional instruments, particularly the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- Remove legal and policy barriers to the full recognition of child's right to be heard
- Involve children in law reform processes through ensuring their participation
- Ensure that national law provides for access to justice for children where their rights are violated
- Enact national legislation to domesticate international standards
- Submit regular State Party reports to the treaty monitoring bodies
- Involve children in reporting to treaty bodies, including in the validation of State party and CSO reports
- Ensuring that children are able to give evidence to the widest possible extent in justice processes
- Translate laws into local languages to enable dissemination to children
- Review all the laws and applicable policies on ratification to identify what needs to be added or removed
- Dissemination in a manner understandable to children and awareness creation on such laws is an obligation of State Parties

Strategy 2: Enhance and/or put in place nationally recognized governance processes,

guidelines and mechanisms that enable child participation to be deliberate, systematic and accountable

National structures, institutional mechanisms and dedicated programmes ought to systematically mainstream child participation.

How to implement this strategy

- Develop national child participation guidelines and an implementation manual
- Ensure that Children's Parliaments are institutionalised eg through giving them a legislative basis
- Incorporate child participation into all government processes affecting children e.g. education and health policy design and implementation
- Ensure that children's views are taken into account in the development of all, policies, and programmes e.g. in Constitutional reform, legal developments, national plans of action and poverty reduction strategies
- Establish/strengthen formal and informal structures to enable systematic participation of children (Child School Committees, Child Rights Clubs, students Councils/Associations. Children Parliaments e.t.c).
- The annual Day of the African Child (16 June) should be planned well in advance, taking into account the concept note prepared by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights of the Child; children should participate in the planning of the day's proceedings; it should be as widely celebrated nationally as possible and with as many children as possible, taking into account all forms of media including social media; celebrations can extend to the entire month of June; a comprehensive report should be compiled and forwarded to the UNICEF AU Liaison office within three months of the conclusion of the celebrations
- Official proceedings of decision-making processes and conference outcomes should systematically reflect and document children's perspectives
- Mechanisms should be put in place to monitor and evaluate the processes and the outcomes of child participation
- Ensure the NHRIs have mechanisms in place to facilitate access to children, including channels for them to lodge complaints and receive feedback

Strategy 3: Ensure inclusion of especially vulnerable children in child participation mechanisms

All children should be given equal opportunities to engage in public decision-making processes. Measures should be put in place to ensure the participation of especially vulnerable and marginalised groups of children in governance processes at the international, regional and national levels (positive discrimination).

How to implement this strategy:

- Legislate for the non-discrimination of children in the implementation of all rights
- Ensure processes and mechanisms of governance are accessible to children with special needs such as children with disabilities, nomadic children or children in rural or remote areas, and children living or working on the street
- Strengthen the understanding of the views and capacities of vulnerable children
- Work with local partners to develop systems to ensure the fair, transparent and representative participation of all children in all processes
- Capacity building at the necessary level must be an on-going endeavour

Strategy 4: Ensure safety and protection of participating children

Stakeholders working with children have a duty of care to children with whom they engage and work with. All actions and activities must be undertaken to minimise the risk of abuse, exploitation or any negative or harmful consequences of children's participation.

How to implement this strategy:

- Develop and enforce child protection policies, procedures and child safeguarding standards at all levels
- Ensure informed consent of participating children, and maintain the confidentiality of sensitive information
- Objectively assess and take into account the risks associated with children's participation in speaking out, advocacy, campaigning and sharing information
- Adopt safeguards to minimise the risks and prevent the abuse of children participating in remote or unfamiliar environments
- Establish a formal complaints procedure to allow children to register complaints in confidence about issues that concern them
- Ensure that if a complaints mechanism or helpline is functioning, there are adequate resources and trained staff to follow up on complaints received
- Enact national laws that require CSOs and others working with children to adopt child protection policies for staff and volunteers and to oversee their implementation through registration of non-profit organisations and deregistration of those whose policies are inadequate or not implemented

Strategy 5: Reduce negative attitudes and beliefs on child participation and promote positive ones

How to implement this strategy:

- Promote the strengths, abilities and achievements of children and young people, and of their contributions to society, also by illustrating where their participation has had impact and meaning
- Increase children's visibility in civic engagement by openly endorsing and reinforcing their status as citizens and active members of society capable of and entitled to civic engagement, for example, calling for children to express views on laws or constitutional reforms through schools, clubs or other settings where they often find themselves
- Encourage families and communities to consult children when making decisions that can affect them
- Ensure that administrative and civil law processes are fully compliant with child participation principles, and that decisions makers regularly listen to and reflect children's views in their decisions
- Engage with cultural and traditional leaders to influence their attitudes to child participation
- Promote positive cultural and traditional practices, and monitor the extent to which negative practices reduce over time

Strategy 6: Create an evidence-base and enabling learning environment to facilitate and inform effective child participation processes

Research is necessary to inform law and policy reform on child participation and to determine the appropriate interventions to promote child participation with children of different levels of maturity and understanding. Consultations with children ought to be an integral part of such research. Monitoring is another important part of promoting children's participation and their right to information, expression, and association. Policy makers and CSOs are called upon to regularly review and evaluate the effectiveness of child participation initiatives on a regular basis.

How to implement this strategy:

- Document good practices of effective child participation
- Ensure that research tools and methodologies systematically create opportunities for children's perspectives to be considered
- Establish national benchmarks and targets against which to measure the extent of children's participation, such as the number of policy and legal provisions directly attributable to children's participation
- Develop impact assessment tools for evaluation of children's participation in both formal and informal child participation structures
- Continue to expand the array of techniques by which to solicit children's views, taking account of emerging technologies and their increasing accessibility to various groups of children
- Ensure data collection on child participation, and ensure that such data is disaggregated by age, sex and socio-economic situation
- Support state parties in their international and regional treaty reporting obligations by providing monitoring and evaluation information on child participation and its impact
- Ensure that ethical considerations are fully accounted for in research processes that involve children

Monitoring and evaluation

Strategy	Monitoring and evaluation; output indicators
Domestication of international and regional standards on child participation	<p>Number of laws and polices enacted reviewed and repealed; adoption of subsidiary legislation outlining standards for child protection during participation processes; formalization of child participation in school/education legislation relating to school governance; legislation relating to children’s evidence in courts ensuring the widest possible margin of participation; access to justice for children assured in law to ensure that violations of rights can be remedied; complaints mechanisms established that clearly give children the right to lodge complaints without parental assistance;</p>
Enhance and/or put in place nationally recognized governance processes, guidelines and mechanisms that enable child participation to be deliberate systematic and accountable	<p>Number of countries reporting on the involvement of children in law and policy-making making processes Have process indicators feeding in to output indicators</p> <p>Ensure that child participation (e.g. Children’s Parliaments) is enshrined in legal standards and not merely left to discretion Ensure that all organs of state and relevant parastatals or constitutional bodies (such as NHRIs) have standard operating procedures in place as to when child participation is mandated or required</p> <p>Reporting on the Day of the African Child shows increased participation of children in its celebration. And increased public awareness of children’s rights and child participation</p>
Ensure safety and protection of participating children	<p>Ensure that ethical guidelines on child participation are drawn up and disseminated</p> <p>Child protection and safeguarding policies are drawn up and implemented at all levels</p> <p>CSOs who are licensed by governments are required to have a child protection policy</p> <p>Ensure that a complaints mechanisms is developed which enables children to voice complaints; ensure sufficient resources to respond adequately, professionally and timeous to complaints received; document complaints received and responses effected, disaggregated by type of complaint, source of complaint, geographical area of complaints and type of responses initiated</p>

continued to next page...

Strategy	Monitoring and evaluation; output indicators
<p>Ensuring inclusion of especially vulnerable children in child participation mechanisms</p>	<p>Policies in place regarding recruitment/invitation/ representation of children from especially vulnerable groups to child participation processes, including Children’s Parliaments and child clubs</p> <p>Policy in place guiding CSOs and other facilitating child participation (eg schools) on how to ensure inclusion and give effect to positive discrimination (affirmative action).</p> <p>Number of such children participating in reviewing reports and Policies, disaggregated by socio-economic status, orphanhood, refugee status, disability, working children and so forth</p>
<p>Reducing negative attitudes and beliefs on child participation and promoting positive ones</p>	<p>Quantification of estimated number of negative practices reduced; positive public reception for children’s views expressed</p> <p>Number of meetings/encounters/capacity building events with traditional leaders and religious leaders</p>
<p>Create an evidence base and an enabling learning environment</p>	<p>Documents produced and shared on good practice; research tools are produced on child participation in different contexts (school boards, clubs and national Children’s Parliaments) and for children at different levels of maturity ; a documented increase in the array of techniques for enabling children to participate is experienced (eg U-report); effective and detailed monitoring and evaluation frameworks are developed for each country and data is systematically collected to enable research results to be drawn</p>