

## Child Participation in Education Initiatives

by CRS/Zimbabwe







# How-to Guide Series

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## *Child Participation in Education Initiatives*

*by CRS/Zimbabwe*

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Written by Carolyn W. Fanelli and  
Mildred Mushunje, CRS/Zimbabwe  
Illustrations by Mashet Ndlovu

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## A C R O N Y M S

CCT	Child Care Team
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FFS	Farmer Field Schools
JFFS	Junior Farmer Field Schools
MLC	Mavambo Learning Center
ORAP	Organization of Rural Associations for Progress
OVC	Orphans and other Vulnerable Children
PLHA	People Living with HIV/AIDS
SDC	School Development Committee
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
STRIVE	Support To Replicable, Innovative Village/community-level Efforts
UOC	Uzumba Orphan Care



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## Letter from CRS Education Technical Advisors

Dear friends and colleagues,

We are pleased to present the latest edition in our CRS education ‘How-to’ series: *Child Participation in Education Initiatives*, which was produced by CRS staff and partners in Zimbabwe.

The ‘How-to’ guide series was created as an opportunity for CRS country programs and their local implementing partners to highlight and share an aspect of their work that has been particularly successful. Instead of presenting a detailed description of their program history and accomplishments, however, the focus of the guides is on the practical steps that CRS country programs and partner organizations can take to adopt similar activities. The recommendations will need to be interpreted for each particular context, but the topics addressed in each guide are ones that would strengthen and improve any existing program: how to reduce the number of school drop outs; how to get disabled children into school; how to use adult literacy to improve rural development.

This guide from CRS/Zimbabwe addresses child participation in many aspects of programming. Child participation is one of the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and increasing the scope and level of child participation should be an objective for every education or child protection program. This guide presents many useful suggestions for ways to increase child participation, but what is required most of all is a belief in the value of child participation and a commitment to making it happen in a meaningful way.

This guide presents many useful suggestions for ways to do to this. Some are simple and others require more concerted effort. As this guide shows, whatever we do to make education better for disabled children will also make education better for all children.

Best wishes,

Anne Sellers and Eric Eversmann

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## Letter from CRS/Zimbabwe Country Representative

Dear friends and colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this How-to Guide on Child Participation in Education Initiatives, which was written by two members of our talented CRS/Zimbabwe staff. We are fortunate that CRS initiated this How-to Guide series, because it provides CRS/Zimbabwe with a wonderful opportunity to share our partners' admirable work in the area of child participation.

This guide looks at child participation in a wide range of education programs, from more traditional school-fees assistance to the innovative Junior Farmer Field Schools, a vocational education project. The common denominator is that each education initiative enables children to meaningfully share their views and to participate in decision-making. Facilitating child participation is not easy, and we commend our partners for their ongoing efforts to make child participation a programming priority.

I feel certain that the tips, suggestions and short activities provided in this Guide will be of use to a variety of organizations and government bodies who work with children. May the result be an increase in quality and quantity of child participation in education programs around the world.

Best wishes,

Margarett Désilier

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“This guide will show you the ways that some real-life organizations in Zimbabwe have made child participation happen.”

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## I. Introduction

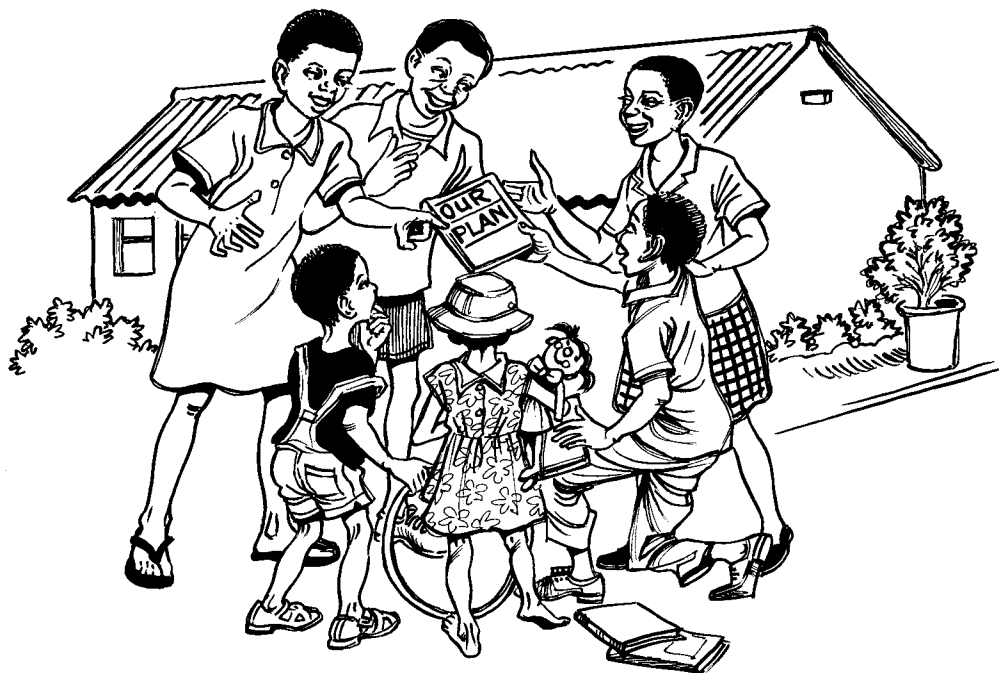
Jane has finished school for the day in Harare, Zimbabwe. She packs away her pencils and notebook and says “Toonana mangwana” (“See you tomorrow”) to her many friends. She passes by small homes growing green leafy kovo in their front yards and heads down the dusty road that leads to Mavambo Learning Center (MLC).

MLC is an accelerated learning center for children who have never before attended school, and it prepares these children to enter the public school system. The center is run by Mavambo Trust, a CRS/Zimbabwe partner. Jane attended MLC for nine months in 2003, soon after both her parents died. After graduation, she was able to enter the fourth grade in her neighborhood public school. Mavambo continued to support Jane by providing education assistance, which meant Jane did not have to find the money to pay school fees. She soon became a school prefect (student leader) and earned top grades. In addition, through Mavambo, she received training to become a peer counselor. Now, she visits MLC after school and teaches children in the community about HIV/AIDS, health and hygiene and other important topics. The peer education sessions are child-led—she and her fellow counselors determine the topics in consultation with other children, and they facilitate the sessions. Jane is also prepared to help her classmates with problems like feeling sad and depressed, and she knows who to go to in the community if children’s problems are too serious for her to handle.

Every month, Mavambo invites Jane and other children in the community to discuss how the organization’s various programs are going, what could be improved, and what new needs may exist. In addition, Jane’s group of peer counselors elected her and one other student to represent them on

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*Students on the Child Care Team discuss ways to help children in their community.*

their school's Child Care Team. This means that once a month Jane and her fellow counselor meet with a community volunteer and a teacher to discuss the problems facing children at the school and in the community, and talk about ways to solve these problems. Sometimes the Team decides it needs to take joint action; other times action points are assigned to one or more of the members. After the Team meeting, Jane and her fellow child representative inform the peer counselor group about what has been discussed, the decisions made, and the tasks they as a group need to carry out. She is always talking to her peers about issues that need to be raised at the next Team meeting.

This story is true—and is described in more detail in this Guide. It highlights some of the rich possibilities for involving children in education initiatives, including leading the effort to educate their peers about HIV/AIDS and having the skills to counsel their classmates and refer them to trusted sources. This example also shows how children can truly represent a larger group of children on a joint adult-child committee, and make decisions and take actions with the support of, and in true partnership with, adults.

If you would like a similar story to be told about a child who is part of your education initiative, then this How-to Guide is for you. This Guide will show you the ways that some real-life organizations in Zimbabwe have made child participation happen, and provide clear steps and activities you can use to begin to facilitate child participation in your own education initiative.

“...there are literally hundreds of ways your organization could facilitate child participation in education activities.”

## **Outline of How-to Guide on Child Participation in Education Initiatives**

This Guide begins by summarizing the work of the CRS/Zimbabwe country program so that you have an understanding of how this program operates and how we are connected to the examples explored in this Guide. Then, it provides an overview of the concept of child participation, explaining why child participation is so important and providing guidance on how to analyze and evaluate the scope and level of child participation in a project. Next, the Guide offers six examples of how CRS/Zimbabwe partner organizations facilitate child participation in their education initiatives. Each example includes relevant background information on the partner’s programming; the specifics of how the partner organization facilitates child participation; a description of the critical steps organizations need to follow to facilitate child participation in a similar way; and an activity that can get you started on the road to child participation in your organization’s education initiative.

Please note that the guide is in no way comprehensive—there are literally hundreds of ways your organization could facilitate child participation in education activities. The examples provided here are ideas that hopefully will get you thinking about the many and varied ways that children access their participation rights and strategies you could use in your own context.

## **Summary of CRS/Zimbabwe Country Program**

CRS began its Zimbabwe country program in 1989 with the goal of strengthening communities’ capacity to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and mitigate the impact of the pandemic. To achieve this goal, CRS operates programs in the area of HIV/AIDS, agriculture, Nutrition Support and

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*Thousands of children participate in CRS-Zimbabwe programs for orphans and vulnerable children.*

*Photo: Carolyn W. Fanelli  
CRS/Zimbabwe*

Global Solidarity. Most of these programs are implemented by partnering with local, community-based organizations, who, in turn, provide direct services to the most vulnerable members of their communities. This How-to Guide draws from the experiences and insights of CRS/Zimbabwe, its partners in HIV/AIDS programming, and its partners in Agriculture and Livelihoods Security programming.

In the area of HIV/AIDS, CRS/Zimbabwe works through more than a dozen partner organizations, most of whom participate in the Support To Replicable, Innovative Village/community-level Efforts (STRIVE) project. STRIVE focuses on improving communities' care and support to orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC) and establishing proven models that assist children. Its partners support more than 20,000 individual OVC through a holistic and integrated set of activities in the areas of education assistance, economic strengthening, food security, health assistance and psychosocial support. Education assistance is the most popular STRIVE intervention, and almost 70% of beneficiaries receive this support. In addition, CRS/Zimbabwe ensures that all its partners uphold child rights and principles of child protection and child participation. CRS/Zimbabwe partners also take great care to make certain that their programs do not stigmatize children and that they meaningfully address the particular needs of the girl child. This Guide highlights examples of how four of CRS/Zimbabwe's HIV/AIDS partners facilitate child participation in their education programming: Mavambo Trust, Uzumba Orphan Care, Nzeve School for the Deaf and J.F. Kapnek Trust.

In the area of agriculture and livelihoods security, CRS/Zimbabwe supports four partner organizations in their efforts to help communities protect the livelihoods of vulnerable people who rely on agricultural work to feed their families. Partners



Participants in the Junior Farmer Field School view a poultry project.



Learning in the field is an important part of the curriculum.

Photos: Carolyn W. Fanelli  
CRS/Zimbabwe

also ensure that community members are able to produce or access the food they need to live healthy and productive lives. For example, with CRS/Zimbabwe support, one partner, Organization of Rural Association for Progress (ORAP), has established 12 Junior Farmer Field Schools and 15 Farmer Field Schools. These schools serve as both community-based seed-production centers and agricultural learning centers for youths and adults. This Guide highlights child participation in ORAP's Junior Farmer Field School program.

## II. Overview of Child Participation

Child participation is an increasingly prominent focus of development workers around the world. But recognizing the importance of child participation and actually putting child participation into practice are two very different things! Child participation in education initiatives is important because it is a child's right, because it enhances program quality and because it develops children's capacity for more advanced participation. A more detailed analysis of the concept of child participation is available in Section IV. For now, we'll provide one possible framework for thinking about child participation which will be useful as you read, reflect on and apply the examples in this Guide. When you have time, we encourage you to read all of section IV!

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the starting point for most discussions of child participation. Article 12.1 says that:

*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.*

In this How-to Guide, we use Article 12.1 as the basis for understanding the possible **scope** and **level** of children participation in a project.

**By scope of child participation, we mean the range of mechanisms available to enable the participation of children.** Drawing on the CRC, we need to look closely at how a project perceives which children are “capable of forming a viewpoint”, how it defines “matters affecting the child” and how it ensures that “due weight” is given to children’s viewpoints. To determine the scope of child participation in an initiative, organization or institution, it is useful to ask the following questions:

- How broad is the range of roles and responsibilities available for all children, of differing capacities, to participate?
- How broad are the means of expression children can use to express their viewpoints?
- How broadly or narrowly is “affecting the child” defined?
- How comprehensive, meaningful, and subjective is the process established to determine the “due weight” to accord children’s viewpoints?

**By level of child participation, we are referring to the depth of children’s engagement in initiatives, organizations and institutions.** To determine the level of child participation in a project, it is important to consider the decisions that have been made, consciously or unconsciously, about how “freely” children can express their views and the extent of their “the opportunity to be heard”.

### Scope:

“How broad is the range of roles and responsibilities available for all children, of differing capacities, to participate?”

## **Critical questions to ask of any initiative, organization and institution.**

- ✓ How free are children to express their views?
- ✓ In what ways are children encouraged to express their views, and what efforts are made to ensure a supportive environment for their expression?
- ✓ How much power or authority do children's views have in decision-making processes?
- ✓ To what extent do children understand the parameters of their opportunity to be heard?
- ✓ To what extent are children in charge of their own initiatives?
- ✓ To what extent are children working in equal partnership with adults?
- ✓ To what extent do child representatives have opportunities to consult with their constituency and ensure meaningful participation of this constituency?

Again, for more detail on how we developed these questions from the language in the CRC, and for a deeper insight into the child participation literature, please see Section IV.

### **III. Child Participation: How-to**

Facilitating child participation is a challenge for all development practitioners. In Zimbabwe, there are a variety of programs that have met the challenge and are successfully promoting children's right to education and their right to participation.

The first two units in this Guide are about involving children in program decision-making and implementation. The third unit details child participation with very young children. The final two units look at how children can shape and guide their own learning in the context of non-formal education activities.

#### **Involve Children in Decision-making and Implementation**

##### **EXAMPLE 1: Mavambo Trust**

##### **Project background:**

Mavambo was founded in 2000 in response to the critical needs of OVC in two adjacent suburbs of Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. It operates a nine-month accelerated literacy and numeracy program—Mavambo Learning Center—for children who have never been to school. After graduating from the program,



children enter the formal school system. In addition, Mavambo Trust is one of 13 CRS/Zimbabwe partners implementing the block grants/resource exchange strategy of providing education assistance, and this assistance enables more than 2,000 OVC to attend public schools. (See text box for more details on this strategy.) Block grants and resource exchanges require increased interaction between community-based organizations and schools, and Mavambo sees this interaction as an opportunity to enhance the community's overall care and support of OVC.

“ A “block grant is a lump sum payment that a partner provides to a school.” ”

### What are block grants and resource exchanges?

The current, hyper-inflationary economic environment in Zimbabwe means that school fees are constantly on the rise. As a result, CRS/Zimbabwe's partners found that, with the same amount of money, they were able to offer school fee support to fewer and fewer children. One of the STRIVE's innovative responses to this challenge was to develop the block grants/resource exchange strategy.

A “block grant” is a lump sum payment that a partner provides to a school. The school can spend this money to purchase books, school furniture and/or other tangible resources that it identifies as needs. In exchange, the school agrees to enroll a certain number of OVC for an agreed on period, such as a term or a school year. A “resource-exchange” is similar in that it also involves the purchase of materials for a school. However, rather than the school receiving cash, the school receives the actual resources that it requires.

The block grants/resource exchange strategy reduces the impact of inflation because goods are purchased on a “today” basis—vital in a country where the same goods will likely cost more tomorrow. In addition, these strategies allow for more children to benefit indirectly, because all children at the school benefit from their school's new resources. As a result, this strategy is also less stigmatizing to children. Whereas, with direct school fees assistance, beneficiary children were sometimes labeled “the project children”, now no one child can be distinguished as a “project child” since everyone is benefiting. (university) is listed under the larger category of “major life activities”.

## Mavambo Trust: Child Participation in Action

In early 2006, Mavambo established a peer-counseling program at the 12 schools with which it works (9 primary schools and 3 secondary schools). There is an average of 10 peer counselors at each school, and each school group works closely with a teacher. The peer counselors received training in basic counseling skills, such as active listening and the meaning of confidentiality. Mavambo's motivation for launching this particular initiative was to enhance the impact of its education assistance by empowering children to help each other address some of the challenges and problems they face. In this way, the OVC directly benefiting from the education assistance receive more holistic care and support.

As an organization committed to community participation, Mavambo holds **monthly feedback sessions** with the children, caregivers and volunteers who participate in its interventions. During a monthly feedback session with the peer counselors, children told Mavambo that they wanted to be more closely linked to the organization's community volunteers. Children didn't come to them with problems only on weekdays, the peer counselors said, but on weeknights and weekends, too. The peer counselors needed someone in the community that they could turn to for assistance in addressing children's issues at all times.

In response to this need, Mavambo worked with the counselors, community volunteers and teachers to establish **Child Care Teams (CCT)** at each school. These teams consist of the teacher who works with the peer counselors, two leaders of the school peer counseling group (a boy and a girl, selected by their peers), and a community volunteer. This community volunteer is the volunteer leader—elected by his/her peers—for the neighborhood surrounding each school.

*Jane helps Usufu with homework  
at school*

*Photo: Carolyn W. Fanelli  
CRS/Zimbabwe*







*Children giving their feedback to adults.*

The Teams meet formally once a month at the school, and stay in contact on an ongoing basis. They rotate chairing the monthly meetings so that every member—including the two children—has an opportunity to serve as chair. These meetings are a time for the peer counselors to discuss their concerns and share the list of counseling “cases” they have addressed the month. At their meetings, the Team also determines, as a group, what actions need to occur. The child members are usually tasked to follow-up with children who are not attending school, while teachers are asked to address school-wide issues such as bullying and the volunteers take on problems that stem from children’s home situations, such as a lack of food.

Mavambo views the Child Care Teams as contributing to the sustainability of its programs. As the number of children it supports continues to grow, Mavambo staff members cannot personally know every individual child they support—something that was possible in the past. Building effective networks that support the well-being of children—with the participation of children—is a key to ensuring that each child who receives education assistance is being cared for and supported in a holistic way. Mavambo says that no matter how many children it supports with education assistance, the message it wants to send to children and the community is: “We are here. We don’t pay school fees and leave. We are close and available.”

Another strategy for facilitating child participation in the decision-making and implementation of resource exchanges is to ensure that children are part of process of determining what resource the school should acquire. This can be done by either having a child member on the committee that selects the resource, or ensuring that there is a formal mechanism in place for this committee to consult with children and give weight to their viewpoints. Both girls and boys are consulted, because they might share different ideas. For instance, based on STRIVE's experience, you might find that girls suggest building a weekly hostel where they can stay during the school week. For the girls, this is a practical need which reduces the strain they face in walking long distances to get to school and having to carry out domestic chores at home, which takes up their time for completing homework. On the other hand, for boys, sports uniforms might be their priority because they want to appear presentable when they go for school matches. Whatever the case may be, children need to be part of the discussion and final decision-making process.



Jane, 14, is a peer counselor leader

Photo: Mark W. Adams  
for CRS/Zimbabwe.

### What children say

Fourteen-year-old Jane serves as a peer counselor leader, and is a member of her school's Child Care Team. She says:

#### About her relationship with the teacher and volunteer on the CCT:

*"It is very important that the teacher and volunteer are part of the Team. We can all refer cases to each other."*

#### About her role as a peer counselor:

*"To be a good counselor, you must be honest, and shouldn't gossip. You have to be able to talk nicely to your peers and listen. You can't be doing other things while children are talking to you. Our role is important because sometimes children don't have anyone their own age to talk to that they can trust. Let's have peer groups all over so that children can be in a position to share their problems."*

About the skills she has developed as a peer counselor leader:

*“I know how to counsel others, and how to care for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA). I am now able to interact better with other children and with PLHA. I am now brave enough to stand in front of others, talk to them and assist them.”*

About gaining the trust of her peers, so that they share problems and concern with her:

*“The headmaster introduces us as peer counselors to all students and says, ‘Here is a group that is going to help you.’ I try to be a role model. Also, I gain trust as I help children—the word spreads.”*

“To be a good counselor, you must be honest, and shouldn’t gossip.”

## Steps to making child participation in decision-making and program implementation happen

Mavambo suggests that organizations that want to facilitate child participation in decision-making and program implementation do the following:

- 1 Work with schools to establish Kids’ Clubs**, peer counseling groups or other child-led organizations. In order to reduce the potential for stigma, these groups should be open to all children at the school, not only members of the target group, and should serve all children at the school.
- 2 Provide these child-led groups with the training, support and resources** they need to be effective. For example, members of a Kids’ Club might need training in how to educate their peers on life skills, or support in conducting an HIV and AIDS awareness campaign.
- 3 Use monthly feedback sessions with the groups** as a way of gathering information about children’s needs and discussing any problems or concerns they might have.
- 4 Develop a strong link between this group and the adult-led groups** that are involved in the block grants/resource exchange initiative, including teachers, school heads and community volunteers. Create mechanisms for these groups to share ideas and address the issues and concerns of OVC who are receiving education assistance and the student body at large. Establishing Child Care Teams that meet monthly is one way to create this link.



Two children meeting with adults for a problem-solving session.

### Activity to get you started

Mavambo says that one reason adults value children as equal partners in the Child Care Teams, and that children have the confidence to work with adults as equal partners, is because these community members have seen meaningful child participation in action before. The concept is not new to them. Thus, one “activity to get you started” is to support a community awareness campaign by the child-led group in your community. This campaign will empower children to know what they are capable of. It also will acquaint teachers, school heads, community volunteers, parents and other adults with children’s capacities, thus contributing to the establishment of equal partnerships between adults and children in the community.

- Step 1** Check the calendar for an upcoming “Days”, such as the Day of the African Child, World Refugee Day, World AIDS Day or another commemoration.
- Step 2** Meet with the child-led group to tell them about the day, and let them know you’d be happy to offer your support if they want to organize a community event for this day.
- Step 3** Be clear with the children about the resources and support you can offer, and let them know you are available to offer guidance. However, ensure the children know that they are in charge of planning, organizing and presenting the campaign.
- Step 4** Be available to offer support to the child-led group throughout the project.

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Offer to serve as an audience for a “run-through” before the event.

- Step 5** On the day of the event, serve as the child participation police officer—don’t allow adults to co-opt the day at the last minute! Public officials are especially prone to this type of behavior. If public officials are invited to the event, be sure they understand that the event is being led by the children.
- Step 6** After the event, hold a de-brief session with the children to discuss what went well about the day, the challenges they faced, and what they would want to improve next time.
- Step 7** Hold a meeting with the adults in the community who are involved with education support—in Zimbabwe, for example, block grants/resource exchanges—and those whom you want to engage with the child-led group as equal partners. Discuss what the event showed them about children’s knowledge, abilities and skills, and use this conversation as a platform for talking about how their groups could work together with the child-led group.

One event alone won’t build children’s capacity to participate or convince adults that children can serve as equal partners. However, it is a step that will get you started!

## Reflection

### Reflect back on the questions posed on pages 11 and 12 in Section II.

Based on what you now know about Mavambo’s efforts to facilitate child participation, how might you answer these questions? What additional information would you need to make an informed response, and how would this information affect your response?

For example, based on the information provided, it appears that children have a range of roles, including roles as representative, advocate, counselor, role model, information-gatherer and decision-maker. Adults actively seek out and value children’s viewpoints, and the group uses these viewpoints to inform decision-making. There is social space for adults and children to collaborate, and also space where children can work with their peers to help each other, share ideas, take their own initiatives, and raise issues and concerns. The “issues that affect the child” are all the issues that children themselves raise as concerns. Within the CCT team, adults and children are working in equal partnership, and they understand the skills and capacity every member brings to the table.

However, the example does not go into detail about how the adults in the CCT determine the due weight to give to children’s views. How do you think adult CCT members might handle the issue of “due weight”? How would different scenarios

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“Adults actively seek out and value children’s viewpoints...”

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represent different processes for giving due weight to children’s decisions, and which scenarios would facilitate the most meaningful participation? Also, it is not clear how children of differing capacities might participate in Mavambo’s programs, or how children could use mediums other than verbal expression to share their viewpoints. Based on what you know, how might Mavambo facilitate the participation of children of differing capacity in its programs? How could it create opportunities for children to use different mediums of expressions? Think about different possibilities, and consider which option might enable the most meaningful child participation.

## EXAMPLE 2: Uzumba Orphan Care

### Project background

Although most CRS/Zimbabwe STRIVE partners now use the block grant/resource exchange strategy (described above), direct school assistance is still employed in select settings and situations. Direct school assistance is the traditional means of supporting children’s education by paying children’s school fees and, in some cases, purchasing children’s school uniforms and stationary. For example, Uzumba Orphan Care uses a combination of the direct school assistance and block grants approaches because it is still introducing school heads to the benefits of the block grant system. UOC is based in a rural district, and has been a CRS/Zimbabwe partner since 2002.

### UOC: Child Participation in Action

UOC implements its direct school assistance program by establishing **Education Assistance Committees** at each school with which it works. These committees select the children who should receive assistance. Committee members are usually

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chosen by the community itself, and include members of the School Development Association/Committee and representatives of children. Child representatives play a critical role informing the committee about OVC in need within their community. UOC says that children are in an ideal position to identify their vulnerable child counterparts because these peers are their playmates.

UOC also facilitates child participation at an organizational and district level. It coordinates regular meetings of village **Child Protection Committees** in each of the 375 villages in its district. UOC ensures that these committees include representatives from all stakeholder groups—caregivers, non-governmental organizations, the police, government ministries, and, significantly, children and/or youth. UOC fosters child participation in village CPCs by giving children and youth the tools they need to elect their representatives. Before elections are held, UOC holds “**Role Model Workshops**” which provide children with information on child rights, the role of the child representatives, and the types of issues that CPCs address. In this way,



Meeting of a village Child Protection Committee (CPC)

Photo: Carolyn W. Fanelli, CRS/Zimbabwe



Youth representative,  
Makamba Pedzisai

Photo: Carolyn W. Fanelli, CRS/Zimbabwe

children are not simply a token presence on CPCs, but true representatives who understand their role, know their constituency and are known by their constituency.

UOC further demonstrates its commitment to child participation by creating a link between CPC child representatives and the organization's own program development.

It has established **Junior Councils** in the four areas where it works. Each Junior Council consists of five children who are members of a village CPC in that particular area, and includes at least one secondary-school student, one primary-school student and one out-of-school youth. UOC staff members meet with these Junior Councils once every three months between school terms. The councilors present their constituencies' most pressing issues and ideas for how they could best be assisted. UOC uses this information to inform its own programming, and spreads the information among other stakeholders. Junior Councilors are also members of UOC's Board.

"The Junior Councils support the village CPCs because they create a forum in which children can air problems that have emanated up from the village level", Mr. P. Chitiyo, UOC's director, said. "During both Junior Council meetings and Board meetings, we hear things from children that truly influence and improve our programming."

### What children say

One youth representative, Makamba Pedzisai, stressed the significance of UOC's workshops for children representatives:

*It is important to train new child representatives to be confident, to speak in front of groups, to listen, and to understand others so that they can take their views to the committees.*



## Steps to Making Child Participation in Decision-making and Program Implementation Happen

- 1 Walk the talk.** One way to encourage the community to embrace child participation is to walk the talk by facilitating child participation in decision-making structures that exist within your own organization and/or program. Although you might train Education Assistance Committees about the importance of enabling and encouraging the participation of the child representatives and giving representatives' views "due weight," demonstrating your own commitment to child participation is critical for reinforcing behaviors, setting a positive example and informally "training" adults in child participation through your own model actions.
- 2 Link child participation structures.** Another strategy UOC has successfully used is to link together child participation structures. Thus, the EACs, Junior Council, Child Protection Committees and UOC's own board are all connected. This reinforces the culture of child participation and expands the scope of children's possible participation.
- 3 Ensure child representatives have a constituency** by facilitating elections for child representatives, and working with children to ensure they understand what being a representative means. This step is critical for developing new child representatives, for ensuring that representatives are speaking for children as a collective group (including children of differing capacities), and building children's capacity to gather ideas from peers and articulate different perspectives.
- 4 Work closely with traditional leaders** to ensure they are well-informed and supportive of child participation efforts, as their support is critical to community-buy-in. Discuss societal values that suppress children's voices, and then engage traditional leaders in community meetings with adults to talk about what child participation is going to look like in community structures. These do not have to be flamboyant or elaborate meetings; UOC often has such meetings under trees.
- 5 Don't forget about out-of-school youth.** Because out-of-school youth are not found in one place, like children at school, it can be more difficult to engage them. In addition, you must think about how to ensure out-of-school youth are able to represent their constituency—there might be need for multiple representatives, representing different types of out-of-school youth who are facing different challenges.

“...plan to include child representatives on your organization’s local board or steering committee.”

### Activity to get you started

As noted above, one step to facilitating child participation in decision-making and program implementation is walking the talk. So, an activity to get you started is to plan to include child representatives on your organization’s local board or steering committee. To begin this process you’ll need to talk to other committee members to get their views on the initiative, and let them express any questions or concerns. You’ll also need to think about how your meetings might change—for example, do your meeting times typically fall during school hours? Do members typically sit around a table and talk? If so, how could this method of sharing information become more child-friendly?

Next, you’ll need to reflect on how the representative or representatives will be selected, ensuring they have a constituency to gather ideas from and report back to. Similar to UOC’s “Role Model Workshops”, talk to children about what it will mean to have a representative and to serve as a representative, and address any questions or concerns they might have.

Share your lessons learned about the process of initiating child representation on your board with the other community committees in your areas so they can learn from your experiences.

### Reflection

#### Reflect back on the questions posed on pages 11 and 12 in Section II.

Based on what you now know about UOC’s efforts to facilitate child participation, how might you answer these questions? What additional information would you need to make an informed response, and how would this information affect your response?

For example, one aspect of meaningful child participation that UOC demonstrates particularly well is facilitating meaningful child representation. So, one question you can consider is: “To what extent do child representatives have opportunities to consult with their constituency and ensure meaningful participation of this constituency?”

In terms of “ensuring meaningful participation of this constituency”, it might be interesting to reflect on how UOC’s “Role Model Workshops” could build the capacity of child representatives to solicit and share the views of younger children and children of differing capacities.

At the same time, you don't know much about how the UOC board and village CPC might create a supportive environment for children to express their views. You also don't know about how much power or authority children's views have in decision-making processes. Are child representatives valued for their ability to uncover and share problems facing children in the community? Or, do they play a meaningful role in making decisions about how to address these problems? Think about different possibilities, and consider which option might enable the most meaningful child participation.

## **Facilitate the Participation of Very Young Children**

### **EXAMPLE: J.F. Kapnek Trust**

#### **Project background**

One common type of education initiative that involves very young children is Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centers. These centers generally cater for children ages 3-6, and are important for preparing children for school and improving educational access and equity. They are also significant for older children. Why? Many older children in Zimbabwe, especially girls, must stay at home to care for their young siblings because they live in a child-headed household or because their parent or guardian is too sick to care for the child. With ECD centers, these older siblings are able to drop off their younger siblings at the center, and then carry on to school.

Zimbabwe has a nationwide curriculum for ECD centers (otherwise known as pre-schools or nurseries) that focuses on children learning through play. Communities can work through their primary-school School Development Committee (SDC) to implement ECD on their own. In this effort, some communities are supported by non-governmental organizations, such as J.F. Kapnek Trust (Kapnek), a CRS/Zimbabwe partner.

Kapnek implements ECD by helping existing community-based pre-schools develop and grow. The organization supports five centers by supplementing teachers' allowances; funding center renovations; providing play equipment, educational materials and toys that are not locally available; offering supplementary feeding; and organizing monthly in-service trainings for the teachers with a specialist from the Ministry of Education. The communities, meanwhile, set up Pre-school Management Committees, which report to the SDC and undertake such tasks as managing the center's nutrition garden, fundraising, pooling community resources that can be used at the center (toys, cardboard boxes, etc.), and addressing problems like shortages of chairs or broken equipment.

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It is important to look at child participation in ECD centers—including the participation of both the very young children who attend the centers and their older siblings, for whom the center’s existence enables school attendance. Facilitating the participation of very young children is challenging, and often overlooked, even among organizations that have embraced the participation of older children (Save the Children Norway 2000). It requires finding innovative ways of enabling very young children to use the capacities they do have to participate in matters that affect them.

### **Kapnek Trust: Child participation in action**

Experience has shown that adults who are actively participating in a project are more likely to support child participation because they understand the project and feel they have a say. Thus, Kapnek sets the stage for child participation by fully engaging communities in their projects.

One opportunity for **engaging community members** of all ages is in renovating the center. Although Kapnek works with existing ECD initiatives, they may lack a suitable centre building. Locally available resources such as mud and wood are gathered, and Kapnek may bring in resources like the roofing material. Kapnek’s ECD teachers also solicit children’s ideas for toys that can be made for use at the centers, such as wire toys and dolls.

Kapnek also supports **training of ECD teachers**, and these trainings can help teachers develop tools and approaches for facilitating child participation.

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<sup>1</sup> CRS/Zimbabwe’s STRIVE project supports another Kapnek program, one that assists children living with disabilities and their parents. STRIVE does not specifically support Kapnek’s ECD program.

## Strategies for Facilitating the Participation of Very Young Children

- 1 As Caroline Arnold (2000) notes, participation must start where children, together with their families and communities, are.** This means that any program or activity aimed at ECD must be child-, family- and community-specific, and you need to have a sense of where people are in terms of understanding and welcoming child participation. If facilitating child participation in the ECD center might challenge local cultural norms, make sure to have discussions with community leaders such as the local headman, chiefs and district administrators to discuss the viability, value and worth of the project. It is also important to facilitate community involvement in the center, because if the community is participating in the center, they will be more likely to support their children's active participation.
- 2 Ensure the Pre-School Management Committee has a mechanism for soliciting the views of children.** Even very young children could draw pictures for the committee of, for example, their favorite thing about the center or a picture of themselves at the center, which might usefully highlight the things they see as important.
- 3 Children are the best engineers of the games and activities they enjoy.** Children who attend the center, as well as their siblings, can be at the forefront of identifying the toys that they would like to make with locally-available resources.
- 4 Very young children learn by doing, so it is important that they are also engaged in directing their learning environment.** Such involvement could include them being asked to tell a story they might have heard in a previous lesson or to share with the class "wish" stories, which are stories where children share what they would like to be when they grow up. These stories can also help teachers understand children's needs and challenges, so that they can respond to these issues individually or as part of lessons.
- 5 Create opportunities for young children to take part in decisions about how the ECD center is arranged.** For example, they could be asked to draw pictures of the vegetables they would like to grow in the school garden. Or, when organizations such as Kapnek help renovate the playground area, children could draw maps of how the new equipment should be placed. The idea is to meet children at their level of capacity to contribute to decisions, enable them to have a say in creating the center environment, and nurture an understanding that their ideas are valued.

At an ECD center, you could also **involve the older siblings** of center students, including members of child-headed of households, in the center's management committee. The committee should also have space for any older siblings that use the center to drop off younger siblings they would otherwise have to care for, as there may be specific ways that the center can better cater for these children's needs. Child-headed households face unique challenges and these children have the right to bring their perspective to this decision-making forum. Older children can also find ways of soliciting the views of their younger siblings for sharing at committee meetings. Since children build their capacities by interacting with children who have more advanced capabilities, matching younger children and their older siblings in participatory institutions and activities is a natural fit.

### **Activity to get you started**

Education traditionally has involved the one-way flow of information from teachers to students, and some of these traditional views need to be discussed and analyzed, and ideas brainstormed for how to support the participation of very young children in their education. One activity to get you started is to hold a child participation training workshop for ECD teachers, and to ensure that subsequent trainings mainstream child participation and leave space for talking about what is working and what is not in regards to facilitating child participation. Note that the workshop itself must be very participatory to model, albeit on a more sophisticated level, the type of actions you are looking for in the pre-school classroom.

Drawing again on Arnold's comment, the best way to start talking about child participation is to begin talking about what teachers already do in the classroom. Teachers often know very clearly how much more children know than we give them credit for—they see children's capacities every day. So, it is likely they already have ways of listening to children and then taking these views into account in classroom decision-making. One participatory way of eliciting this information is a technique used by the Ministry of Education representative who works with Kapnek's ECD teachers—asking the teachers to role play the roles of both teacher and student. As teachers' child participation strategies emerge, it is critical to discuss why they demonstrate child participation (and why other examples might not) and then to look at how this existing child participation might be enhanced. For example, informally, teachers might see older and younger children working together. How can this interaction be strengthened so that children are developing their capacities to involve other children in activities? What strategies can teachers use to build children's confidence to be active participants and share their views freely? One very basic example of this is a strategy many teachers use—posting children's work on the wall.

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How can this common example serve as a point of discussion of other ways to increase students' confidence and enable their participation in how their classroom looks and operates?

In a workshop setting it also is important to think about the cultural norms that might conflict with any of these strategies. How can this situation be reconciled? What challenges might teachers face in facilitating the participation of very young children? After the workshop, it is important for the trainer to make follow-up visits to provide support to the teachers and check on their progress—another technique used by Kapnek's trainer.

## Reflection

### **Reflect back on the questions posed on pages 11 and 12 in Section II.**

Based on what you now know about Kapnek's efforts to facilitate child participation, how might you answer these questions? What additional information would you need to make an informed response, and how would this information affect your response?

One particularly interesting question to think about is the breadth of roles and responsibilities available for all children, of differing capacities, to participate. What sort of roles and responsibilities can very young children take on, in line with their capacities? This example gives some ideas about the role very young children—ages 3-6—could play in decision-making, including contributing to decisions about toys to create, vegetables to grow in the garden, and the arrangement of playground equipment. Do you have any other ideas? How do you think that very young children can contribute to decision-making? What other roles could very young children play at an ECD center?

This example suggests that, currently, ECD centers are not seen to be a matter "affecting" older children, as they are not represented on Pre-school Management Committees. Do you think this is a narrow or broad view of "affecting the child"? Should older siblings of children who attend the center be involved in the centers' management? Why or why not? How else could an ECD center facilitate the participation of older siblings?

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“...children can be active participants in guiding and shaping their own learning within non-formal education programs.”

## Foster Participatory Learning in Non-Formal Education

Non-formal education is a huge area that includes all forms of organized educational activity that children receive outside of the formal school curriculum. The two examples below demonstrate how children can be active participants in guiding and shaping their own learning within non-formal education programs. The first example introduces a non-formal Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) education program for hearing-impaired children; the second example discusses a vocational education program in agriculture and livestock.

### EXAMPLE 1: Nzeve School for the Deaf

#### Project background

By providing SRH education, OVC programs can ensure that even the most disadvantaged children have accurate information they can use to make informed decisions and choices. At the same time, OVC education programs that serve children living with disabilities must be specifically-tailored to meet the needs of these children and the challenges they face, and this includes specially-tailoring their SRH education. The example below looks the work of a CRS/Zimbabwe partner, Nzeve School for the Deaf. Nzeve means “ear” in Shona, and, fittingly, Nzeve works with hearing-impaired children.

As part of its education assistance for this target group, Nzeve pays the school fees of hearing-impaired children who attend resource rooms attached to primary and secondary schools. Nzeve also facilitates training workshops for resource room teachers aimed at enhancing teachers’ ability to provide quality education for hearing-impaired students, including their ability to teach SRH. In addition, an Nzeve staff member visits each school monthly for a “Day Event” with resource room



students. These Day Events are opportunities for Nzeve to talk with students about issues of concern to them, including HIV/AIDS, child sexual abuse, growing up, friendship, health and staying fit. Reaching this target group with accurate, practical information is critical because studies suggest that the hearing-impaired population in Zimbabwe has elevated rates of HIV infection. Nzeve uses the Auntie Stella pack for its SRH education program, a collection of activity cards produced by the Training and Research Support Centre that facilitate discussions among young Zimbabweans on sex, life and relationships. CRS/Zimbabwe provided all of its STRIVE partners with Auntie Stella materials and facilitated staff members' training in how to use the pack with children.



*Hearing impaired student supported by Nzeve at Elim School.*

*Photo: Mark Adams for CRS/Zimbabwe*

### **Nzeve: Child Participation in Action**

Nzeve soon realized that the Auntie Stella information was not always user-friendly for hearing-impaired children and did not address some of their specific vulnerabilities. With the meaningful participation of children, Nzeve created a special SRH manual for resource room teachers and adapted the Auntie Stella pack for use with hearing-impaired children. In this way, children have shaped their own education in SRH.

Nzeve used its **Day Events** to gather children's opinions on existing SRH materials and the Auntie Stella pack, and to see what aspects of this information were confusing or could be improved. In particular, children told Nzeve about specific words that were difficult to express in sign language, said that illustrations helped them grasp content more quickly, and suggested that the activities use hearing-impaired characters in their examples, role plays and scenarios. After making these adaptations, Nzeve took the revised materials back to children for a second round of feedback. This step was important because children could see that their past suggestions had been utilized, which gave them a sense of ownership over the document and encouraged them to share even more ideas and recommendations. Meanwhile, the process itself provided children with the opportunity to review SRH education topics multiple times for maximum retention. Teachers also had an opportunity to provide feedback on the Auntie Stella pack and the SRH manual.



*Hearing impaired children share their views on the Auntie Stella adaptation.*

When using educational materials aimed at children in general, or when using materials created for another country or context, it is important to consider whether these materials need to be adapted to meet the specific needs of a target group or members within a target group. This is particularly true in the area of SRH because culture has a great influence in determining SRH norms. **Customizing materials** is also a critical consideration within OVC programs because OVC is a very general category that includes many different sub-groups of children—such as street children, child-headed households, and children living with disabilities—who have different types of vulnerabilities. By meaningfully involving children in the process of adapting SRH education materials, you can ensure that the materials will be child-friendly and effective, while also giving children ownership over the materials and improving their retention of the information. As a next step, the materials adapted by your group can be shared with other groups in your community or region, and children themselves can be integrally involved in this effort.

## What children say

**Why is it important that children take part in adapting these materials?**

**Alice:** “It will help bring out what is affecting us.”

**Musarenga:** “Otherwise, some things that are important for us may be left out.”

**Ishmael:** “We want things for our culture.”

**What has been the impact of your participation on project?**

**Talent:** “I feel I am part of it [adapting the Auntie Stella materials] because I see what I have said being included in the booklet.”

**Benjamin:** “I was happy to see a question that I had said.”

**Cleopatra:** “I am happy because the situation at home is in one of the booklets.”

## Steps to Making Participatory Learning Happen

These steps can be used with any group of children. If you are working with hearing-impaired children, make sure you engage the services of a sign-language translator who has experience working with children.

- 1 Review the educational materials that you currently use,** and identify opportunities for the materials to be adapted for your target audience. For example, perhaps your materials employ role plays, scenarios or examples whose characters, geographic locations and/or cultural references could become more context-specific. Or, perhaps such context-specific role plays, scenarios or examples could be added to existing content.
- 2 Use a transparent process to determine which children will be involved** in the adaptation project. Make sure your entire target group is represented by the participants. For example, if the materials target ages 10-17, ensure that children of these ages are involved in the project. Since some educational topics (such as SRH and HIV/AIDS education) addresses sensitive topics, consider separating children by gender—just as you would if you were using these materials as is.
- 3 Introduce the adaptation project to children.** Let them know exactly how their contributions will be used and that they will be acknowledged for their efforts. Note that you will try to include every suggestion in the final product, but that sometimes contributions cannot be used because of logistical, ethical or factual reasons. Depending on the capacities of your group, you could either ask children how they want to deal with suggestions that conflict with one another, or announce a procedure of your choice, such as voting or developing versions that incorporate each suggestion for the next feedback round.

## Steps to Making Participatory Learning Happen (cont'd)

- 4 Use each meeting with children to introduce a particular section of the materials.** Use group and small-group discussions, writing, drawings, songs, etc. to gather their feedback on how user-friendly the materials are and whether the activities address their particular environment and challenges. Ask for children's suggestions and ideas for how the materials could be easier to use and how they could better represent the situations and challenges they face. If children's ideas are in conflict, work with the children to find a middle ground that serves both suggestions, or, if necessary, follow the procedure established in Step 3. Ensure the session is broken up by energizer activities!
- 5 Revise the materials based on children's suggestions.** If children have suggested adding illustrations, one option is to engage the children in designing the illustrations.
- 6 Meet with the children for a second round of feedback.** Discuss the ways in which their ideas and suggestions have been incorporated into this second draft. Then, once again gather their ideas and suggestions on user-friendliness and relevance.
- 7 Make the necessary revisions.**
- 8 As an optional step, you could engage the child participants in conducting their own field test** with a new group of children that have not previously seen the materials. During this test, children themselves will either present the materials to the new group or observe as the materials are presented by a trained adult or teacher. Then, they will ask for feedback from the new group of children. Based on the field test, the child participants will make additional suggestions for revisions to the materials.
- 9 Produce the final version of the educational materials.** Ensure that you have acknowledged the children who contributed to producing the materials either by name or by group name. One option is to officially "launch" the materials at an event, with the participation of children.
- 10 As an optional step, you could involve children in disseminating the materials** to other groups in your area that serve a similar target group.

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## Activity to get you started

The best way to begin is through a pilot that helps you learn about how best to facilitate a feedback session that will inform the adaptation of your non-formal education materials.

Select one lesson and one group of children. The lesson can even be one that the children have recently covered. Introduce the pilot project to children, explaining that the goal is to figure out how best to facilitate this sort of feedback session, in the hopes of holding more sessions with more children in order to customize the curriculum. Gather children's feedback on how the materials could be more user-friendly, or could be more relevant to their particular situation.

### Some specific questions you may want to ask are:

- Do the role plays, scenarios or examples provided in the lesson or activity reflect situations familiar to you? Why or why not? How could the examples more closely reflect the situation in your community?
- Do the illustrations reflect situations familiar to you? Why or why not? How could the examples more closely reflect the situation in your community?
- How could the role plays, scenarios or examples use names, locations or terms that would make the materials more familiar to you?
- What words are difficult for you to understand? What sections of the materials are confusing? Why?
- Are there any problems or challenges you face that are not addressed by these materials? What are they? How would you go about giving your peers the information they need to deal with these problems or challenges?

**Then, at the end of the session, gather children's feedback on the session itself. For example, you could ask children questions (verbally or in writing) such as:**

- Did they feel they were able to express their ideas? Why or why not?
- Would they prefer sharing their feedback in a different way, such as working in small groups, or using writing, drawing or music?
- Was there enough time dedicated to the activity?

Ensure that you acknowledge and utilize this information during your next consultative session with the children.

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## Reflection

### Reflect back on the questions posed on pages 11 and 12 in Section II.

Based on what you now know about Nzeve's efforts to facilitate child participation, how might you answer these questions?

What additional information would you need to make an informed response, and how would this information affect your response?

For example, think about how Nzeve encourages children to express their views and creates a supportive environment for their expression. How does going back to children with revised materials that incorporate their suggestions contribute to this "supportive environment"? Beyond what is described, how do you think Nzeve might encourage children to share their viewpoints? The example also suggests introducing children to the parameters of their participation by explaining that not all ideas can be used and giving children an active role in determining which ideas are used (especially if two suggestions are conflicting).

Nzeve's project is not really child-driven, although children are meaningfully involved. How could some of the project's next steps, such as a field test or dissemination of the newly-adapted materials, be child-led, or planned and implemented in partnership with adults?

## EXAMPLE 2: Organization of Rural Associations for Progress

### Project background

This example demonstrates how children participate in shaping and guiding their own learning within Junior Farmer Field Schools (JFFS), a program supported by Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP), a CRS/Zimbabwe partner.

When beginning its JFFS program in 2004, ORAP first developed support for the JFFS within the community, and then trained adult members of the local Farmer Field School (see textbox on opposite page) to serve as JFFS facilitators. ORAP provides JFFS with money for the purchase of inputs or the inputs themselves (poultry, fencing, seeds, drip irrigation kits, etc.) and offers ongoing technical support. The community selects which children will participate in the JFFS, with a focus on identifying the most vulnerable children. Participants can be up to 18 years old, and the groups average 20-30 children each. Once children are members of the group, they can stay members until they choose to leave or have "aged-out" of the group. Some youth over age 18 remain involved after they "age-out", and the hope is that they will eventually link with the adult FFS.

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## What Are Junior Farmer Field Schools (JFFS)?

JFFS are a recent offshoot of adult-run Farmer Field Schools (FFS), which have existed in Zimbabwe since the late 1990s. FFS aim to help farmers “learn by discovery” about basic agricultural principles and new farming techniques. Members meet weekly to make observations on the progress of their communal crops and livestock; discuss causes and effects of the changes observed; determine and assign tasks for the following week; learn about a study topic; and work on an experiment, such as an experiment to determine how best to control chicken parasites. The FFS curriculum has five components: seed multiplication, integrated soil, water and nutrition management, HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation, agro-business, and livestock.

In Zimbabwe, CRS and other stakeholders have encouraged FFS to establish JFFS as one component of their HIV/AIDS mitigation curriculum. JFFS involve OVC in the same participatory agricultural learning process as their adult counterparts, and serve an important function transmitting agricultural knowledge and creating livelihoods options for OVC. Although JFFS participants may earn a small amount of money from the sale of produce, livestock or eggs, the intervention is not intended as an income-generating activity. Instead the idea is that the children can take what they have learned and apply it within their household in order to provide food for household members and, eventually, to help support the household financially.

JFFS are not based at schools, but rather the adult facilitator’s homestead or land earmarked for the purpose by the village headman. Thus, the program attracts out-of-school as well as school-going children.

“...some children now have their own household vegetable plots where they are growing vegetables for sale.”

### ORAP: Child participation in action

The Junior Farmer Field Schools that ORAP supports use a **participatory learning** model. Children, in collaboration with their facilitator, develop the schedule for their weekly meetings. Working within the overall JFFS curriculum, the children identify specific topics they want to learn about and the guest speakers they would like to hear. At one JFFS, for example, children decided that they first wanted to learn first about a farming technique called Conservation Framing and how to raise poultry. The children also develop the rules and regulations for their group—sometimes in the form of a constitution or by-laws—which describe how decisions are to be made, how the task roster is to be established, how the executive committee will be elected, etc.

Children work together to determine what experiments to conduct as part of their learning. For example, in one on-going experiment, the children have created two fowl runs. In the A section, the chickens are allowed to run freely, and, in the B section, the chicken are kept within cages. Children are keeping records of the number of eggs laid per day in each run, the amount of feed used, and other critical factors. Soon, they will draw conclusions about which type of production system works best.

At JFFS, setbacks are seen as learning opportunities. For example, at one school, the children’s first batch of chickens died from disease. With their facilitator’s support, the children learned more about chicken diseases, and now their chickens are healthy and strong.

Many junior farmers put into practice at home what they are learning at school. For example, some children now have their own household vegetable plots where they are growing vegetables for sale.





*This Junior Farmer proudly shows off the house that he built with profits made from his own efforts.*

*Photo: Carolyn W. Fanelli,  
CRS/Zimbabwe*

One junior farmer, who is an orphan, was able to construct a house of his own after earning profits from the sale of seed, poultry and eggs over two seasons.

Periodically, ORAP organizes field days for the JFFS and FFS, which gives members of both groups the opportunity to share what they have learned. For example, if one JFFS and FFS are doing seed multiplication particularly well, ORAP will organize a field day on this topic.

The facilitator is a central figure at the JFFS, and ORAP has found that it is important that the person selected for this position understand that his/her role is not to dictate to children what they should be learning and doing. Rather, the facilitator's role is to give children the space to make decisions—and mistakes—on their own, and to serve as a guide to children's learning, not as an expert lecturer. The facilitator creates a supportive environment for children to express their views and can provide input into decisions, but leaves decision-making in the hands of the children. He or she is also a critical figure in modeling positive behavior and ensuring girls and boys have equal opportunities. The FFS and JFFS have a relationship built on partnership, in which they learn from one another.



*Junior Farmers conduct an experiment to find the best production system.*

### What children say

**Emmanuel:** “I am an orphan and have disabilities. I cannot use my arms, although I can do a few chores. The JFFS program has changed my life. I can now farm and even if CRS had to leave this area, I feel I am well equipped to provide for myself.”

**Mbongeni:** “The JFFS has taught me the importance of self reliance.”

**Mthokozise:** “Besides learning about farming, I enjoy the JFFS because we learn about the prevention of AIDS. I know that you can get AIDS through sharing of needles, razor blades, but most common and serious of all is sex. We have also learnt that it is important not to segregate from the community those people that have AIDS; we should continue to love them and treat them with dignity.”

## Steps to Making Child Participation in Non-formal Education Happen

- 1 Train the facilitators in child participation techniques and strategies**—they play a central role in ensuring the schools are places of participatory learning.
- 2 Ensure that the children themselves are negotiating what activities take priority**, as this increases their ownership over the projects, ensures the project is meeting their needs, and enables them to later analyze their own decisions to determine whether they would make the same decision next time.
- 3 Cultivate child leaders within the program, especially girls.**  
The facilitator may need to play a role strategizing with the group about how to ensure girls are taking up positions of leadership, and the reasons why this may or may not be happening.
- 4 Equip child leaders to facilitate the participation of younger children.**  
While it is natural for younger children to choose older children as their leaders, it is important that these leaders receive training in how to ensure that younger children are participating in decision-making and sharing their voice in a variety of ways.
- 5 Organize field days and exchange visits between projects**, so that children have a chance to show off their work and share what they have learned.
- 6 Link together groups with different comparative advantages.**  
For example, in the JFFS program, if one JFFS is doing seed multiplication particularly well, perhaps they can sell seed to another JFFS. Once you've made this introduction, allow the children to conduct negotiations, and create opportunities for these groups to network on an on-going basis.

## Activity to get you started

If you support a non-formal vocational education project like JFFS, one “activity to get you started” is to support the children in hosting a field day (or shop day or studio day—tailor the name to your project!) for another group of children who may be working in a similar vocational area.

### Hosting a Field Day

- 1 Explain the project to the group of children,** and gather their ideas for what other children’s group (or groups) to invite to the field day.
- 2 Talk with the group about what aspect of their work they are most proud of** and would want to share on the field day. If there are younger or shyer children in the group who are more confident sharing ideas through drawing, allow them to do so.
- 3 Facilitate a discussion among the children about roles and responsibilities** in organizing the day. Depending on the size of the event and the group, you may want to encourage the children to create a planning committee. It is also important for the group to consider how they are going to present their work—can they do it in a participatory way in which their guests have a chance to try the particular skill they are sharing? Another discussion topic is how the children will ask their guests to evaluate the day—important information to gather for the next field day!
- 4 Let children take charge of organizing the day,** providing support and guidance as you see fit, depending on children’s capacities. For example, children should be in charge of the agenda, invitations and other logistics, and in the running of the actual event. Although you’ll probably need to be involved in overseeing budget and finance issues, try to let children take as much responsibility as possible.
- 5 After the event, have a discussion with children about what went well,** what could have gone better, and what they learned. Then, most importantly, talk about how some of the roles and responsibilities they took on in this initiative could be translated into the project’s day-to-day operations. Create a list of ideas and strategies to test over the next month. If, like the junior farmers, your group is good at conducting experiments, you can even frame testing new child participation strategies as an experiment. For example, one test could be whether having a rotating child co-facilitator of the weekly meetings increases the amount of time children talk during these meetings.

*One note of caution:* This type of child participation activity is event-based. In order to ensure child participation is happening at all times, you need to find ways to integrate child participation into the structure of how your project operates. Child participation should not just be a one-off, or something that only happens during special events.

### Reflection

#### Reflect back on the questions posed on pages 11 and 12 in Section II.

Based on what you now know about ORAP's efforts to facilitate child participation, how might you answer these questions? What additional information would you need to make an informed response, and how would this information affect your response?

In particular, consider the interaction between the adult Farmer Field Schools and the Junior Farmer Field Schools. What about this relationship supports meaningful child participation? Beyond what is described, how could you envision the relationship building a true partnership between adults and children?

This example also raises the issue of the gender equity because, at some JFFS, boys were participating in leadership roles more than girls. What strategies could the JFFS facilitator use to ensure that both girls and boys are actively participating in the project? How can the JFFS members and the facilitator ensure that girls feel free to express their views? How could a more supportive environment for girls be created?

“What strategies could the JFFS facilitator use to ensure that both boys and girls are actively participating in the project?”

## IV. Child Participation: In-depth

### Why Child Participation is Important

#### Child Rights

*A century that began with children having virtually no rights is ending with children having the most powerful legal instrument that not only recognizes but protects their human rights.*

—Carol Bellamy, Former Executive Director of UNICEF

“...child participation is not only a right in and of itself, but is also critical to the realization of children’s other rights, such as the right to education.”

The “powerful legal instrument” that Bellamy refers to is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which entered into force in 1990 and has been ratified by more countries than any other human rights instrument. Shaped from a variety of legal systems and cultural traditions, the CRC is a universally agreed-upon set of non-negotiable standards and obligations. It spells out the basic human rights that belong to all children, without discrimination.

One of the four guiding principles of the CRC is child participation. Thus, child participation is not only a right in and of itself, but is also critical to the realization of children’s other rights, such as the right to education. Significantly for this Guide, this means that child participation is an indispensable component of children accessing their right to education.

### Program Quality

Beyond being a right, child participation also enhances the quality of policies and programs. Lansdown (2001) argues that child participation strengthens decision-making. Tolfree and Woodhead (1999) say that listening to children makes policymakers more effective because they can avoid assumptions about what children want, think and need and can engage with children as valuable partners in social development. Child participation is also a key feature of high-quality, sustainable development programs because it is an investment in the capacity of future generations to explore their surroundings, to appreciate and contribute to their community’s development, and to feel ownership over community initiatives (CRS 2006).

### Developing Children’s Capacity to Participate

Participation should promote the best interests of children and enhance their personal development. In fact, when children use their existing capacities to participate, the quality of their participation improves and their decision-making confidence increases (ECPAT International 1999; Lansdown 2004).

## Child Participation in Practice<sup>2</sup>

Child participation has been an increasingly prominent focus of development workers around the world. But recognizing the importance of child participation and actually putting child participation into practice are two very different things! As noted above, the CRC is the starting point for most discussions of child participation. Article 12.1 says that:

*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.*

In this How-to Guide, we use Article 12.1 as the basis for understanding the possible scope and level of children participation in a project. By scope of child participation, we mean the range of mechanisms available to enable the participation of children. By level of child participation, we are referring to the depth of children's engagement in initiatives, organizations and institutions.

The scope and level of child participation are both spectrums. So, for example, at one end of the "scope" spectrum are those initiatives that have no mechanisms available to enable the participation of children, and, at the other end are initiatives with a comprehensive range of mechanisms available. It is useful to think about these spectrums as we describe child participation in education initiatives in Zimbabwe, and also as you think about child participation in your own activities.

<sup>2</sup>Text for this section is excerpted from: Fanelli, C., Musarandega R., and Chawanda, L. "Child Participation in Zimbabwe's National Action Plan for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children: Progress, Challenges and Possibilities", draft for publication in *Children, Youth and Environments*, Volume 16, Special Issue: "Critical International Perspectives on Child and Youth Participation."

### Key Terms

**Scope:** the range of mechanisms available to enable the participation of children

**Level:** the depth of children's engagement in initiatives, organizations and institutions





*Young children give their advice on what the school garden should grow by drawing pictures.*

## Scope of Child Participation

In determining the scope of child participation in a project, it is important to consider the decisions that have been made—consciously or unconsciously—about which types of children are “capable of forming a viewpoint”, what matters are considered to be “affecting the child”, and how “due weight” is given to children’s viewpoints. We’ll use the child participation literature to explore these concepts and develop endpoints for the “scope spectrum” of children’s participation.

### Children’s Capacity to Form a Viewpoint

Four key points about children’s capacity to form a viewpoint emerge from the child participation literature.

**First, it is difficult to make generalized comments about children’s capacities.** Age, in particular, is often a misleading guidepost for determining whether or not children have the capacity to form a viewpoint. Although children generally gain greater capacity for participation as they grow older, using a age to determine a child’s capacity overlooks the individuality of each child (Woolf 2000); the possibility that a child may have competence in one area, but not in another (ibid.); the effects of intra-cultural differences such as class and education levels (Hart, Newman and Ackermann 2004); and the fact that even children in early infancy have been found to express preferences (Hart 2002).

**Second, as noted earlier, participation itself further develops children’s capacity to participate.** This means that participation is key to increasing children’s confidence and ability to form and express viewpoints. Lansdown argues that “the most effective model for developing competencies is one where children work collaboratively, each serving as a resource for others, and taking varying roles and responsibilities according to their understanding and expertise” (2004, 6). In order to cater to a range of children’s evolving capacities, it is important that a range of roles be made available for children’s participation, and that, when possible, children’s capacity be built to prepare them for these roles.

**Third, verbal or written expression is only one of many ways that children can express a viewpoint.** In fact, Article 13 of the CRC guarantees children’s freedom to “impart information and ideas” through the media of their choice. As a result, a creative array of tools can and should be used to gather information about children’s viewpoints. Children’s forms of expression include not only oral and written communications, but also art, drama, and music. Facilitating and observing these various forms of expression is especially important when working with children in difficult circumstances, such as OVC, who may be silent, unresponsive, or withdrawn (Tolfree and Woodhouse 1999). In addition, children in some traditional African societies may have unique social spaces through which to communicate with adults, even though it is culturally inappropriate for children to talk to adults in public (Miljeteig 2000).



*Older and younger children working together.*



**Fourth, it is important for children to have “access to relevant information prepared in a child-friendly way”** in order to form their viewpoints to the fullest extent of their capacities (ISCA 2003, 13). Significantly, access to information is also a right in and of itself, captured by Article 17 of the CRC, while Article 13 outlines children’s freedom to receive “information and ideas of all kinds”. Children’s ignorance about a topic should not be mistaken for a lack of capacity, and it is the responsibility of adults and the government to ensure that children have the information they need.

### **All Matters Affecting the Child**

How do you know if a matter is affecting a child? Hart (2002, 253) believes the question is “probably best handled by taking the default position that the standard is met unless convincing evidence to the contrary is presented”. Also significant is the idea of when children should begin participating in a certain “matter”—when the project is conceptualized? planned? implemented? evaluated? Child participation literature would encourage child participation in all stages of the project (Ackermann et al. 2003, 33; Smale 2000, 18).

### **Due Weight in Accordance with the Age and Maturity of the Child**

How do you give “due weight” to a child’s viewpoint? The CRC makes it clear that a child who simply expresses his or her viewpoint is not truly participating until this viewpoint is given consideration (Hart 2002). Determining what sort of consideration qualifies as “due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” is a

challenge, and the literature provides no clear formula making this determination. In general, however, giving “due weight” means progressively increasing the weight given to a child’s viewpoint (ibid.).

### **The Scope Spectrum**

Taken together, the literature’s perspective on the concepts of “capacity,” “all matters” and “due weight” help to define the endpoints of the scope spectrum in regards to child participation.

#### **At one end of the spectrum are initiatives, organizations and institutions that:**

- Recognize that all children—including very young children and disabled children—have the capacity to form a viewpoint.
- Ensure that children have access to accurate, understandable, “child-friendly” information.
- Embrace a diverse range of capacities.
- Facilitate and observe the expression of these viewpoints through a variety of media.
- Assume that all matters affect children, unless convincing evidence proves the contrary.
- Thoughtfully consider every viewpoint expressed by children.
- Emphasize individual evaluations of maturity over objective decisions based on age in determining “due weight”.

#### **At the other end of the spectrum are initiatives, organizations and institutions that:**

- Create strict guidelines regarding which children have the capacity to form a viewpoint.
- Undertake no effort to make information accessible to children for use in forming their viewpoint.
- Purposely limit the media available for children to express these viewpoints.
- Assume that most matters do not affect children, and require that strict criteria be used to prove that a matter does affect a child directly.
- Give cursory, token consideration to children’s viewpoints.
- Utilize age as the primary factor for determining the “due weight” to give a child’s viewpoint.

## Assessing Scope of Participation

Based on these “endposts,” it becomes useful to ask the following questions about initiatives, organizations and institutions to determine where they fall along the scope spectrum:

- How broad is the range of roles and responsibilities available for all children, of differing capacities, to participate?
- How broad are the means of expression children can use to express their viewpoints?
- How broadly or narrowly is “affecting the child” defined?
- How comprehensive, meaningful, and subjective is the process established to determine the “due weight” to accord children’s viewpoints?

## Level of Participation

In determining the level of child participation in a project, it is important to consider the decisions that have been made, consciously or unconsciously, about how “freely” children can express their views and the extent of their “the opportunity to be heard”. We’ll again use the child participation literature to explore these concepts and develop endpoints for the “level spectrum” of children’s participation.

### The Right to Express Those Views Freely and the Opportunity to Be Heard

There are two sides to the requirement that children have a right to freely express their views—first, that children should not be forced to express their views, and second, that adults must ensure “that children are enabled and encouraged to contribute their views” (Lansdown 2001, 2). This enabling and encouraging might include “enabl[ing] children to negotiate their participation to reflect their own preferences and working methods” and “build[ing] self-esteem and self-confidence in children so that they feel they are able to contribute and have opinions which are worth listening to” (ISCA 2003, 12). Meanwhile, the concept of an “opportunity to be heard” means that adults and children are required to listen to children and must clearly explain what this opportunity means so that children understand the possible extent of their influence (ISCA 2003). In other words, adults need to tell children what they are going to do with the viewpoints that are shared. The “opportunity to be heard” recognizes the potential of children to enrich the decision-making processes and to participate as citizens and agents of change.



*Members of a child-led internal savings and lending group supported by RUDO (a CRS-Zimbabwe partner) discuss their group's plans.*

*Photo: Mark W. Adams for CRS/Zimbabwe*

Based on the opportunities children have to express their views and be heard, several authors have developed frameworks for thinking about the possible levels of children's participation (Hart 1997, 41; Reddy and Ratna 2002; Lansdown 2004, 6; Shier 2001, 110-1). What these frameworks have in common is that, at their lowest levels, children are not encouraged to express their viewpoints. In fact, children might even face "active resistance" to their participation (Reddy and Ratna 2002) or manipulation of their contributions. As children's level of participation increases, they become more involved in decision-making processes and hold increasing amounts of power, responsibility and authority. At the highest levels of child participation, children are leading their own initiatives, often in an equal partnership with adults. They are not just participating in special children's events; their participation is evident throughout structures, networks and decision-making institutions. Children are so well-integrated into a project's operational structure that they become critical to its success or failure.

It is important to note that the concepts of children expressing their views and being heard both raise the issue of whether children are being viewed as individuals, or as a collective. In many settings, such as international conferences, children participate as representatives of children, viewed as a collective group. But, at the collective level, how can one ensure that the children being represented have themselves freely expressed their views and had the opportunity to be heard? The right to participate extends to individual children being represented at the collective level by a child representative. Thus, for genuine representation to occur, there must be genuine opportunities for a child who is representing other children to hear the opinions of his or her constituency.

## The Level Spectrum

**Mindful of the above points, at one endpoint of the level spectrum are initiatives, organizations and institutions in which:**

- Children have complete freedom, without constraints or restrictive criteria, to express their opinions in a supportive environment with the encouragement of adults and peers.
- Adults and children actively listen to children's views, and these views hold power and authority in substantive decision-making processes.
- Child participation plays a critical role in project implementation.
- Children fully understand the parameters of their opportunity to be heard.
- Children have the opportunity to lead their own initiatives, in equal partnership with adults.
- Children who are speaking for children as a collective have genuine opportunities to hear the views of their constituency, freely expressed.

**At the other end of the level spectrum would be initiatives, organizations and institutions in which:**

- Children have very limited opportunities to express their views, or are forced to express their views unwillingly.
- Children's views are manipulated to meet the needs of adults.
- Children's views hold no power or authority, and play no role in decision-making.
- Children misunderstand the potential impact of their views.
- Children are not considered equal partners with adults.
- Child representatives have no means of consulting with their constituency.

**In determining where an initiative, organization or institution fits along the level spectrum, it is useful to ask the following questions:**

- How free are children to express their views, or to choose not to express them?
  - In what ways are children encouraged to express their views, and what efforts are made to ensure a supportive environment for their expression?
  - How much power or authority do children's views have in decision-making?
  - To what extent do children understand the parameters of their opportunity to be heard?
  - To what extent are children in charge of their own initiatives?
  - To what extent are children working in equal partnership with adults?
  - To what extent do child representatives have opportunities to consult with their constituency and ensure meaningful participation of this constituency?
-



## Other Models

Thinking about the scope and level of child participation in a project is just one framework for thinking about your approach to putting child participation in practice. There are many others. For example, Save the Children Canada (2005) notes that meaningful participation is characterized by an ethical approach and commitment to transparency, honesty and accountability; a safe approach in which children's protection rights are properly safeguarded; a non-discriminatory approach that ensures that all children, regardless of their class, language, etc. have an equal opportunity to be involved; and a child-friendly approach which enables children to contribute to the best of the abilities and guarantees effective follow up and evaluation with children. We encourage you to scan the useful resources section (page 61), as you might find a framework you find particularly resonant and applicable to your situation.

## Possible Negative Effects of Child Participation

For all its benefits, it is important to remember that child participation also can have negative effects. These potential effects must be taken into consideration, not only to ensure that child participation can succeed, but also to meet child protection goals.

In particular, children may be singled out for derision, discrimination, or worse as a result of their participation. McIvor points out that, "in disadvantaged communities, knowledge is often held as a form of status and power by the knowledge-bearer which can both be abused by participating children and leave children susceptible to abuse or exploitation" (2005, 31). He also discovered that cultivating child participation in Zimbabwe can

“For all its benefits, it is important to remember that child participation also can have negative effects.”

“Children and their parents/guardians also should be well-informed about child participants’ roles and responsibilities...”

challenge existing power dynamics between adults and children, which traditionally portray children as “passive, obedient and unquestioning” (2005, 25). Ackermann et al. (2003, 23) note that tensions between adults and children could also emerge because the adults who are witnessing children’s participation may feel powerless themselves.

From a child protection perspective, it is also essential to understand that participation can have a significant impact on children’s lives, and that their physical safety and emotional wellbeing must be of foremost concern. Acting on this concern might include follow-up with child participants after the project they are participating in ends. Children and their parents/guardians also should be well-informed about child participants’ roles and responsibilities and how any products of their participation will be used. In some cases, informed consent forms and permission slips should be prepared and signed. You might also want your project evaluation to include an assessment of how participation in the project has impacted children (McIvor 2005).

Finally, Ackermann et al. (2003, 12) flag the importance of keeping children’s responsibilities in line with their capacity, and avoiding giving them “excessive responsibilities, costs or workloads... under the guise of participation”. Participatory activities should not undermine children’s other responsibilities, such as schoolwork (Ackermann et al. 2003).

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## Child Participation in Education Activities

About 121 million children, the majority of whom are girls, do not attend school and are denied their right to an education (UNICEF 2004). CRS/Zimbabwe is committed to ensuring that as many children as possible complete their primary education.

The whole notion of education assistance is based on the need to make education available to children who are disadvantaged and would otherwise not be able to attend school. It is these child beneficiaries who are best placed to know exactly what they need and how best these needs can be met. In order to have a broad scope and deep level of child participation, the involvement of children in education programs must go beyond their participation as recipients of services.

The broader community also plays a very integral role in promoting school attendance amongst children. It is of core importance to engage community members in both the development and ongoing functioning of any initiative. This is important for incorporating local knowledge, generating community ownership and extending the access of the intervention into the community. Parental and community participation constitute a fundamental aspect of quality education (Kajawu and Makiwa, 2006).

In CRS/Zimbabwe programs, each community that administers education assistance is responsible for selecting the children that will benefit. Community members elect a committee to have this decision-making responsibility. Traditionally, these



committees have been adult-only, largely due to cultural norms and values which dictate that children do not sit in the same forum as adults, let alone hold discussions with them. Through CRS/Zimbabwe and its partners, efforts are underway to sensitize communities on the empowering tool that child participation can be, and many communities have begun to have child representation in the village forums which identify education assistance beneficiaries.

## V. Conclusion

### Common themes and approaches

A number of common themes and approaches emerge from the examples, steps and activities described above.

- 1 Parents, guardians, caregivers, community leaders and traditional leaders such as headmen must be consulted about your child participation efforts.** Child participation might challenge traditional cultural norms, and it is important to discuss this possibility, solicit adult's opinions about how child participation could be facilitated within the community, and address any concerns or questions they might have about your particular project. Adult support is critical because adults can exert control over whether children are part of a particular project or not, and can actively support or suppress your child participation efforts. In many communities, gaining the buy-in of traditional leaders is a must for the concept of child participation to take root.
  - 2 Creating participatory adult groups can set the stage for establishing similar participatory children's groups.** As the example from ORAP demonstrates, when adult community members and/or their peers participate in a project, they understand the project and the scope and level of participation it requires. This awareness can make them more supportive of their children taking part in a similar initiative because they know very well how children are spending their time and the roles and responsibilities they are taking on.
  - 3 Both children and adults may require training in child participation.** In the example from Kapnek, pre-school teachers were trained in how to facilitate child participation at the ECD center. Meanwhile, the children UOC works with receive training in what it means to be a child representative meaningfully participating in an adult committee and representing a constituency of children. It is important to consider the training needs that accompany your child participation efforts.
-

- 4 Be clear with children about the extent of their participation in a project.** For a variety of reasons, such as logistics, budgetary constraints and cultural norms, it is not always possible to have the broadest scope and deepest level of child participation in your project. While aiming to enable more and more meaningful child participation, it is important to be very clear with children about the extent and influence of their participation. If their views on how many groups to invite to the field day doesn't really matter because you only have a budget to invite 20 people, then tell them so. Children need to know the parameters of their participation; otherwise they may be disappointed in the impact of their participation and, eventually, lose motivation to continue participating. Participation does not mean everyone's idea is used, but that every idea is heard and considered.
  - 5 Event-based child participation is positive, but must lead to ongoing child participation in decision-making structures and institutions.** As an "activity to get you started" having an event that child actively participate in organizing and implementing is important as a way of empowering children and demonstrating children's capabilities to the larger community. However, participation cannot only be event-based. In order to ensure child participation is happening at all times, you need to find ways to integrate child participation into the structure of how your project operates. Child participation should not just be a one-off, or something that only happens during special events.
  - 6 Develop avenues for children of different ages and capacities to participate in a project.** In particular, consider how very young children, children living with disabilities and other special groups can be involved and how to overcome any specific obstacles to their participation.
  - 7 Think about how you can facilitate participation throughout the project cycle,** including planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.
  - 8 Facilitating child participation requires time, patience, and resources.** It must be a conscious commitment made when you are considering the human and financial resources required for a project.
  - 9 Leave time for reflection and learning.** Work with children to identify and share your lessons learned and promising practices in facilitating child participation.
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## Acknowledgements

CRS/Zimbabwe's main donors are the U.S. Government (through USAID and Food-for-Peace), the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID), the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida), the Royal Netherlands Embassy and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The country program also receives substantial support from CRS private funds.

This Guide would not have been possible without the support of the CRS/Zimbabwe staff, particularly Shamiso Moyo, Tarisai Mubhonderi, and Ralph Chirowamhangu from the Partner Support Coordination Unit, Willie Makumbe from the Livelihoods Security Department and Washington Masikati from STRIVE.

A big thank you to CRS/Zimbabwe's partner staff members and members of the communities they serve (including numerous children!), many of whom shared their time and insights with us during the creation of this Guide. In particular we'd like to thank Dennis Flackson from Nzeve, Danny Gomwe from Mavambo Trust, Hazel Makuya and Trust Chiguzare from Kapenk Trust, and Rosemary Tawodzera, Chipo Magara and Agness Nyalsanga from Kapnek's early children education program in Zvimba. Finally, we'd also like to thank Dr. Claire Nyandoro from the Ministry of Education for her valuable insights into Early Childhood Development in Zimbabwe.

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## Notes

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## **Notes**



**ISBN:** 0-945356-25-0