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Children's Participation and Policy Change in South Asia

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Preface

This paper is one of a series of working papers, reports and policy briefings on different aspects of childhood poverty published by the Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Centre (CHIP). CHIP is a collaborative research and policy initiative involving academic institutions and Save the Children in China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and the UK. It aims to:

- deepen understanding of the main causes of childhood poverty and poverty cycles, and increase knowledge of effective strategies to tackle it in different contexts
- inform effective policy to end childhood poverty, ensuring that research findings are widely communicated to policy-makers, practitioners and advocates
- raise the profile of childhood poverty issues and increase the urgency of tackling them through anti-poverty policy and action
- work globally to tackle chronic and childhood poverty in developing and transition countries.

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This paper was written by Emma Williams, who at the time of writing, was an M.Phil. student at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex. She is currently working as a policy adviser for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. It was edited by Colette Solomon.

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The views in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of CHIP, CPRC, DFID or Save the Children.

Contents

Abbreviations and translations

Bal Mazdoor Sangh - Child Workers' Union

BBC - British Broadcasting Corporation

Bhima Sangha - strong union

BJP - Bharatiya Janata Party

CPI - Communist Party of India

CPI(M) - Communist Party of India (Marxist)

CRC - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

CRIN - Child Rights Information Network

CWC - Concerned for Working Children

DCRC - Delhi Child Rights Club

GAD - Gender and Development

Gram Panchayat - elected council of village representatives

Gram(a) Sabha - village assembly

HIPC - heavily indebted poor country

ILO - International Labour Organisation

IMF - International Monetary Fund

INGO - international non-governmental organisation

Makkala Panchayat - children's council

MP - Member of Parliament

NGO - non-governmental organisation

OSCAR - Save the Children Office for the South and Central Asia Region

PRSP - Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

ROSA - Regional Office for South Asia (UNICEF)

Taluk Panchayat - sub-district (intermediate) council

UNGASS - United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

WID - Women in Development

Executive summary

This report aims to contribute to the emerging literature on children's participation in policy processes by exploring the ways in which children may successfully influence policy relating to childhood poverty. It compares five case studies: an HIV/AIDS conference in Nepal; the 2001 Children's Parliament in Sri Lanka (both of which were one-off interactions); two Indian working children's unions, and a children's movement in Bangladesh which raises issues of importance to street and working children. Using these case studies, it aims to establish which channels of influence have proved most successful for children attempting to engage with decision-makers.

The paper discusses the main reasons advanced for involving children and young people in decision-making about issues which affect them – instrumental concerns about improving policy effectiveness and arguments based on children's and young people's right to participate. It also analyses the main concerns raised – that children and young people are too busy or inexperienced to participate in policy development, or that this is yet another developmental fad. It relates the motivation for children and young people's participation to the nature of the policy space (political, social and cultural environment) where dialogue takes place, and the amount of control they are likely to have over policy processes and outcomes. This analysis is then used to construct a picture of constraining and enabling factors for children and young people who aim to influence policy processes.

The paper shows that children have been most successful in influencing local-level decision-making which does not significantly challenge society's power relations, although it should be recognised that the idea of children being taken seriously on public policy issues in itself challenges age hierarchies. Policy spaces which have developed more slowly and have become 'institutionalised' have greater potential for long-term influence over, and change in, policy than one-off issue-based confrontations, though these may be the only route to influence some more controversial issues. Children have enforced accountability most effectively when there are formal mechanisms in place for tracking the implementation of decisions in which they have been involved.

The key findings of the paper are:

- Despite the widespread rhetoric of empowerment and policy influence, only a few of the groups or organisations reviewed for this study actually appeared to have had an observable influence on policy at any level. Often, influence was limited to local decisions rather than policies.
- Children and young people in all five case studies have engaged most effectively with policy-makers at the agenda-setting stage.
- One-off instances of engagement between children and young people and policy-makers generate more media attention than long-term processes of engagement, but less in the

way of sustainable change. However, the nature and extent of media involvement depends on the type of issue concerned.

- Of the five case studies, the strategy adopted by Bhima Sangha (a working children's union in South India), of working through children's councils linked to village councils, offers the most sustainable and comprehensive channel for policy influence. However, it involves a trade-off between the level of engagement, which remains local, and the sustainability of access to decision-makers. While effective for decisions about local development planning, it may not be so effective at achieving change in wider policy issues.

1 Introduction

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which came into force in 1990, gives children the right to 'express [...] views freely' in all matters affecting them (UN 1989: article 12.1).[1] Following this, the decade leading up to the 2002 UN General Assembly Special Session on Children saw an emerging emphasis on children's participation as a key element of children's rights (White, 2002a; Harper, 2002).

The increasing involvement of children and young people in policy processes related to childhood poverty needs to be situated within a broader context of participation in poverty reduction policy. Over the past couple of decades, participatory approaches to poverty reduction have become more common. This has been encouraged by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s 1999 introduction of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), a key step towards debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPCs). These papers were drawn up in consultation with civil society, including if possible poor people, on the assumption that their involvement would produce more effective policies and increase the degree of country 'ownership'. Echoing this, the 2000/2001 World Development Report, with its extensive Voices of the Poor survey, recognises that effective poverty reduction policy requires the input of those affected (World Bank, 2000). However, while the value of adult participation in decision-making processes that affect them has long been asserted, the active involvement of children and young people in decision-making is a relatively new area of concern and practice.

Children and young people's participation consists of children's involvement in decision-making in issues of concern to them (O'Kane, forthcoming). The majority of commentators focus on the processes of this participation, such as the empowerment – however defined – of the children and young people involved. There is, however, an increasing need for children's groups and NGOs to justify their actions both to those on whose behalf they claim to be acting and to funding bodies, and also to demonstrate what children and young people's participation achieves when they advocate that others do the same. This means looking at the kinds of policy outcomes that this participation has had. To date, however, there is little evidence to indicate whether children and young people can effectively influence policy-makers (Kirby and Bryson, 2002; McGuigan, 2003).

This report examines situations in which children and young people have influenced policy processes on issues of childhood poverty. It uses five case studies from South Asia to track the change in outlook on the part of national and local authorities, from a perception of children and young people as passive recipients of services, to a recognition of the value of their active participation (White, 2002a). Kirby and Bryson (2002: 63) argue that 'we know much more about how to support

1 The CRC was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1989, and came into force on 2 September 1990. By November 2002, there were 191 states which were party to the Convention, with only Somalia and the United States of America still to ratify it.

young people to express their views, than we do about how to ensure those views affect change'. Research into the influence of children and young people's participation therefore represents a first step towards plugging the gap in existing knowledge, which will ensure that in future children and young people's participation is designed in a way that maximises their policy influence.

The key question addressed by this report is: **Under what conditions and/or by what routes can children and young people effectively influence policy relating to childhood or youth poverty?** Answering this question involves considering a subsidiary set of issues, including:

- What constitutes 'success' or 'failure' in terms of children and young people's participation in policy processes?
- Which children are participating, and whom do they represent?
- Who initiates and drives processes of children's participation in policy change? What are the relative roles of the children and adults involved?
- Has the nature of the space in which children and young people's participation has taken place affected the outcome of their attempts to influence policy-makers?
- When policy outcomes have been influenced by children and young people, has there been an implementation gap? Are there any methods of enforcing accountability?
- What factors have enabled or constrained their influence?

The second chapter discusses the conceptual framework for the report, including key terms and working definitions, models of the policy process, potential outcomes of attempts at policy influence and the analytical framework for the case studies. In the third chapter, the case study methodology and its limitations are discussed. The fourth chapter presents the case studies, while chapter five provides a comparative analysis of the insights generated from each of them. Chapter six draws conclusions and recommendations.

Development of the conceptual framework has involved drawing on the academic literature concerning participation, empowerment, policy processes and policy influence. The empirical analysis is based on information from a variety of sources. These include interviews and questionnaires from non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff and government officials associated with the various case studies, newspaper and internet sources, documentation from mediating NGOs in the case of the working children's groups and evaluation reports from other NGOs and independent consultants.

2 Conceptual framework

Attitudes towards children and young people and their participation in decision-making have been changing over the past decade. At the World Summit for Children in 1990, children and young people showed delegates to their seats. Twelve years on, at the 2002 UN General Assembly Special Session on Children (UNGASS), children and young people held their own forum as well as participating throughout the rest of the event (CRIN, 2002; O'Kane, forthcoming). Putting children and young people's interests and opinions firmly onto the agenda has been described as the new challenge for social development (Save the Children, 1995), and the concept and practice of children's participation have become increasingly established and accepted by organisations and governments around the world. As White (2002a: 725) notes, this new development agenda 'marks a major shift from the consideration of children as marginal subjects primarily within health and education programmes, to the promotion of children as a development target group in themselves, through the rubric of child rights'. This shift from the language of needs and beneficiaries to the language of citizens and rights is exemplified in the CRC's discourse of rights and echoes a wider shift in development discourse and practice (Cornwall, 2002).

There is still a long way to go, however, before children and young people's participation is fully accepted by those with decision-making power. There are several reasons for this. Harper (2002) argues that governments and policy-makers tend to conceive of policy related to children as a question of basic services. Citing Marcus et al (2002) on PRSPs and children, she notes that 'it is often considered that children's wellbeing can be taken care of via "add-ons" to mainstream policy, and the ways in which mainstream policy may lead to or entrench childhood poverty virtually ignored' (Harper, 2002: 1077). Both of these assumptions – that children have service-based needs rather than rights, and that children will automatically benefit from policies designed for adults – lead to a lack of interest in the rights or opinions of children. Furthermore, many people feel that children and young people are inexperienced and not the appropriate people to be making, or contributing to, potentially important policy decisions (Panicker, 1996).

There are strong parallels here with the older debate on gender and development. Women in Development (WID), in which planning for women was perceived by policy-makers as an 'add-on' to mainstream policy and practice, has gradually been supplanted by a more progressive discourse on Gender and Development (GAD), which addresses the social relationship between women and men (Moser, 1993). Advocates of a gender planning approach experienced similar resistance to women's participation - in its empowering rather than instrumental sense - as those currently arguing for children and young people's right to participate. Their experience shows that it can take decades for those with decision-making authority to accept the relevance and importance of particular groups in society.[2]

2 Edwards (1996) makes a more detailed comparison of women and children in policy-making.

This section now discusses key terms and provides working definitions, then outlines some of the arguments used for and against children's participation. It then goes on to discuss different models of the policy process and develop an analytical framework which will be used in chapter five to assess the nature and degree of children and young people's influence on policy outcomes.

2.1 Children and young people

The UN CRC defines a child as 'every human being below the age of 18 years old, unless under the law applicable to the child, a majority is attained earlier' (UN 1989: article 1). While any cut-off point between childhood and adulthood is bound to be arbitrary, this one has the benefit of being the most widely agreed upon. It is the definition that will be used throughout this report, except where indicated otherwise. Although the terms 'children' and 'young people' are mainly used together to refer to everyone under eighteen years of age, an explicit distinction is occasionally made. In these instances 'child' is used to refer to those who are 12 or under, and 'young people' to refer to those who are 13-18.

As with any category, there is a danger that the label 'child' obscures a more complex reality because using an age lens focuses on certain aspects while excluding others. White (2002a: 726) points to the heterogenous nature of children, arguing that they do not 'constitute a social group with common interests and a universal set of entitlements'. Using the term 'child' has certain implications. Firstly, it is likely that the prevailing image of childhood will be drawn from the modern West (ibid). Boyden (1997) contrasts the 'sentimental' Western ideal of childhood with the often harsh Southern reality, and looks at how this ideal influences international legislation relating to children. She notes that 'the discontinuity between the protective ideologies of child welfare embodied in both international rights legislation and national policy and the socio-economic and cultural realities of countless children in the South is marked' (ibid: 213). Secondly, it may lead to the neglect of other relevant variables, such as class, gender or ethnicity (James and Prout, 1997).

Of marginalised groups, children are among the most vulnerable to this kind of collective stereotyping. For years, their development has been seen as biologically rather than socially and culturally determined (Save the Children, 1995). Piaget's linear model of childhood development has held sway for much of the twentieth century [3], and it is only relatively recently that a view of children as active agents rather than 'passive subjects of structural determinations' has emerged (James and Prout, 1997: 4). It is this spectrum of possible views of children and young people, from beneficiaries to agents, that forms the basis for the ensuing rights-based discussion of children and young people's participation and helps to account for the range of attitudes and approaches to children's participation.

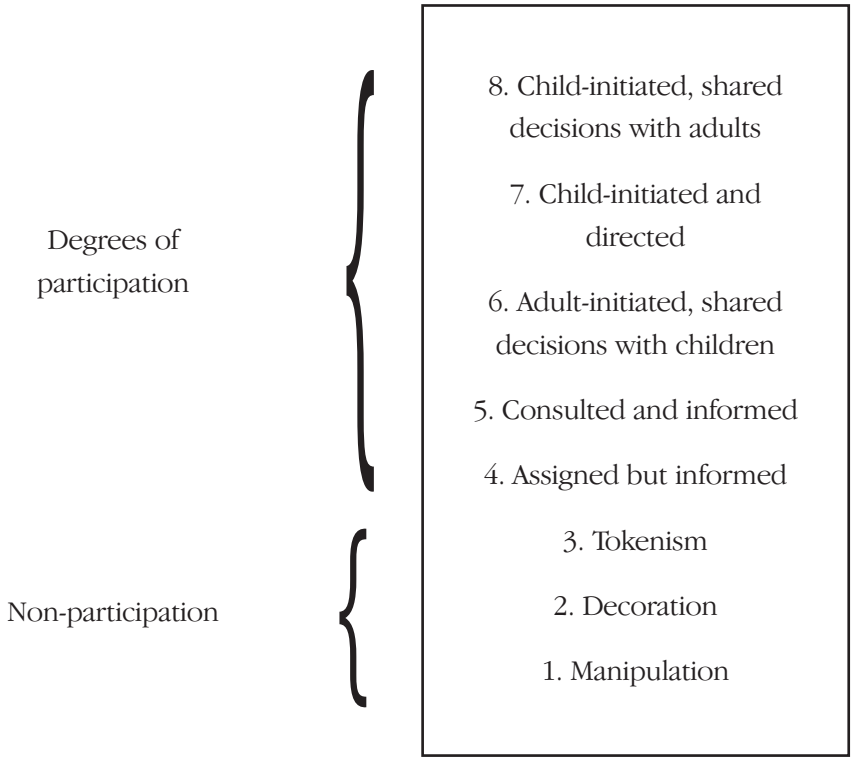
3 According to Piaget, childhood development consists of 'a series of predetermined stages, which lead towards the eventual achievement of logical competence. This is the mark of adult rationality' (James and Prout, 1997: 11).

2.2 Participation

There is now a large body of participatory initiatives covering a range of activities, from project planning to municipal budgeting. The common thread is the element of decision-making power afforded to less powerful stakeholders – such as villagers, local residents or disabled people – who are usually left out of such processes. Accordingly, O'Kane (forthcoming: 19) refers to children's participation as 'an ongoing process of children's active involvement in decision-making (at different levels) in matters that concern them. It requires information sharing and dialogue between children and adults, which is based on mutual respect and power sharing. Genuine participation gives children the power to shape both the process and outcome'.

As outlined in the introduction, participation has become a major feature of contemporary approaches to poverty reduction. Organisations ranging from small NGOs and grassroots groups to international agencies such as the World Bank and the UN have recognised the potential for increased participation in policy processes, from the local to the international level. Various 'ladders' of participation are commonly used to show the different levels at which stakeholders may be engaged in a decision-making process. Hart (1992) draws on Arnstein's well-known 1969 conceptualisation to create a child-specific ladder.

Figure 1- A ladder of children's participation



Source: Hart (1992: 9)

Here, the top rung is not 'citizen control' as in Arnstein's ladder, but 'child-initiated, shared decisions with adults'. This is because Hart recognises that children are often unable to carry out activities without the help of adults. He emphasises that 'the important principle [...] is one of choice: programmes should be designed which maximise the opportunity for any child to choose to participate at the highest level of his [sic] ability' (Hart, 1992: 12). It should, however, be recognised that, while the divisions Hart makes may draw attention to non-participatory practice masquerading under the rhetoric of children's participation, they nonetheless represent a simplification of reality. It does not necessarily follow that anything further up the ladder is 'better', because different degrees of participation may be suitable in different situations.

There is a range of arguments in favour of children and young people's participation in poverty reduction policy processes. These arguments may be divided into two broad categories. The first set argue that children's participation results in better decisions, or that it is good for children and young people to participate because it develops their critical thinking, dialogue and citizenship skills (the instrumental approach). Arguments in the second category are those which maintain that it is children's right to participate in making decisions that affect their lives (the rights-based approach). As the debate on children's participation proceeds, it is becoming increasingly common for observers to acknowledge the validity of both types of argument: from participation as a means of better addressing children and young people's needs and encouraging their growth as active citizens, to participation as a right. The arguments advanced include:

- **Children and young people's participation results in increased knowledge of their needs.** This is an instrumental approach, but one that is often couched within a wider argument for participation as a right.

- **Children and young people's participation results in better decisions.** This builds on the previous argument, asserting that children's input will result in more accurate information for policy-makers, service providers and those engaged in advocacy efforts, which will in turn result in better decisions. 'Consulting children and drawing on their perceptions, knowledge and ideas are essential to the development of effective public policy' (Lansdown, 2001: 5; Shier, 2001).

- **Children and young people's participation encourages a greater understanding of, and commitment to, democracy.** As Hart (1992: 5) argues, 'it is unrealistic to expect [children and young people] suddenly to become responsible, participating adult citizens at the age of 16, 18 or 21 without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities involved'. Engagement with political processes from an early age promotes an interest in, and commitment to, the principles of democratic behaviour (Lansdown, 2001; Shier, 2001).

- **Children and young people's participation has benefits for the organisation(s) involved.** These could include organisations of children (such as working children's unions), facilitating organisations (such as NGOs), and/or organisations which are the target of the

children's advocacy efforts. Benefits may take the shape of changed knowledge and attitudes about children and young people, increased knowledge/skills to undertake participation work, and increased commitment to children and young people's participation (Kirby and Bryson, 2002).

- **Participation is a right.** Under article 12 of the CRC, children and young people are entitled to 'express [their] views freely' in all matters affecting them (UN 1989: article 12). However, participation should be recognised as a means to an end as well as an end in itself, since 'the right to participate is the right to claim other rights' (Eyben, 2003: 2; also Johnson et al, 1998; Lansdown, 2001).

The different arguments for children and young people's participation are indicative of the kind and extent of influence that children and young people are likely to have. The rationale for their participation often influences the terms of access (if any) to decision-making spaces and the amount of control children and young people have over processes and outcomes. Analytical tools such as Hart's ladder help define more clearly the nature, meaning and aims of 'meaningful participation'.

There are also arguments that are employed against children and young people's participation, and these are worth considering briefly. They include:

- **Children and young people do not have the experience or understanding of the relevant issues to participate effectively.** As the CRC recognises, this is not necessarily true. Children and young people's participation is not about contributing in the same way as an adult expert, but in ways that are meaningful to them and that reflect their lived experience (Lansdown, 2001).

- **Participation is just a trend.** This refers to a broader perception that various participatory initiatives, and not just those involving children and young people, are merely passing fads which will be replaced by the next fashion which comes along.

- **Asking poor children or young people to participate can mean wasting their time.** This can be a valid criticism. Participation is sometimes merely used to legitimise certain activities and initiatives, whether consciously or otherwise. Furthermore, it may be inappropriate to ask those who can least afford the time, to participate when this participation may have little direct effect. This is the kind of participation Hart refers to as 'non-participation' or tokenism.

The real question, though, is 'participation in what, and for what purpose?' The case studies will look at the kinds of policy issues that the groups or organisations under discussion attempt to influence, then ask whether and why certain policy issues are more susceptible than others to children's influence.

2.3 Empowerment

Empowerment, by definition, implies the transition from a state in which an actor has comparatively little control over events to a state in which they have more control. It is often cited as a corollary of children's participation (Hart, 1992). Kabeer (2002: 3) calls it 'the processes of change through which those who have been denied the ability to articulate their needs, exercise their rights and influence the decision-making processes which shape their lives are enabled to do so'. As with participation, it is a highly contested term that risks being stripped of meaning through overuse and co-option by powerful actors such as INGOs and multilateral institutions.[4] While Kabeer's definition informs this report, claims of empowerment will be examined in the light of its contested meaning and general overuse.

Kabeer (2002: 5) suggests that there are three 'levels' of empowerment: an individual level, which concerns resources, agency and achievement; an intermediate level which concerns institutional rules, norms and practices; and a deeper level which concerns structures of constraint such as class and gender. In looking at the kinds of policy issues that children and young people are able to engage with, and the outcomes of their attempts at influence, this framework provides a useful analytical tool to relate their actions to the empowerment which is often cited as the goal. It is used in chapter five for the comparative analysis of the case studies.

2.4 Childhood poverty

Definitions of childhood poverty have evolved in recent years from income-based definitions focusing on the proportion of children living in income-poor households to those that acknowledge the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and include factors such as health, education, nutrition and shelter (White et al, 2002). The latter approach has increasingly been adopted by the large international institutions (eg, UNDP, 1990; World Bank, 2000). This report uses a wide definition of childhood poverty, going beyond income poverty to embrace both the causes of childhood poverty (economic, social, political and environmental) and its symptoms (such as child labour, homelessness and lack of access to education or healthcare).

As policy in different areas has the potential to impact on childhood and youth poverty, this report discusses policy engagement in a range of issues. There are various key poverty-related policy areas in which the children and young people referred to in this report have engaged, which reflect both the causes and symptoms of childhood poverty. They include lobbying for changes in law and policies related to child labour; asserting their right to participate in the formulation of HIV/AIDS policy; raising problems related to economic issues, armed conflict, education and alcohol and drug abuse, and setting up an advocacy network for street children.

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4 Rowlands (1997) provides a useful analysis of the various uses and definitions of empowerment. Cornwall (2000) traces how the term 'participation' has been adopted and adapted in a similar fashion by various development actors over the past three decades.

It is notable that children engaging in policy dialogue have not tended to focus on poverty in itself; rather they have focused on its symptoms and causes. This points to both the key issues that children prioritise and the areas in which they identify effective solutions. These are mostly in the areas of service delivery and improved governance and practice.

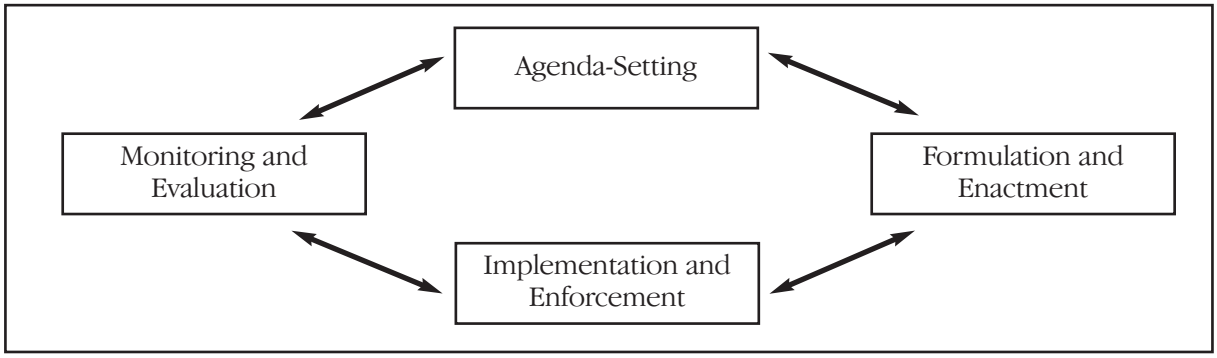
2.5 Policy processes

Titmuss (1974: 23) describes policy as 'the principles that govern action directed towards given ends'. This definition goes some way towards capturing the close relationship between law and policy: both could be described as principles guiding the action of a government or its representatives towards certain ends. The difference is one of hierarchy and permanence. While policies are made with an eye to the laws which guide and constrain their formulation, the reverse is not usually the case. Equally, policies are more amenable to change than laws. A change in the law will, however, have a trickle-down effect in terms of policy. Given this close relationship, children's attempts at instigating legal change are included in the discussion of influence on policy processes.

Many models of policy processes exist. Grindle and Thomas provide a useful summary of more recent models, dividing them into state-centred models of policy processes which 'suggest that policy elites are virtually unconstrained by social interests' (Grindle and Thomas, 1991: 19-20), and society-centred perspectives that focus solely on the role of individuals, groups or social classes in deciding on the issues and solutions of public policy. These perspectives 'present competing visions of where initiatives for stasis and social change come from' (Grindle and Thomas, 1991: 20). Their approach is useful for its focus on the interaction between state and society, and its rejection of the extremes of either perspective.

The model proposed by Miller and Covey (1997) in Figure 2 below sets out a dynamic, interdependent model in which each stage of the policy-making process informs the other. In other words, the 'final' stage of the monitoring and evaluation of policy, as well as feeding back to improve ongoing implementation and enforcement, feeds into another round of agenda-setting. This in turn will lead to the refinement of policy and so on.

Figure 2 - Phases of policy-making



Source: Miller and Covey (1997), cited in Veneklasen and Miller (2002: 192)

The term 'policy change' becomes easier to define and discuss when the policy process is broken down like this into its constituent parts. This model of the policy process will therefore form the basis for the analysis of the case studies, with a particular focus on the level of influence achieved by the children involved at each stage of the process.

2.5.1 Policy and power

Any discussion of policy processes must address the relationship between policy and power. Shore and Wright (1997: 8) reject the supposed political and ideological neutrality of policy, arguing that 'policies are most obviously political phenomena, yet [...] their political nature is disguised by the objective, neutral, legal-rational idioms in which they are portrayed. In this guise, policies appear to be mere instruments for promoting efficiency and effectiveness. This masking of the political under the cloak of neutrality is a key feature of modern power' (Lukes, 1974; Foucault, 1980).

Shore and Wright also point to the way in which individual policies are related to a wider framework of goals and principles, so that to challenge an individual policy is to take on a much larger set of values and ideas. In the contested political space of policy communities,[5] critical issues include whose voice prevails, under what circumstances, and how competing discourses become authoritative. Thus, children who demand access to decision-makers are not just challenging individual policies or laws (such as their right to be recognised as a working children's union), but also the wider network of values and power relations that underpin the reluctance of the State and others (such as adult trade unions) to recognise them as actors in their own right.[6] Looking at policy in this way alerts us to the power relations behind all policy decisions, and the competition that takes place around the relative influence and dominance of various discourses (Brock et al, 2001).

The state-society interaction at the centre of Grindle and Thomas's view of policy processes is described more explicitly in McGee (forthcoming) as a dynamic process of exchange between actors, knowledge and spaces. There is a risk, however, that newcomers – such as children – are incorporated into policy processes not 'as citizens or political actors with rights to uphold and interests to defend, but as "technical" actors who can provide useful information, and that even when cast as such, their actor status will be further compromised because their informational contributions will be subject to parameters of validity, credibility and policy-relevance set and upheld by other, longer-standing, better networked and more "expert" actors' (ibid: 10-11). This points to a danger with some of the more instrumental approaches to children and young people's participation, in which their input serves only to better inform policy-makers. On Hart's ladder of children's participation, this represents 'consulted and informed', or policy processes in which adult 'experts' have already delineated the process and outcome, and have only invited children and young people to fill in some of the details.

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5 The term 'policy community' is used to refer to 'not a discrete local community or bounded geographical area, but [...] a social and political space articulated through relations of power and systems of governance' (Shore and Wright, 1997: 14).

6 White (1996) discusses the wider political implications of participation.

Issues - and dangers - such as these are taken up in McGee's (forthcoming) discussion of what constitutes a policy space and defines its potential. She suggests looking at five overlapping characteristics of a policy space:

- its **history** (how long it has existed, why, how and by whom it was created)
- its **rules of access** (who can enter the space, what they can hope to achieve there)
- its **mechanics** (what takes place within the space, who performs what function)
- its **dynamics** (encompassing relationships, power relations and the previous experiences of its participants)
- the **scope for learning** that the space embodies (offering the potential for transformation of some or all of the actors who engage with it).

All five characteristics are discussed in relation to the case studies, primarily by looking at the nature of the space in which the children and young people engaged with policy-makers, and how it affected the outcomes of their interaction.

2.5.2 Policy outcomes

Attempts at policy influence may have a variety of potential outcomes, both intended and unintended (McGuigan, 2003). In terms of children and young people's participation in poverty reduction policy processes, these changes might include positive outcomes such as the desired change in policy or law, both on paper and in terms of effective implementation; strengthening of democratic institutions; empowerment of children and young people as a result of their experiences; capacity-building of the actors involved and changes in outlook and practice on the part of the authority figures involved (Johnson et al, 1998). However, there are also some negative effects which may arise, such as children's time being wasted; money being spent on processes which achieve little; the sharpening of resistance of those in power to the idea of children and young people's participation or to the issues being raised; the encouragement of tokenism (Panicker and O'Kane, 2000); or the grooming of an 'elite' set of children who are regularly asked to represent children's views (Lansdown, 2001).[7]

Recognising the variety of possible outcomes (and these are only some of the potential consequences of attempts to influence policy decisions) helps to avoid false attribution, where policy outcomes are spuriously related to the activities of one particular group or individual. It also reminds us that policy change has uncertain results: 'policies do not always achieve the goals intended by their proponents; and, even if they do, they may bring with them unintended and unwelcome consequences' (Grindle and Thomas, 1991: 16). The costs and benefits of any change will differ for different social groups. An awareness of the range of potential policy outcomes and their implications for different groups informs the subsidiary issues which are the basis of the following analytical framework.

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7 Thanks to Rachel Marcus of the Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Centre for input on the variety of potential outcomes of children and young people's participation in policy processes.

2.6 Analytical framework

It has been argued that 'possibly the most difficult area [to assess] with respect to the impact of children's participation, is public policy' (Cunninghame, 1999, in McGuigan, 2003: 24). Consequently, the question of children and young people's influence on policy processes has rarely been addressed (Johnson et al, 1998; CRIN, 2002). This paper does not attempt an assessment of impact in any quantitative sense. Apart from the fact that this would involve a quantitative assessment of an inherently qualitative process, the available information is not sufficiently detailed to allow it.

Instead, by focusing on the subsidiary issues raised in the introduction, it attempts to build a qualitative picture of the areas and characteristics of children's influence on law and policy which relates to child poverty in the case studies. Studying both the processes and the context of policy influence generates a series of preliminary conclusions on the constraining and enabling factors for children to influence policy processes relating to childhood and youth poverty, and the circumstances under which they have been most successful in influencing such processes.

The first subsidiary issue relates to what constitutes success or failure in children and young people's participation in policy processes related to childhood and youth poverty. This is partly about the actual changes that children and young people have succeeded in bringing about in either policy or practice relating to childhood poverty issues. The framing of the question, however, deliberately invites a wider interpretation of the notion of influence. Miller (1994) embraces this wider definition when suggesting that success in policy influence operates on three levels:

> Success at the policy level is seen as achieving favourable policy or legislative change. At the level of civil society, it means strengthening non-governmental and grassroots organisations capable of keeping government accountable and responsive to community needs. Finally, at the level of democracy, success means expanding the democratic space in which NGOs and people's organisations function, increasing their political legitimacy, and improving the attitudes and behaviours of government officials and elites towards NGOs and grassroots groups (Miller, 1994: 16).

This report's analysis of the 'success' and 'failure' of children's advocacy efforts is thus based on an assessment of the extent to which change has or has not occurred at these three levels: the policy level, the civil society level and the democratic level.

At the policy level, 'success' is exemplified by concrete changes in policy or law that are associated with the efforts of children and young people. In the context of the case studies, these changes included changes in state policy on the regulation of child labour or national legal recognition of a working children's union. At the civil society level, success (or failure) is reflected in the extent to

which the groups and organisations being discussed (and, where relevant, their supporting NGOs) have (or have not) been strengthened by their experience of children and young people's participation in policy processes. Positive changes leading to a success rating might include:

- increased advocacy expertise
- increased confidence on the part of the children and young people and the NGO staff concerned
- a higher profile in the media and the local community.

These changes would make it easier for the particular organisation to engage with government and keep them accountable and responsive to the community. Finally, when considering success and failure in terms of democracy outcomes, the assessment will look at the degree of political legitimacy enjoyed by the children and young people's organisation, and any changes in attitude or behaviour on the part of officials and/or decision-makers towards the children's groups. The question of increased democratic space is addressed below in relation to the subsidiary issue regarding the nature of policy space.

The next two issues are concerned with the type of children participating, whom they represent, the relative roles of the children and adults involved, and the kind of participation involved. In looking at these issues, the report uses Hart's ladder of children's participation to analyse the quality and extent of children and young people's participation. This is followed by a discussion of the membership criteria of the various groups. Consideration of whether participation is child- or adult-led also involves looking at the organisational context (ie, the mediating NGO), and in three of the five cases, the local institutional context – ie, how local government is organised and how much local democratic space there is. As Johnson et al (1998: 178) argue, 'for the outcomes of participatory approaches with children to influence policy and action, active institutional support is needed'.

The issue of policy spaces has been discussed in some detail in this chapter and informs the analysis of the case studies. Specifically, the fourth subsidiary issue is concerned with whether the nature of the space in which children's participation took place affected the outcome of their attempts to influence policy-makers. This issue is addressed using McGee's (forthcoming) suggested analysis of policy spaces (discussed in section 2.5.1 above), by taking into consideration the history, rules of access, dynamics, mechanics and scope for learning of the spaces opened up or entered by the children and young people.

The implementation gap is addressed with an examination of accountability mechanisms and the potential for, or existence of, monitoring and evaluation. Grindle and Thomas (1991: 6) call implementation 'a filter that often alters intended policy' which implies that it is not enough for children and young people to have a say at the agenda-setting, formulation and enactment stages of poverty reduction policy processes. Furthermore, Borland et al (2001, quoted in Kirby and Bryson 2002: 5) find in the United States that children and young people have little strategic influence – they criticise youth forums, for instance, as 'ineffective in influencing decisions, unless they were given

power to hold officials to account'. There is a similar recognition from Mokwena (2002) who acknowledges, in relation to the experiences of the South African National Youth Commission, that policy influence is one thing, but delivery is another. The fifth subsidiary issue therefore looks at the extent to which children are able to hold those in authority responsible for enforcing existing laws and policy, and carrying through the legal or policy changes that they have pushed for. Finally, the answers to the foregoing questions are used to look at the factors which may have enabled or constrained the influence of children and young people in poverty reduction policy processes.

The analysis is informed by an awareness (as per Miller and Covey's (1997) model) of the policy process as a series of interlinked and interdependent stages. Chapter five also uses these stages of the policy process to clarify the points at which children and young people are able to exert the most (and least) influence.

3 Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach employed in this report, including the reasons for using comparative case studies and the data collection methods used. It also includes a brief discussion of the limitations of the study.

The central research question which this report seeks to address involves analysing the context and extent of children's influence on policy processes related to childhood or youth poverty. As the discussion in chapter two make clear, advocacy initiatives 'are not linear and cannot follow a logical sequence' (McGuigan, 2003: 5; also Chapman and Fisher, 2000). Trying to attribute policy outcomes to the efforts of one group or organisation is often both difficult and methodologically problematic. This report therefore looks at factors emerging from the case studies that might be classifiable as 'enabling' or 'constraining' in terms of policy influence. It then uses a comparative approach to generate theoretical insights into the issue of children and young people's influence on policy processes relating to childhood and youth poverty.

The case studies were chosen according to several criteria. As this was a desk-based study, the first criterion was access to information and documentation of children's participation that has had some policy influence. The second was relevance to the research questions. Numerous well-documented examples of children's participation had to be rejected, as many were more about children's support for service-delivery activities, or about engagement only within the organisational context. Despite the widespread rhetoric of empowerment and policy influence, only a few groups or organisations actually appeared to have had an observable influence on policy at any level.

The case studies chosen have a strong South Asian bias, reflecting the ground-breaking work around issues of children's participation and citizenship currently taking place in that region (O'Kane, forthcoming). While association with Save the Children was not a criterion for inclusion in the study, the constraints of time and access to information have meant that three of the five cases are affiliated in some way to one of the International Save the Children Alliance partners. Three case studies on child labour have been selected because it is an issue around which there has been a great deal of mobilisation and where children have been actively lobbying for change.

The analytical framework for the case studies is based on the expectation that efforts to influence policy processes have a range of possible outcomes, including direct and indirect, intended and unintended, and positive and negative consequences. Various analytical precautions were taken as a result, the most obvious of which is that neither the main research question nor the six subsidiary issues are limited to a simple assessment of change/no change. Instead, they aim to define and qualify the nature of policy influence, while remaining aware of the variety of outcomes that may result from children and young people's participation.

Data collection methods included a primary literature review that refined the research questions, an analysis of primary and secondary source material, interviews with relevant NGO staff by phone and e-mail, and a series of questionnaires answered by NGO and government actors.[8] In all of the case studies, care was taken to corroborate evidence from one source with information from another. Interviews and questionnaires were constructed on the basis of documentary and Internet data, while a variety of actors were interviewed or asked to complete questionnaires, in order to establish areas of confirmation and dissent. For example, the findings of the interview undertaken with the director of Butterflies were substantiated with contemporary newspaper reports, and by cross-referencing with other interviewees.

There are a number of limitations to this study. In the absence of fieldwork, there was no children's input into the research process. The research has also had to rely heavily on secondary data, much of which has been written for particular purposes that are rarely made explicit. In addition to this, some case study details were not accessible. This has made interpretation of the information available difficult, as it has relied on the interpretations of others. Separate case studies have also meant that there are different sets of informants, all with separate values, agendas and priorities, making comparison of the different case studies more difficult. In order to avoid the potential for bias that this introduces to the research process, the triangulation described above (ie, corroborating information from various sources) has been particularly important.

8 Interview and questionnaire findings are cited in the report using the name of the respondent and the date of the interview or on which the questionnaire was completed. See Appendix 1 for a full list of interviews and questionnaires undertaken for this report.

4 Case studies

The case studies discuss both one-off interactions between children and policy-makers at the national or international level, and ongoing efforts to engage children with government authorities to bring about positive change.

The Nepalese and Sri Lankan case studies are one-off interactions. The Nepalese case study looks at the role of children in a high-level conference on HIV/AIDS held in Kathmandu in 2002. Similarly, the Sri Lankan case study involves the 2001 Children's Parliament held in Sri Lanka prior to the UNGASS. The two Indian case studies and the Bangladesh case study are all examples of ongoing initiatives. They look at three organisations of working children with similar aims but different strategies. All three organisations seek to influence government policy affecting working children.

Case study 1 - South Asia Regional Forum for Young People (Nepal)

The first South Asia Regional Forum for Young People was held in Kathmandu, Nepal, in December 2002. It brought together over 40 children and young people from South Asia in discussions and preparations for a 2003 regional conference on HIV/AIDS. The four-day Forum was jointly organised by two of the major international children's rights organisations in the region: UNICEF's South Asia office (ROSA) and Save the Children's South and Central Asia office (OSCAR). The high incidence of HIV/AIDS in the region[9] makes it an issue with significant implications for childhood and youth poverty.

Before the Forum, country workshops and consultations were held with groups of children and young people to 'familiarise them with the issues to be taken up at the Forum and to select representatives to the Forum' (OSCAR, 2003: 1). The Forum's main output was a Call to Action entitled 'Young South Asians Assert Their Rights'. This included an assertion of their right to participate in policy-making and to influence and mobilise key adults. This Call to Action was then presented at the February 2003 regional high-level consultation on HIV/AIDS involving national leaders, senior policy-makers, parliamentarians, faith-based leaders, people living with AIDS, civil society organisations, NGOs, young people and multilateral partners.

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9 South Asia has more than four million people living with HIV/AIDS. While overall prevalence rates remain relatively low, the region's large populations mean that a rise of a mere 0.1 per cent in the prevalence rate in India, for example, would increase the national total of adults living with HIV by about half a million people. According to the Indian National AIDS Control Organization, about four million Indians are already infected with HIV. Nepal has a concentrated epidemic, characterised by a low prevalence rate among the general population but significantly higher rates among high-risk behaviour groups, such as injecting drug users and sex workers. Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka have nascent epidemics, but the threat of HIV spread is significant due to high prevalence of risk behaviours and high vulnerability. Bhutan and the Maldives also have nascent epidemics and are vulnerable. (http://Inweb18.worldbank.org/sar/sa.nsf, accessed 29/01/04)

Four child representatives were invited from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Eight were invited from India, and two child journalists from the Indian NGO, Butterflies, also attended.[10] The child participants were nominated by the two organising partners, UNICEF and Save the Children, which meant that they were either already known, or accessible, to these organisations. The selection criteria included children and young people already active in young people's organisations, those involved with HIV/AIDS issues, those representing groups vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, school-going and non-school-going children and those from minority groups, as well as a balanced gender representation.

Child and youth participants at the Forum had the opportunity to communicate their ideas to senior decision-makers across the region, making use of resources such as simultaneous translation. The Forum opened with a commitment to children and young people's participation from the organisers, such as the Regional Director of UNICEF, who was quoted as saying that 'children must be given a greater part in decision-making that affects their lives' (OSCAR, 2003: 12). The three reasons given for including children and young people in the process of tackling HIV/AIDS were:

- improved decision-making
- education on the subject of HIV/AIDS for the young people involved
- the development of their capacity to participate in future decision-making (OSCAR, 2003).

At the Forum, children presented their views on the reality of HIV/AIDS in their countries using short role-plays. These covered issues such as the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, the stigma attached to the disease, poverty as both a cause and a consequence of infection, the lack of information on prevention, and the need for changes in cultural attitudes. In addition to the Call to Action already mentioned, children from each country prepared a national Action Plan with planned follow-up activities at local, regional and national level.[11]

Several aspects of the structure of the Forum may, however, have militated against the kind of representation and full participation its organisers were seeking to achieve. Firstly, there are the problems of achieving any kind of national representation at such an event. As already noted, participants were drawn from a relatively small pool, and it is unlikely that the four delegates from each country were representative of all the groups listed in the selection criteria. Another problem is that articulate children with some experience of speaking in public – possibly at similar events – appear repeatedly at such international events.

Secondly, the motivation for the participation of children and young people on the part of both the young people themselves and the organisers also needs to be examined. The fact that some of the delegates had to be educated on HIV/AIDS issues before the conference indicates that they had little or no existing knowledge of the issues involved. This might imply that their participation was

10 See case study 3 for a description of Butterflies.

11 It has not been possible to find out whether these follow up activities took place, and if so, whether they influenced national HIV/AIDS policy.

sought by the adult organisers rather than initiated by the young people themselves – not in itself a bad thing, but indicative of a process that is adult- rather than child-driven. For the adults, the desire to have young people participate in the conference emerged, at least partially, from principled commitments to children and young people's participation made at the Global Movement for Children[12] process and the UN Special Session on HIV/AIDS in 2001.

Finally, there is the issue of the value of one-off high-profile events in enabling children and young people to influence policy, as opposed to ongoing representation in decision-making processes. While the media profile of an event such as this Forum may be high, it is also a transient event, with the potential for agenda-setting, but little scope for sustained involvement in further stages of the policy process, such as formulation and implementation, or monitoring and evaluation. There is a danger that the expectations of the children and young people concerned will be raised, then let down after the event, as the donor community moves on to the next big issue. Continued effort and a real commitment to ensuring that promises are seen through are required to ensure that this does not happen. The most cynical reading of this kind of event might be that it minimises the real control afforded to children and young people, but maximises the legitimising 'children's participation' factor for the organising adults (White, 2002c). However, it is impotant to acknowledge that holding this kind of event at all is a step forward.

Case study 2 - The Children's Challenge and Children's Parliament (Sri Lanka)

The Sri Lankan Children's Challenge was a national consultation run by the Save the Children Alliance in Sri Lanka[13] from June to September 2001, in the run-up to the UNGASS held in New York in May 2002. It culminated in a national Children's Parliament – the first of its kind in Sri Lanka – at which children from each province presented their views on policy to government decision-makers, members of the judiciary, business representatives and the media. Objectives of the process included:

- to maximise children and young people's participation in the preparation and input for the Special Session, and to ensure that they influenced its outcomes
- to show that children and young people have the capacity to participate in such a forum
- to ensure that a range of children's voices are heard, including children and young people from marginal groups and groups that are discriminated against
- to build a platform for future participation
- to change adult attitudes towards children, seeing them as full and equal participants (Save the Children Alliance, Sri Lanka, 2002).

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12 Launched by Nelson Mandela and Graça Machel in May 2000, the Global Movement for Children (GMC) is a coalition of organisations and individuals that share a common vision of a world fit for children, and have the ability to turn that vision into reality. It seeks to build a massive constituency of people from all walks of life to support child rights and demand accountability and action for children in the twenty-first century (www.gmfc.org accessed on 19/04/04).

13 The Save the Children Alliance in Sri Lanka is a partnership between Save the Children UK and Save the Children Norway.

In addition to basic demographic information, the questionnaire asked children to prioritise the goals set by the Government of Sri Lanka in 1990. These goals included issues such as reduction of maternal mortality, access to education and tackling malnutrition. Respondents were also asked to identify the problems which they themselves faced and suggest possible solutions. Over 11,000 of the 15,000 questionnaires sent out were completed and returned. Following the analysis of the results, provincial workshops were arranged to identify the key challenges for the particular province. Government officials from the districts and provinces were invited to these workshops, and the children who attended elected representatives for the Children's Parliament in Colombo (Save the Children Alliance Sri Lanka, 2002).

The Children's Parliament took place on 18 September 2001. It was preceded by a day of workshops in which children's representatives from the different provinces got to know each other and discussed their five priority issues. These were economic problems, education, armed conflict, alcohol and drug abuse and the problems faced by children in institutions. Presentations were developed and rehearsed. The two-hour Parliament was televised nationally, and the audience included parliamentarians, government officials, corporate leaders, children's rights activists and representatives of the UN, NGOs and INGOs.

The organisers of the Parliament deemed the day a 'resounding success', and cited the positive feedback from the adult decision-makers who had been present or who had seen the Parliament on television, as testimony to this success (ibid: 14). However, the children who had been representatives at the Parliament were positive about the personal benefits of the process, but cautious about the outcome of their presentations: 'children were concerned that the Parliament [would] end and there [would] be no follow up' (ibid: 14).

Although the process by which the issues raised at the Sri Lankan Children's Parliament was national in scale and ensured at least partially representative coverage of opinion, the organisers acknowledged that its success was mainly in terms of awareness-raising and confidence-building. As with the Nepal conference, there is no intrinsic method of ensuring that promises made will be kept, although the inclusion of the children's five demands in the election manifesto of the United National Front following the Parliament was a promising sign.

Case study 3 - Bal Mazdoor Sangh and Butterflies (India)

Background

Butterflies Programme of Street and Working Children was set up in Delhi in 1988. It aims to empower children, in line with the CRC, by supporting every child's right to 'a full childhood where he/she has the right to protection, respect, opportunities and participation in his/her own growth and development' (Butterflies, 2002: 1). The organisation engages with about 750 of Delhi's estimated 400,000 street and working children (Christian Aid, 1997) in a variety of ways, based on

the principles of democracy and child participation.[14] The children targeted by Butterflies mostly work as rag pickers, shoe-cleaners, vendors, or are employed in restaurants, workshops, garages or small-scale industries (Panicker, 1996).

The chief characteristic of the interaction of Butterflies staff and working children is the degree of autonomy enjoyed by the children. They are organised in their own right, and work with Butterflies as equals rather than clients (Lansdown, 2001). The first set of activities organised by the children in partnership with Butterflies could be broadly described as service provision. They include street education, a savings scheme, a restaurant run by and for the children, and healthcare and counselling. The street educators visit the areas where the children congregate and teach them basic literacy and their legal rights. The areas covered by Butterflies are located in the centre of Delhi and include the inter-state bus terminal, New Delhi Railway Station and various markets.[15]

With the savings scheme, children are encouraged to save a little money every day. If they save regularly and do not withdraw their money for six months, they are given 50 per cent interest on their savings. In 1995, this led to the formation of a credit union, which provides services such as education, vocational training, healthcare and business start-up credit to its members. Finally, healthcare, counselling and occasional cultural or recreational activities are also organised by the children in conjunction with Butterflies, with the healthcare and cultural and recreational activities being paid for by the children out of their own earnings. Staff at the organisation claim that this increases the sense of ownership and hence the enthusiasm of the children involved (Panicker, 1996).

The second type of activity undertaken by the NGO in partnership with the children is more directly concerned with the empowerment of street children, at least at the individual level, in terms of increasing their control over resources and giving them a stronger sense of agency. The children's council, working children's union and street newspaper are all run by and for the children. Unlike the service provision activities, they do not earn the children money or contribute directly and immediately to their daily needs.

The Bal Sabha, or children's council, provides a forum for all activities to be discussed and debated, and for future plans to be made. Once a fortnight, children from each area hold a meeting to discuss issues that affect them, such as police harassment, non-payment of wages, education, saving schemes, drugs and gambling (ibid). They also discuss proposals from Butterflies, such as prospective outings. Five representatives from each group then attend the Bal Sabha, which is held once a month. This meeting usually follows an agenda decided upon by the children, and where a chair is elected among themselves. This forum appears to have provided the basis for development of much of the Butterflies programme and many of the activities of the street children.

14 E-mail from Claire O'Kane (ex-Voluntary Service Overseas volunteer with Butterflies) to author, 12 August 2003.

15 Panicker (1996) provides the full list of locations.

The Bal Sabha meetings led to the formation of the Bal Mazdoor Sangh (Child Workers' Union) in 1991. The children were encouraged to form a union by Butterflies staff, although it took four years for the children to accept their arguments. A particularly violent incident at a Delhi market in August 1991 eventually convinced them to get organised. A boy was accused of theft by his employer, and beaten up. When he tried to resist, the shopkeepers and police beat up a number of the boys in the marketplace (Swift, 1999; Panicker and O'Kane, 2000). The Union 'seeks to educate and conscientise children regarding their rights both as children and as workers' (Panicker, 1996: 11), and by 1999 had a membership of about 300. Its aims are to:

- negotiate better wages and working conditions
- raise awareness of children's rights under the Indian Constitution and the CRC
- take action in cases where rights are denied or infringed upon
- mobilise the public to put pressure on politicians to tackle the causes of child labour, such as poverty and adult unemployment (Swift, 1999: 5).

The street children associated with Butterflies also produce a newspaper called *Bal Mazdoor Ki Awaz* ('Voice of Child Workers') which they paste up on walls around Delhi. They aim to educate the public about issues concerning working children, such as the reasons children take to the streets in the first place. They face frequent altercations with authority figures such as the police, who deny that they have any right to put up posters (Lloyd-Roberts, 2001). The activities of the newspaper group are complemented by those of Butterflies staff, who release information on working children to NGOs and other interested actors through a quarterly compilation of newspaper clippings. There are also programmes of street theatre (since 1992) and a children's radio station (Butterflies, 2000).

Although they may appear quite different, the two elements of Butterflies' work with the street children of Delhi should be regarded as complementary. Both the service delivery and the more overtly empowerment-oriented aspects of their programmes have the common feature of educating the children, and the public and officials with whom the children interact, about their situation and their potential for agency. All the service provision activities are planned, implemented, monitored and evaluated by the children themselves, which means that they are continually gaining experience in how to design, manage and evaluate projects. This knowledge may then be applied to other spheres, such as Bal Mazdoor Sangh activism and advocacy initiatives. The common feature is the projection of children as agents, not as beneficiaries.

There is a complex relationship between Butterflies and the children it seeks to help. Literature from the NGO stresses the importance of trust, citing the length of time it takes the street educators to build a good relationship with individual children as evidence of the abuse which they have suffered from authority figures in the past. They are also frank about their own latent mental resistance to children's participation. Even Rita Panicker, the founder and director of Butterflies, confesses that 'institutionalising the concept of children's participation [...] is a constant battle with one's mental blocks' (Panicker, 1996: 4).

Since the formation of Butterflies in 1988, there have been disagreements between the NGO and the children. For instance, the savings scheme initially stipulated that children must keep their money in the scheme for at least 11 months if they were to receive the 50 per cent interest from Butterflies. The children objected, pointing out that many of them did not know if they would even be in the same city in 11 months' time. They proposed a minimum savings period of three months, and Butterflies staff eventually compromised with six months. Similarly, in the early 1990s, when the first Gulf War broke out, the children wanted to demonstrate outside the US and British embassies in Delhi. Butterflies staff felt that this would be a counter-productive gesture, and convinced the children not to demonstrate. Instead, they wrote to the Secretary-General of the UN to communicate their concern about the outbreak of war and to ask for a resolution through dialogue (Panicker, 23/7/03). Both examples suggest a relatively equal relationship between the children's group and the NGO.

Attempts at policy influence

There have been three main areas of policy influence observable over the 13 years that Bal Mazdoor Sangh has been in existence (involving both successful and attempted initiatives). The first and most groundbreaking has been their attempt to gain legal recognition of their union from the Indian government. The second has involved protests, demonstrations and the submission of memorandums and petitions regarding instances of child abuse. The third, and most recent, has been their integration into the Delhi Child Rights Club alongside other Delhi children's organisations, and their ensuing attempts to ensure that the manifestos of leading political parties at the last general election in 1999 were sensitive to children's rights and concerns. This section will briefly discuss these three areas of policy influence.

The legal challenge

Following its formation, Bal Mazdoor Sangh initiated a legal battle for recognition by the authorities. The union initially applied to the Registrar of Trade Unions for registration in 1992. This application was rejected because, according to Section 21 of the Trade Union Act of 1925, no person below the age of 15 can be a member of a union or form a union.[16] They tried – unsuccessfully – to argue that since the 1986 Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act recognises some forms of child labour, children involved in those forms of labour should be granted the basic right of workers to organise to resist exploitation.

Bal Mazdoor Sangh then filed a writ petition in the Delhi High Court, arguing that section 21 of the 1925 Trade Union Act should be repealed as it was ultra vires[17] to the Constitution. The petition was not accepted by the High Court, so the children then appealed to the Supreme Court through a

16 Trade Union Act 1925, Section 21: 'Rights of minors to membership of Trade Union. Any person who has attained the age of fifteen years may be a member of a registered Trade Union subject to any rules of the Trade Union to the contrary'. Online at www.vakilno1.com/bareacts/tradeunionact/ (accessed 30/6/03).

17 Ultra vires is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'beyond one's legal power or authority'.

Special Leave Petition, citing Article 15 of the CRC, which states that children have the right 'to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly' (UN 1989: article 15.1). This petition was accepted by the Supreme Court on 15 November 1993. Three years of hearings followed, but the departure from the bench of a sympathetic judge and the replacement with a hostile judge caused Bal Mazdoor Sangh to decide to drop the petition and reapply when a favourable outcome was more likely (Swift, 1999; Panicker, 23/7/03). This nonetheless represented a landmark case, as it was the first time that a children's union had had its petition recognised by the Supreme Court.

Enforcing accountability

Since then, there have been many more attempts to lobby those in power, but usually on isolated issues. One 1994 case involved a 15-year-old boy murdered by his employer, who poured kerosene over him and set him alight. The police filed the case as attempted murder rather than murder. The case received extensive newspaper coverage, and the children decided to put pressure on the police to change the charge. They staged a silent march to the residence of the Chief Minister of Delhi and sat outside his residence for four hours, until he agreed to see them. On hearing the details of the case, the Chief Minister instructed the Home Secretary to change the charge to murder, and the employer is now serving a life sentence (Panicker, 23/7/03).

Other cases of collective action have involved issues further afield, echoing the wider political awareness witnessed in the Bal Mazdoor Sangh's reaction to the first Gulf War. In November 1994, police charged on demonstrators from the Gowari tribe in Nagpur, Maharashtra, causing a stampede which resulted in an estimated 120 deaths (Indian Express, 14/12/98). Civil liberties and women's groups contacted the Bal Mazdoor Sangh to ask for their support, and over 450 children participated in the protest march to the Maharashtra State Resident Commissioner's house in Delhi, where they handed over a memo protesting at the incident (Panicker, 23/7/03).

One further instance of accountability enforcement in which the actions of the children's union resulted in a government enquiry concerns the death in 1995 of a 12-year-old street boy in a boys' home run by the state government. He was hung upside down and beaten for 48 hours, dying later as a result of his injuries. Members of Bal Mazdoor Sangh presented a memo to the Minister of Welfare demanding that an independent committee be set up to look at the way in which the homes were run. The committee was assembled, but included government officials and was therefore not perceived as independent by the Bal Mazdoor Sangh or staff at Butterflies. Members of the union demanded a copy of the committee's findings, but they were never released (Panicker, 23/7/03).

Not all these examples could accurately be described as enforcing accountability. For instance, the actions of the Bal Mazdoor Sangh concerning the death in the boys' home did not bring about the changes envisaged by the children's union. However, all three examples show the children engaging with the government on issues of accountability, and getting their voices heard – if not always listened to.

Political influence

Another channel of influence that members of Bal Mazdoor Sangh have attempted to open up involves direct interaction with politicians at the national level. Prior to the 1999 general elections, members of the union presented a list of children's issues and concerns through the Delhi Child Rights Club (DCRC) to leaders of India's national political parties for inclusion in their manifestos.[18] Over 1,000 children's signatures were attached to the list, which was presented on 5 August by a delegation of child workers to the Chairpersons of the Manifesto Committees of several political parties, including the Congress Party (I), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) and Janata Dal (Panicker and O'Kane, 2000). Their ten-point list demanded the right to health and education, access to recreational facilities such as parks, the sensitisation of the police towards the rights of working children, effective action on drugs, children's institutions that are more child-friendly, action to tackle the poverty that leads to child labour, and - finally - 'the right to organise and fight for our rights', and the right to have their organisation recognised (Delhi Child Rights Club, 1999: 2). These demands were accepted by the politicians concerned, and incorporated into their manifestos (Panicker, 23/7/03). The winning BJP has been slow to deliver on its election promises; nonetheless, the working children of Bal Mazdoor Sangh and the DCRC have collectively become a sufficiently powerful group to get their demands heard at the national level.

Case study 4 - Concerned for Working Children and Bhima Sangha (India)

Background

Bhima Sangha is a children's union based in the state of Karnataka in southern India. It was set up in 1990, and currently involves around 13,000 working children.[19] The union is currently active in at least eight districts: Bangalore, Udipi, Bellary, Davenegare (Davangere), North Kanara, Kundapur, Mangalore and Shimoga. Its support organisation, CWC (Concerned for Working Children), is active in the first five of these. (Figure 3 shows the location and extent of Karnataka, with the highlighted areas corresponding to those listed above.)

The union and CWC originated in the attempts of two trade union activists to organise adult workers in India's booming 'Silicon Valley' of Bangalore in the early 1980s. They found that child workers made up a substantial proportion of people seeking advice on rights, yet the law did not even recognise their existence. In response to this, they drafted a child labour bill, which was presented to the government and eventually became the 1986 Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act. While ignoring the informal sector in which the majority of children were employed, this Act at

18 The Delhi Child Rights Club was formed in the winter of 1998 and consists of 14 different children's organisations.

19 E-mail from Kavita Ratna (Director of Communications, CWC) to author, 15 August 2003.

least acknowledged the existence of working children and made an initial attempt to regulate the conditions of their employment (Swift, 1999). CWC was set up to submit the proposed Bill to the government, and had the declared intention of improving life for 'working children and their families using a child-centred methodology' (Swift, 1999: 2).

Figure 3 - Map of Karnataka

Source: Encarta World Atlas 2000

Attempts at policy influence

CWC began with a research and documentation centre, and now provides or assists with a variety of services for the working children of Karnataka. These may broadly be divided into three categories: service provision (including education and occupational training), research and documentation activities such as the children's newspaper *Bhima Patrike*, and the formation of groups such as

Bhima Sangha to undertake collective action and participate in decision-making on issues affecting working children. Of the three, the latter is of most direct relevance to the central research question here. However, as with Butterflies and Bal Mazdoor Sangh, the other activities provide a support base and relevant training for the children involved.

In 1989, the NGO launched a wall newspaper called *Bhima Patrike*. It featured articles by working children, and aimed to increase communication between different groups of children and young people in the city and rural areas. Small groups started to take action on individual issues of child abuse. When in 1990, CWC suggested that they start a union, these groups coalesced to form Bhima Sangha.[20] Collectively, children belonging to the union have been able to negotiate access to services such as healthcare that, as working children, they would otherwise have been denied (Swift, 1999). They have also taken action on incidents affecting other working children. In 1993, for instance, members of the union demonstrated outside a hotel whose child workers were badly treated. They also traced the home village of the hotel owner and sent members to demonstrate outside his village home (ibid).[21]

More recently, activities of the union's members have evolved from demonstrating or otherwise exerting pressure around isolated incidents to demanding a permanent say in village-level decision-making processes. This has been encouraged by CWC, who started the '*Toofan panchayat*', or 'wind of change' programme in 1995. This involves setting up 'Task Forces', which are tripartite bodies present at both the village and sub-district (Taluk) levels. They operate alongside the village and sub-district *panchayats*, or traditional decision-making fora. With decentralisation and the introduction of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992, these *panchayats* have once again become an integral part of India's structure of governance.[22]

The *panchayat*-level Task Forces are composed of elected members of the village *panchayat* (council), local government officials, child representatives and members of their families, employers of children and a representative of CWC (Swift, 1999). The president of the village *panchayat*, or Gram Panchayat, is also the president of the village-level Task Force. The Taluk-level Task Forces are similarly composed, and are headed by the District Minister. This overlap in leadership between the government-regulated body and the body established by CWC means that the Task Force's recommendations have to be discussed and decided upon at the village and Taluk Panchayats. In the past, the recommendations of the Task Forces have all been accepted at the village and Taluk Panchayat meetings (Ratna, 15/8/03).

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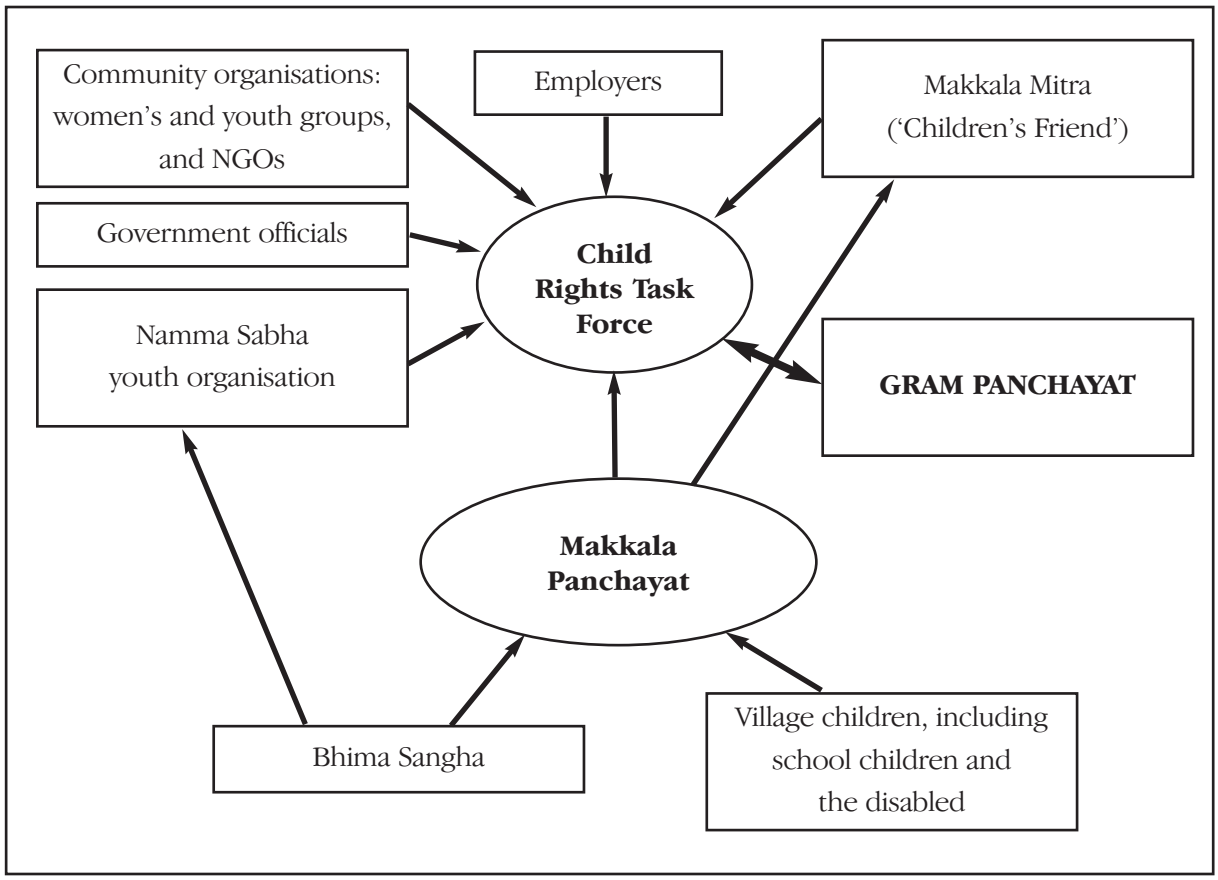
20 Bhima Sangha can be translated as 'strong union' - Bhima is a character from the Indian epic, the Mahabharata, who has the strength of 10,000 elephants, and Sangha means 'union'.

21 The hotel was subsequently closed down, although it is unclear from the reports available how directly the closure was related to the children's protests.

22 This constitutional amendment provides for a three-tier Panchayati Raj system, with responsibility at the village, sub-district and district levels, for economic development and social justice planning, implementation of these plans in some areas and tax-collection. Elections are held every five years, and there are reserved seats for women and members of scheduled castes and tribes (Kurian, 1999).

Together, Bhima Sangha and CWC have also set up 'Makkala Panchayats', or children's councils, in eight *panchayats* of Karnataka. In seven of these *panchayats*, a Task Force is present alongside the Makkala Panchayat, and in the eighth, it is in the process of being set up.[23] These Makkala Panchayats represent a parallel structure to the village *panchayats*, and members are drawn from the children of the village. All the children in the village aged between six and 18 are able to vote for the president, vice-president and members, who are in the 12-17 age group. There are representatives of major interest groups such as working children, school-going and disabled children. As with the adult Panchayati Raj system, there are reservations based on gender and caste criteria, which are decided by the children. For instance, in the five *panchayats* of Kundapur in which Makkala Panchayats are held, the children have decided that 65 per cent of members must be girls because girls outnumber boys in the area due to work migration patterns, and also because the children regard girls as more vulnerable to exploitation than boys (Ratna, 15/8/03).

Figure 4 - The structure of the Makkala Panchayat and the Task Force[24]



Source: Adapted from a diagram sent by Kavita Ratna (Director of Communications, CWC) to author, 15th August 2003

23 E-mail from Kavita Ratna (Director of Communications at CWC) to author, 21 June 2003.

24 The Namma Sabha is an organisation of artisans and other craftspeople, aged 18 and over, founded by ex-Bhima Sangha members. The Makkala Mitra is an adult 'children's friend' or ombudsman, chosen by the Makkala Panchayat, to provide support and assistance to children in difficulties. This diagram shows the structure of a Gram Panchayat (village level) Task Force. A Taluk-level Task Force has a similar structure but interacts with the intermediate (sub-district or Taluk) *panchayat*.

At meetings, the members of the Makkala Panchayat discuss issues which they wish to raise in the Task Force and, if necessary, research the issues in order to make a convincing case. According to one of the founding members of Bhima Sangha, while the Toofan programme provided an opportunity to participate in village-level decision-making, it was often hard for the children to be heard by the Task Force: 'as it was an adult's Panchayat, our needs were taken into consideration only if they conformed in part or whole to the need of the adult group. [This] led us to the creation of the Makkala Panchayat. The Children's Forum presents the views and opinions [of the children] on the development process of the village' (a founding member of Bhima Sangha, quoted in CWC, n.d.: 6). Figure 4 above shows the relationship between the Makkala Panchayat and the various bodies that make up the Task Force.

The Children's Grama Sabha

One of the most recent examples of the activities of the Makkala Panchayats and Bhima Sangha was a children's Grama Sabha (general assembly) held by the children of Keradi, in western Karnataka, in January 2001. This is a remote area, and is home to one of Karnataka's eight Makkala Panchayats. CWC has been working in this *panchayat* for eight years. Over a thousand children took part in the meeting, which was preceded by discussions and consultations between the children of eight wards of Keradi. Presentations were made to an audience of children, the local Member of Parliament (MP), members of the Taluk and Gram Panchayats and government officials from the *panchayat* and district levels (Ratna, 2001).[25] These presentations covered issues of concern to the children, such as education, disability, gender discrimination and child labour. The decision to hold the meeting was taken by members of the Makkala Panchayat (Devi, 12/8/03).

Experience with previous Task Force meetings meant that the children had not only listed their concerns, but also researched the extent of the problem and suggested solutions. For instance, one subject raised was the shortage of footbridges in the area. The children had investigated how many footbridges were needed, their ideal length and location, the number of people that would use them and so on. Although at a decidedly local level, children 'clearly demonstrated how they could use political space to negotiate with the local government and influence decision-making processes' (Ratna, 2001: 2).

The MP for Udipi, Vinay Kumar Sorake, was quoted as saying that the Grama Sabha was exemplary and that 'it should become a role model for all *panchayats* in the country' (ibid). Most significantly, he made a personal commitment to communicate the issues raised with the relevant government departments, and suggested that regular reviews be held to see how the children's demands were being met. He instructed the relevant officials 'to treat the children's Grama Sabha [as if it were] as

25 More specifically, those present from the *panchayat* level included the local village accountant, the *panchayat* secretary, school headteachers and teachers, and workers from government-run childcare centres. From the Taluk level, they included the Revenue Department official, the Executive Officer of the Taluk *Panchayat* and the Rural Development Department and the Education Coordinator. There was also a representative of the District Education Department present. In total, there were 21 elected people's representatives and 33 government officials at the Grama Sabha (Sorake, 12/8/03).

important as [...] the Grama Sabha of the adult members' (Sorake, 12/8/03). In response to the children's demands, a new school has been sanctioned and special Makkala Panchayat post boxes have been set up for children to use to communicate with their members. At the district level, 'the administrators have begun to give due recognition to the demands made by children and have started to respond to them' (Sorake 12/8/03).

The MP sees the benefits of this process as threefold. Firstly, children have learned how to collect information and present it to the authorities in order to substantiate their arguments and get responses, giving them a sense of the political structure beyond their village. Secondly, they have increased their self-confidence by debating issues with adults. Finally, however, he sees the specific benefits of children's participation at the Grama Sabha as instrumental: 'the local government has been able to assess the real needs of children and their communities and to prepare their plans based on these needs rather than guesswork' (Sorake 12/8/03). His willingness to reply to my questionnaire on the outcomes of this interaction between children and the local authorities, and his continued enthusiasm for the notion of children's participation does, however, signal a promising degree of receptiveness on the part of a senior authority figure.

For the children, the occasion meant that their voices were heard by those with the power to take action. The Vice-President of the Keradi Makkala Panchayat, a 14-year-old boy, said that 'until now, hardly anyone had bothered to ask us what we thought or felt. This is the first time we have had such an opportunity' (India Together, 2003: 2).

Case study 5 - Child Brigade (Bangladesh)[26]

Child Brigade was set up in 1994 by Save the Children Sweden, with the following aims:

- to achieve something practical for children at the street level
- to generate a national organisation which has the potential to raise the voices of street and working children in national and international fora
- to evolve a model of child-centred participatory development that can be replicated more widely (White, 2002c).

Based in the east of Dhaka, near the Kamlapur railway station, membership of the group has grown from an initial core of a few waste-collecting boys aged 10-14 to around 110 members aged 11-16.[27] From 1995 to 1997, the programme took the form of a waste management project, but this proved impractical and had little support from the street and working children. In 1997, the focus of the programme therefore shifted back towards the initial premise of self-development and street

26 The information about Child Brigade is largely derived from White, (2002c).

27 This is the most recent figure available, and is taken from a study conducted in December 2000.

networking. Since then, members of the organisation have been consolidating their presence in the area, teaching basic literacy to other children, working with them to identify their problems and raising awareness of their rights.

There is a close relationship between Child Brigade members and staff at Save the Children Sweden, but the adults try to ensure that they only intervene when necessary, and that they allow the children to find the best way to deal with problems. The NGO therefore aims to function as a support structure, rather than a controlling patron. The ethos of Child Brigade emphasises the value of experiential learning: 'when people work things out for themselves, they retain it much better' (White, 2002c: 23).

The Child Brigade comprises four different categories of about 110 members: a core group of eight to ten boys; a smaller 'shadow' core group of three boys; a category of general membership of 25 boys, and a fourth category of street-based members, who are Child Brigade's real clients. There are three main elements to Child Brigade's activities. Firstly, it provides a forum for the street-based members to discuss problems, as well as providing literacy sessions through its Babloo literacy programme.[28] Secondly, it is involved in broader child rights advocacy, which presently only entails collaboration with other agencies. Thirdly, Child Brigade is engaged in income-generation to sustain the core group, who are all working children and thus need some compensation for their Child Brigade work. In addition to its work with street-based children, Child Brigade aims to provide an effective voice for street and working children at national and international fora. When it comes to representation outside the organisation, the core group of Child Brigade members are aware that they need to ensure that the voices of 'client' children are heard.

The advocacy activities of Child Brigade began in 1996 with a false start. Members tried – unsuccessfully – to support a 16-year-old boy who was accused of killing a passenger on a tempo, or local bus service, by pushing him under the wheels. Their lack of success in that instance made them realise that they needed the support of professionals, such as lawyers, journalists and doctors to intervene in such cases in the future. Child Brigade first organised meetings with children in order to understand the nature of their problems with the police and mastaans (the 'strongmen' who run the slums). As a result, Child Brigade identified the need for a network of various professionals (such as lawyers and journalists) which would monitor and act on any abuses experienced by children under the auspices of a Child Rights Monitoring Cell, set up in 2001. It is not clear from available information how effective this has been.

However, White (2002c) points to a tension between the everyday activities of Child Brigade members and their potential advocacy role. She argues that children's participation is currently held as the 'touchstone of authenticity' in the development agenda on child rights, meaning that NGOs

28 This is an educational pack produced by and for Child Brigade members. It centres on the story of a child philosopher called Babloo who collects rubbish, and provides an introduction to basic literacy. White (2002c) provides more details.

regularly have to 'produce' children's participation as proof of their own legitimacy. This means that the more articulate children may end up spending more time participating in advocacy activities such as national or international workshops, conferences and so on, than working with other street and working children. For example, Child Brigade has been involved in international meetings with Radda Barnen from Sweden and participated in workshops organised by various NGOs, including the International Save the Children Alliance, on topics such as children's rights, citizenship and governance. The danger is that 'organised children are increasingly drawn into a role of servicing adult organisations, providing evidence of the "participatory" character on which their legitimacy lies'. There is another concurrent risk - that 'too much time spent in apparently high profile events can raise children's expectations unrealistically and lead in the longer term to dislocation and institutional dependence' (White, 2002c: 34).

5 Comparative analysis

In this chapter, the six subsidiary issues raised in the introduction and developed in the analytical framework section are used to analyse the case studies. These questions are used to build up a picture of the context and nature of children's interactions with decision-makers. Kabeer's (2002) model of empowerment is referred to when looking at the level of empowerment the children may have achieved. Miller and Covey's (1997) model of policy processes is also used in order to clarify the stages at which children are beginning to get their voices heard.

- *What constitutes success or failure of children and young people's participation in policy processes?*

In terms of Miller's model of policy influence cited in chapter two, the working children's organisations, in particular Bal Mazdoor Sangh and Bhima Sangha, have had more influence at all three levels than the consultation processes in Nepal and Sri Lanka. The first level of this analysis looks at policy or legal changes that have been brought about by the children concerned. In other words, it looks at policy influence in its narrowest sense. At this level, it is arguably only Bhima Sangha and Bal Mazdoor Sangh that have had any perceptible impact. Bhima Sangha has brought about small shifts in local policy and implementation at the village level through the Makkala Panchayats, and Bal Mazdoor Sangh has been involved in a critical petition for recognition as a working children's union at the Supreme Court level.[29]

Change at the civil society level involves the strengthening of NGOs and grassroots organisations so that they are capable of keeping government accountable and responsive. At this level, all five groups of children have been unambiguously strengthened by their experiences of interaction with officials and decision-makers. However, as established, rather than transient groups, the children's unions are in a better position to capitalise on this experience. Members of Child Brigade and Bal Mazdoor Sangh, for instance, have increased their skills of self-advocacy through activities such as their children's rights monitoring system, Bal Sabha meetings, publication of their wall newspaper, confrontations with decision-makers and their Supreme Court challenge. In all five case studies, the process of children and young people's participation has altered the behaviour and attitudes of government officials and policy-makers towards children as a group with rights. This is perhaps partly because of the high media profile of the children's efforts which enhances their ability to keep governments responsive and accountable to the interests of children. Again, however, it is the

29 Although their legal challenge has not been successful, the fact that their petition was accepted by the Supreme Court was a significant achievement (Panicker, 23/7/03). It meant that the Court recognised the validity of their basic premise - that according to article 15 of the CRC, which India has ratified, children have the right to form associations - and that in future other organisations may be able to use a similar line of argument with more success. The implications of government recognition of a children's union are numerous. Children would have the legal right to collective bargaining for increased wages and better working conditions along the same lines as their adult counterparts. Unionising would also make it harder for employers to exploit children, thus reducing the incentive to employ them in the first place (Panicker, 1996).

long-term efforts to engage that have yielded the most rewards: while policy-makers were receptive to children's views at the Nepalese Forum and the Sri Lankan Parliament, there is as yet little evidence that their thinking has been changed in any radical sense.

Children in three of the five case studies - those from Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh – have succeeded in making their mark at the first (agenda-setting) stage of Miller and Covey's model of policy processes. Bal Mazdoor Sangh's members have set the agenda and have also been able to move on to enforcement of existing laws and policies. Only Bhima Sangha has succeeded in going further, by having an impact at three of the four levels - agenda-setting, formulation and enactment, and implementation and enforcement - through their work with Makkala Panchayats. None of the groups discussed here have been able to influence the monitoring and evaluation stages of policy processes.

In terms of democracy outcomes, change may be assessed by looking at the political legitimacy of the groups of children and at any changes in attitude or behaviour that they have succeeded in bringing about on the part of government officials and the general public. Both the Forum in Nepal and the Sri Lankan Children's Parliament were set up and run by international NGOs, and thus had a certain degree of legitimacy from the start; the degree of genuine political legitimacy is, perhaps, questionable because they were not locally initiated. However, as the discussion of policy spaces later in this chapter will argue, there is a key difference between spaces created for children and spaces created *by* children for interaction with policy-makers. Bal Mazdoor Sangh members failed to gain legal recognition in the Supreme Court, but have been successful in influencing the manifesto of a national political party. Both Bal Mazdoor Sangh and Bhima Sangha members have been recognised as a group by service providers such as health professionals and the police, with implications both for access to services and for their identity as an autonomous group.

Shifts in attitudes at the local level are only an issue with respect to Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayat members and members of Child Brigade, as none of the other groups have had a sustained local presence. In the case of the former, there is evidence that a shift in attitudes is taking place at the community level. One observer claims that 'Task Forces represent a remarkable coming together of different caste (predominantly upper-caste men and lower-caste children), gender, age and interest groups and *are having [a] gradual impact on social attitudes*' (Swift, 1999: 6; emphasis added). In terms of Kabeer's model of empowerment cited in Chapter two, this implies that children from Bhima Sangha and the Makkala Panchayats are moving towards the 'deepest' level of empowerment, and challenging fundamental attitudes concerning the abilities and role of children. Child Brigade, on the other hand, has had a negligible impact on shifting attitudes, even at the local level. While it has been able to bring about some improvements in relations with local political leaders, this has not necessarily filtered through to the community as a whole. For instance, even staff of children's rights NGOs have humiliated or sidelined Child Brigade members.

By analysing the three different levels separately, it becomes apparent that policy influence is a cumulative process that cannot simply be measured by an assessment of 'policy change' or 'no policy

change'. Changes at the civil society and democracy levels have an impact on local communities (Bhima Sangha), service providers such as the police and medical professionals (Bhima Sangha, Bal Mazdoor Sangh and Child Brigade), and the judiciary (Bal Mazdoor Sangh). They also result in an increase in self-advocacy skills for the children themselves (all five case studies). Drawing on Miller and Covey's model of the policy process, it could be argued that the impact of the children and young people from the groups in these case studies is both wider than, and necessary to, the process of agenda-setting. In other words, education of others on the issue of children's agency and capabilities is a necessary first step in getting children's issues taken seriously and onto the agenda for policy change.

- *Which children are participating, and whom do they represent? Who is driving children's involvement? What are the respective roles of adults and children?*

Membership of both Bal Mazdoor Sangh and Bhima Sangha is dependent on the age of the child and their status as a working or street child. The cut-off age is 18 for both organisations, although Bhima Sangha members have the choice of going on to join Namma Sabha (see footnote 24). Boys and girls are equally eligible. Without direct observation of group meetings, it is impossible to tell whether certain groups of children dominate, or whether gender or caste constraints emerge. However, it is possible to look at the processes of internal election and external representation to see how far they observe democratic principles.

According to Butterflies, members of Bal Mazdoor Sangh who represent the union at external events are chosen by union members in a democratic process (Panicker and O'Kane, 2000; O'Kane, 8/8/03). There are, however, some practical constraints. For instance, obtaining passports for street children with neither family nor addresses is difficult, and considerations such as these have, in the past, played some part in determining who could attend international events on behalf of the union (O'Kane, 8/8/03). There is therefore an inevitable degree of bias about who represents the union at international events.

Within the Makkala Panchayats, members are chosen by the other children in a similarly democratic way. The term of membership is three years or until the age of 18, whichever is first, and the children have the power of recall. While their mere election does not necessarily mean that members of the Makkala Panchayat are accountable to the other children of the village, this power of recall does imply that they may be held accountable to some degree. To date, however, it has not been used (Ratna, 15/8/03), suggesting that representatives are either effective or that the other children do not feel inclined or powerful enough to invoke it.

Despite strategic differences, both the Indian organisations are notable for the degree of agency encouraged in, and even expected of, the children and young people involved. Most of the activities undertaken by Bal Mazdoor Sangh, for instance, are at or near the top of Hart's ladder of children's participation. In other words, activities are either 'child-initiated, shared decisions with adults' (such as the wall

newspaper), 'child-initiated and directed' (such as the protest marches following the 1995 murder of a street boy), or 'adult-initiated, shared decisions with children' (such as the formation of Bal Mazdoor Sangh itself). The attitude of Butterflies staff and the structure of the Bal Sabhas and union appear to safeguard against forms of what Hart terms 'non-participation', such as manipulation or tokenism.

Similarly, the kind of participation enjoyed by members of Bhima Sangha and the Makkala Panchayats, could be termed 'child-initiated, shared decisions with adults'. The children involved have the maximum amount of choice – both in the kinds of activities in which they engage and the level and nature of effort that they contribute. In terms of empowerment this has positive implications for the self-belief and identity of the children involved, as well as preparing them for involvement with decision-making processes as adults in later life. Kabeer describes this as the 'individual' level of empowerment and, based on the discussion above, this appears to be achieved by members of both unions. However, Bhima Sangha goes further, with Makkala Panchayat activities having some impact on social attitudes towards children and, arguably, starting to generate what Kabeer terms a 'deeper' level of empowerment.

In the case of Child Brigade the members participate in different ways, and have different responsibilities and levels of engagement. While all the members receive literacy training and participate in the monthly meetings, it is the core group which actually does most of the day-to-day work of the Brigade. In order to become a core group member, boys need to move from being street-based members to general members to 'shadow' group members, when they undergo intensive training and observation, together with the animator and other core group members. The core group represents the goals and priorities of all members who are involved in the participatory process by which the Brigade's three-year work plan is drawn up, as well as the monthly meeting of general members which is the main 'executive' decision-making body. These structures thus also ensure that the core group is accountable to the general membership. While Child Brigade was an initiative of Save the Children Sweden, the children have a significant say in the organisation particularly because its vision is to promote the children as social actors, working for other children like themselves. The children's participation represents what Hart describes as 'adult-initiated, shared decisions'.

A main characteristic which distinguishes the South Asia Regional Forum for Young People (Nepal) and the Children's Parliament (Sri Lanka) from the other case studies is that they were one-off initiatives. In the case of the Regional Forum, child representatives were invited from each of the participating countries. However, these 'representatives' were actually selected by the organisers, UNICEF and Save the Children, from children with whom they already had previous contact. In other words, these children were not necessarily representative (or accountable) to any group or organisation of children. Indeed, it is even doubtful whether they all had the requisite prior knowledge and background of HIV/AIDS because they had to receive training on the issue before the conference. Clearly, the impetus for children's involvement arose from the adult organisers of the conference rather than from children themselves. Inevitably, therefore, their level of participation could be described as 'tokenism' and would constitute, according to Hart, 'non-participation'.

The Children's Parliament in Sri Lanka was a culmination of a four-month national consultation organised by the Save the Children Alliance. Children participating in district and provincial workshops elected representatives for the Children's Parliament. There was thus representation insofar as the delegates were representing the goals and priorities of the children of their particular province which were partly articulated through the consultation workshops. However, neither the consultation nor the Children's Parliament was initiated by children themselves. Nonetheless, the children's participation could not be said to be entirely tokenistic. On Hart's ladder of children's participation, this perhaps represents 'consulted and informed'. The Children's Parliament was, after all, an informed representation of the views of thousands of children (acquired through questionnaires and the consultation).

Support by adults

In the case of Bhima Sangha, Bal Mazdoor Sangh and Child Brigade, there are several common features which have facilitated their interaction with decision-makers at some stage of the policy process. Firstly, the support provided by adults has been an enabling factor. In her account of Child Brigade's origins and growth, White (2002c) provides a vivid account of how, at one point, the organisation was dominated by local youth who wanted to use its facilities to take drugs and watch videos. It was only the intervention of the NGO representative that got the group back on track. There are some instances where adult support, experience or resource provision is essential to groups like these working children's organisations. For the children involved in the Nepalese Regional Forum and the Sri Lankan Parliament, adult support was more overt and more controlling. As noted above, in the case of the Regional Forum, the child participants were actually selected by NGO staff.

The independence of the working children's groups has meant that they have been able to criticise the failure of authorities to enforce legislation or policies relevant to their lives – as with the Bal Mazdoor Sangh challenge to the Chief Minister and the Bhima Sangha protest at the treatment of hotel workers.

- *Has the nature of the space in which children's participation takes place affected the outcome of their attempts to influence policy-makers?*

A comparison of the tactics used by each organisation in their attempts to reach decision-makers reveals several areas of difference between them. Nowhere is this difference more apparent than in the kinds of policy space they have sought to create, expand or enter. While the children of Bhima Sangha now have access, in many areas, to the village and Taluk Panchyats through a Makkala Panchayat and a local Task Force, the children of Bal Mazdoor Sangh are still limited to demonstrations and petitions in their attempts to reach decision-makers. As this section shows, the types of spaces in which children engage with decision-makers often have the potential to shape the outcomes of their interaction.

Access to decision-makers through demonstrations is time-consuming for the children of Bal Mazdoor Sangh. Once the particular incident has been addressed, the channel closes up and has to be re-opened for the next protest. The director of Butterflies cited the prevarication techniques of senior decision-makers as particularly demoralising for the children. Officials rarely refuse to see representatives from Bal Mazdoor Sangh, but make excuses instead, usually telling them to come back the next day or the day after, but rarely actually granting them an interview (Panicker, 23/7/03).

These experiences resonate in some ways with those of Child Brigade, in that it, too, has not been able to secure access to and influence over key officials. Although Child Brigade has managed to negotiate successfully with political leaders to defuse earlier hostility and achieve cordial relations, this has remained at an informal and ad hoc level, and has not been translated into positive action. One of the major problems facing Child Brigade members has been constant police harassment and abuse. In an attempt to secure legal protection for its members, Child Brigade worked with an organisation which had links with the police. This organisation promised to get Child Brigade members identity cards which they could produce when were stopped by police officers. After more than a year, however, the organisation informed Child Brigade that they would not be receiving the identity cards and denied even making the promise to Child Brigade.

In terms of McGee's (forthcoming) analysis of the dynamics of policy spaces, there is little about this type of interaction that is sustainable. Its history is fleeting, with spaces created by the children in the face of resistance from those they seek to engage with (illustrated by the Chief Minister who kept protesting children waiting outside his house for hours). The rules of access are similarly unstable, with what children can achieve often determined by external factors, such as the strength of media coverage. While the mechanics appear to be controlled by the children who have created the space, the underlying dynamic is a power relationship which is heavily loaded against them as street children who are dealing with adults in positions of national power. Any concessions that are made by figures in authority could be made with a view to enhancing their public image, rather than with the interests of the children in mind. Finally, the scope for learning that is afforded by the space is largely limited to the children, because the decision-makers who are lobbied have had no stake in creating it and, may instead, resist its existence.

The confrontational and transient nature of this space contrasts to the kind of space the members of Bhima Sangha are attempting to build through the Makkala Panchayats. Inspired in part by the emergence of the Shishu Panchayat in West Bengal,[30] the Makkala Panchayat, or alternative children's space, is not a new concept. Parallels may be drawn with a variety of other institutional arrangements in which previously marginalised groups are given their own space for interaction and decision-making, such as the Sri Lankan Children's Parliament.

30 This refers to a children's panchayat run by an NGO in West Bengal in 1995 which claimed to be the first ever children's *panchayat* . See www.indev.nic.in/iper/act.html for more details (accessed 4/8/03).

What makes the Makkala Panchayat different? One answer is that instead of being a one-off exercise in children's participation, it represents an ongoing forum for children's input into village-level decision-making. Another is that there is an institutional mechanism for interaction with the real decision-making arena - in this case, with the members of the Task Force who belong to the village *panchayat* and local government.

If the origins - or history - of a space have an impact on its potential effectiveness in terms of interaction with government, then this child-created space has the benefit of being structurally interlinked with a government-created and authorised space for decision-making. According to Miller and Covey's model of the policy process, this puts children inside both the agenda-setting and formulation and enactment stages. The rules of access of the Makkala Panchayat are democratic and encourage representation of minority groups. While the long period of membership (three years) means that only a few children will be able to take part directly, regular discussions between members and other children of the village widen the scope for individual children to have their voices heard. The children cannot, however, hope to achieve national or even state-wide policy change, due to the inherently local nature of the village and Taluk Panchayat system.

The mechanics of the Makkala Panchayat involve children in debating and researching issues that they wish to raise with the Task Force. The dynamics at this stage are made more equal by the fact that there are only children present at Makkala Panchayat meetings. At the Task Force stage, however, the underlying power dynamics may mean that children (like women and members of scheduled castes and tribes in the village *panchayats*) feel unable to speak out. Direct observation of Task Force meetings would be needed to test this suggestion. However, despite the possibility of power asymmetries, there is enormous potential for learning from the space created by the Makkala Panchayat. Children have the opportunity to debate, research and present issues of relevance to those in authority who have the power to do something about them. The positive responses of officials such as the MP for Udipi (Sorake, 12/8/03) also demonstrate the potential for the Makkala Panchayat's activities to teach decision-makers about the ability of children to identify problems and suggest solutions.

The drawbacks of this space include the possibility that children's voices will be sidelined. Even state-created spaces for marginalised groups are at risk of being ignored, as demonstrated by the statutory women's councils in Uganda, which some commentators describe as 'toothless' parallel institutions (Chandwong, 1999 in Gaventa, 2002: 23). Without commitment from the government, in this case represented by the village and Taluk Panchayat members, there is little that the children can do to ensure that their voices are heard. There is also the fact that the Makkala Panchayat's interaction, and therefore its influence, is limited to the lower levels of government – the village and Taluk Panchayats – and that these bodies themselves vary in influence from state to state and region to region. Some of the decisions in which they have had input cannot even be described as policy influence, but rather refer to local expenditure decisions. There is also a danger that children's

expectations will be raised and then disappointed if it emerges that the Makkala Panchayats are only influential in certain situations or not at all.

Overall, then, it would appear that the nature of the space in which children interact with policy-makers or local decision-makers has a large impact on the outcomes. For the children affiliated to Bal Mazdoor Sangh, spaces for engagement with decision-makers have to be prised open each time through confrontational and public actions. While Bhima Sangha's actions through the Makkala Panchayats may as yet have had only a limited impact, this form of interaction appears to have the potential for long-term and sustainable forms of influence on policy processes.

By contrast, the spaces afforded by the Regional Forum and the Sri Lankan Children's Parliament were by definition one-off events which were established for a specific purpose and with short-term horizons. There was therefore no mechanism for either the ongoing participation of children or for monitoring their inputs and proposals after the event. In other words, the time-bound nature of the spaces of the two fora affected children's ability to actually influence policy-makers and long-term policy outcomes. Indeed, representatives at the Children's Parliament expressed concern that there would be no follow-up after the Parliament ended because it was a one-off event. The nature of the space did not allow for the sustained involvement of children in implementation, monitoring and evaluation; indeed, it is even debatable whether the children were even involved in agenda-setting as they were effectively drafted into a process and event that was initiated by others. Furthermore, because they were carefully selected and trained to perform a particular function (by adults), the children might even have restrained the content and tone of their presentations – perhaps been less critical and forthright – which raises further questions about the empowering value of the events.

- *When policy outcomes have been influenced by young people, has there been an implementation gap? Are there any methods of enforcing accountability?*

The activities engaged in by working children from Bal Mazdoor Sangh and Bhima Sangha fall into two categories: attempts at enforcing existing policy or law and attempts to influence legal or policy changes. Both are addressed in this section, as successful strategies for enforcing existing policy may be adapted to address an implementation gap between policy changes that children wish to bring about and reality.

Protests, demonstrations and petitions by Bal Mazdoor Sangh members on individual issues have only proved partially effective in terms of enforcing existing policy. In Karnataka, some of Bhima Sangha's enforcement activities have been conducted along similar lines, with children protesting and demonstrating against incidents of child abuse. While the active support of experienced NGO staff and the threat of media coverage may have helped to generate responses from the authorities, the two case studies show that such 'success' is often short-lived and partial.

Other channels of enforcement do exist. India's ratification of the CRC, for instance, has given

organisations like Bal Mazdoor Sangh and Butterflies some leverage to try and force national legal compliance with the government's existing international commitments. This was demonstrated by their use of Article 15 of the CRC on children's right to association in their Supreme Court case. However, the children's failed attempt to use the CRC in this case has shown how difficult it may be to achieve changes in the national legal framework which would eventually necessitate policy shifts.

More sustainable forms of accountability would ensure that children do not have to rely on the media to hold policy-makers and implementers to account. However, the extent to which the media is used reflects the different issues and circumstances of the two Indian groups. Of the two unions, Bhima Sangha has better prospects of enforcing government accountability to new and existing policies precisely because it has moved beyond one-off confrontations with authority figures and is, instead, involved in several stages of the policy process. Children of the Makkala Panchayats are now able to propose, design and help implement new (local) policy initiatives, although they are still not involved in the final stage of monitoring and evaluation. The monitoring and evaluation bodies suggested by the MP for Udipi, following the Keradi Grama Sabha, are one potential way of tracking the implementation of decisions which have involved children; however, they have not yet been set up and it is still unclear how they would function.

As already noted, the one-off events of both the Regional Forum and the Children's Parliament meant that the children had no way of ensuring the accountability of policy-makers and politicians who had not given a commitment to take the issues and agenda further. Although it has not been possible to ascertain whether the undertakings made at these events have been followed through, in the case of the Children's Parliament, their five demands were included in the election manifesto of one of the political parties, which might represent a first step in policy influence or, at least, in agenda-setting.

Child Brigade has clearly not been able to influence policy. Indeed, while it has been actively engaged in agenda-setting – ie, defining priorities such as legal protection – it has often not even been able to 'enforce' promises received from a collaborating organisation or elicit the active and committed support of child rights NGOs at critical times. For instance, when a Child Brigade member was arrested on a spurious murder charge, none of the NGOs involved with children and justice was able to get him out of prison. The establishment of the Monitoring Cell may, at least, go some way towards securing Child Brigade's primary objective of legal protection for its members.

Furthermore, core group members are increasing their role as child resource persons to other agencies. While this expanded engagement with other agencies is likely to bring about various arrangements of benefit to its members,[31] these are ad hoc and informal in nature, and do not actually engage with or influence and alter 'official' policies.

31 An example is Child Brigade's informal collaborative arrangement with a local health centre. In exchange for healthcare support for street-based members, Child Brigade conduct weekly literacy sessions in the health centre and have helped to develop a child-friendly environment.

- *What factors have enabled or constrained their influence?*

The two children's unions provide important examples of significant enabling and constraining factors. First, the receptivity and sympathy of the state government of Karnataka was critical in creating an enabling environment for Bhima Sangha and the Makkala Panchayats. Second, for both Bal Mazdoor Sangh and Bhima Sangha, a significant enabling factor in their attempts to influence policy has been the support of an NGO. While both children's unions enjoy relative autonomy from the NGO staff with respect to decision-making, there are numerous instances where adult support has given them the resources or media attention which they needed to carry out their activities. Equally, the emphasis placed by both NGOs on encouraging participatory approaches - from service provision to information dissemination - through the Bal Sabha (Bal Mazdoor Sangh) and the Makkala Panchayats (Bhima Sangha), has enabled the children to learn about democratic approaches and methods of communication.

The size of Bhima Sangha and its presence in rural and urban areas, has meant that the union is well-known across Karnataka, which has facilitated its improved relationship with health service providers and the police. This union has also benefited from the clear focus on establishing long-term spaces for interaction in policy processes. As the discussion above on the nature of the policy space has demonstrated, investing time and energy in creating sustainable spaces - as opposed to demonstrations around individual cases - is arguably a better strategy for influencing policy change in the long run.

In terms of agenda-setting, there are a number of activities undertaken by both unions which may facilitate their long-term influence at this stage of the policy process. Just as policy influence may be regarded as the result of a cumulative process of change at several levels, with positive change at the civil society and democracy levels leading to tangible policy or legal change, agenda-setting needs to be recognised as the end-point of a wider process of change. Thus, while the education and sensitising of actors such as the police, healthcare professionals, government officials and the general public on the subject of children's agency could not be described as agenda-setting, they may, in the long run, lead to agenda-setting in influential policy-making circles.

The case studies also reveal common factors that have constrained the influence of children and young people in both unions. Firstly, children from both Bal Mazdoor Sangh and Bhima Sangha have had to deal with adult resistance to the notion of children's participation. Where officials have been convinced of the value of children's participation, their approval has been couched in terms of the instrumental benefits of children's input to service delivery (eg, the MP for Udipi). This has implications for the level and type of influence which they envisage children exerting. Secondly, cultural resistance also plays a role, with adults - even those in the supporting NGOs – acknowledging that they have a degree of innate resistance to the idea of children as autonomous actors.

There are also problems that may potentially emerge as the two unions grow and become more

adept at self-advocacy. Miller (1994: 19) argues that 'as groups add policy influence to their agendas and depend more on professionals for expertise, there is a clear risk that organisations may lose touch with grassroots concerns'. While this has not yet been an issue because of the grassroots nature of both organisations' membership, there is a danger that the more articulate members of the unions will come to dominate interaction with decision-makers. This could cause stratification within the groups, with an 'elite' group of members attending the high-profile national and international conferences and other events which both unions are increasingly being invited to, and losing touch with the concerns of other 'non-elite' members. Finally, there is the problem for both unions of the 'moving target' of a child constituency. Unlike members of a women's group or a scheduled caste, children grow up and leave the groups, necessitating a constant process of recruitment and training.

A major constraining factor experienced by Child Brigade relates to what might be described as the sociocultural attitudes of various adults, including the staff of most NGOs, to children. For example, when Child Brigade members tried to sell their newly-published magazine, *Amra* ('We Survive'), at NGO offices, staff either did not allow them into their offices or, when they did, humiliated the children or did not keep appointments with them. In other cases, where members have been involved in a project with a particular NGO, they have not been paid the money promised to them, or their involvement has not been acknowledged. The children have also continued to be harassed, beaten and even arbitrarily arrested by the local police. Thus, despite the efforts of Child Brigade to forge links with other NGOs, the prejudices of adults and their lack of commitment to the initiative, have undermined Child Brigade's influence. It is therefore important that the attitudes of adults be considered (and addressed) as a crucial element of work to promote children's participation and self-advocacy.

In the cases of both the Regional Forum and the Children's Parliament, clearly the most significant constraint was the very nature of the two events – they were transient and, therefore, did not allow for the ongoing involvement of children which is necessary to enable, if not ensure, real influence. A related constraint was the fact that both initiatives were driven by adults, which circumscribed the role and influence of the children.

Summary

The analysis in this chapter has highlighted several important characteristics of children and young people's participation in, and influence upon, policy processes. Strategies for engaging with decision-makers have diverged, with clear consequences for the level of empowerment their members can hope to achieve, and the number of stages of the policy process in which they can hope to participate. While the comparison is most stark for the two children's unions, a number of relevant observations can also be made in this regard about the other three case studies.

According to Kabeer's model of empowerment, children from Bal Mazdoor Sangh are mainly engaging with 'individual' empowerment issues, concerning resources, agency and achievement.

'Deeper' structures of constraint involving society's perceptions of children are largely left untouched because changes in the behaviour of the authorities tend to be temporary responses to negative publicity, or pragmatic changes based on a tacit acknowledgement of working children's lobbying power, rather than driven by real changes in attitudes. Bhima Sangha members, though, are achieving a different kind of empowerment. At the individual level, they have demonstrated similar kinds of change to the members of Bal Mazdoor Sangh (ie, they are more adept at self-advocacy and increasingly aware of their own agency). However, they have also gone further by altering the institutional norms and practices of the village and Taluk Panchayats and registering children's voices (ie, the 'intermediate' level of empowerment). They may even be approaching 'deeper' empowerment, by changing the attitudes of local community figures and officials through sustained demonstrations of children's agency in Makkala Panchayat and Task Force meetings, and high-profile events like the Keradi Grama Sabha.

With respect to both the Regional Forum and the Children's Parliament, empowerment largely remained at the individual level through the awareness-raising and confidence-building of the representatives who attended these fora. However, the one-off nature of both events did not allow the children to have any deeper influence on existing structures and power relations; nor is it even certain how sustainable (and long-lasting) the positive impacts will be on the individual child participants. In the case of Child Brigade, the discussion needs to be disaggregated. Undoubtedly, there have been empowering impacts on some members – in particular, core group members. Because they are largely responsible for the day-to-day work of the organisation, these boys have acquired the confidence and skills to interact and negotiate with local politicians and the police, as well as represent the organisation in various workshops and meetings, including with international agencies. The rest of Child Brigade members, on the other hand, have not received the same degree of experience and exposure, even if they did participate in the monthly decision-making meetings of the organisation. Any claim of individual empowerment therefore needs to be qualified. Child Brigade has had little, or no, impact on changing local attitudes and practices and its members continue to face hostility and harassment.

Moving from the 'internal' question of children's empowerment to the 'external' issue of where and when they are able to participate in policy processes, Miller and Covey's model provides a useful analytical breakdown. This chapter has shown that Bal Mazdoor Sangh members participate most obviously at the enforcement stage (in terms of existing policy), with their cumulative achievements in terms of civil society and democratic change potentially paving the way for future influence at the agenda-setting stage. Such participation is, however, sporadic at best. Members of Bhima Sangha and the Makkala Panchayats, on the other hand, are increasingly able to step in and out of three of the four stages of policy processes at will: agenda-setting, formulation and enactment, and implementation and enforcement. Participation in the monitoring and evaluation stage would deepen and consolidate their influence, but this will take time and will require the trust and support of officials and elected local representatives inside the *panchayat* system.

The representatives in both the Regional Forum and the Children's Parliament were largely passive

participants who were drafted into an initiative in which there was no scope for their participation in any of the major stages of the policy process. Their participation was therefore not even sporadic, it was simply a one-off opportunity with little possibility of other similar follow-up events. Child Brigade has also had no real participation in policy processes – although for different reasons from those of the Regional Forum and Children's Parliament. Although it defines its own priorities and drew up its own programme of work – what might be described as setting its own agenda – it remained very much an 'internal' agenda which had no partners or collaborators and, did not actually aim to influence and change policy, even at the local level. Child Brigade has not had an institutionalised mechanism for 'external' policy engagement and influence, and has largely depended on the arbitrary goodwill of various officials and agencies.

A final point needs to be made about the trade-offs involved in the different strategies employed by the five initiatives. Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayat members are sacrificing their level of influence in favour of a more sustainable channel of influence, while Bal Mazdoor Sangh continues its confrontational and unpredictable struggle to be heard at the national level. It should be noted that this assessment arises from the particular questions asked in this paper, and may not represent a conscious strategy or how the organisations themselves would characterise their activities. Although it cannot quite be described as a 'strategy' in the same way, it should be noted that the one-off nature of the Regional Forum and Children's Parliament was fundamental to the time-bound limitations of their influence. Child Brigade's 'strategy' has largely been the forging of links with different agencies which are variously concerned with children, as well as serving its client-base with literacy, healthcare support and a forum for discussing their problems. There have also been sporadic interactions with the *mastaans* and a police-linked organisation. However, unlike the children's unions whose working strategies involved trade-offs between the level and sustainability of policy influence, Child Brigade's strategy is limited in *both* the level and sustainability of policy influence. The issue of trade-offs will be addressed with the wider policy implications of the research findings in the conclusion below.

6 Conclusion

This report analyses the conditions and/or routes by which children and young people can effectively influence policy relating to childhood poverty. As the previous chapter has shown, there are a number of ways in which children in each of the five case studies have succeeded in engaging with policy-makers and government decision-makers. The main differences between them concern the level of influence they have succeeded in achieving (ie, influence at the local, state or national level) and the durability of their channels of engagement.

Children involved in both the South Asia Regional Forum in Nepal and the Children's Challenge and Parliament in Sri Lanka were part of one-off initiatives. Although there was a high degree of media interest, there was questionable potential for effecting long-term changes. Dhaka's Child Brigade is a more sustained form of children's participation, but appears to function as a support network first and a channel for children's wider advocacy second. Meanwhile, members of Bal Mazdoor Sangh have largely relied on confrontations and petitions around individual issues, and have only recently turned to engagement with political leaders in an attempt to get children's issues onto party agendas. Bhima Sangha has a similar track record of confrontational engagement, but it has also built up a network of Makkala Panchayats, or children's councils, which offer - in theory, and partly, in practice - the chance for children in even the poorest villages to have their voices heard by the local and sub-district councils. Of all the strategies employed, this appears to offer the most scope for sustainable, ongoing influence.

While the channels through which children and young people attempt to influence policy are significant, it is also important to examine the actual issues on which children have been able to influence or effect change. Children in Nepal, Sri Lanka and India (Butterflies) have all engaged in trying to change issues at the national level. Children from Child Brigade and Bhima Sangha, however, tend to focus on local issues. The Makkala Panchayats, for instance, mainly raise issues such as the lack of access to good schools, the need for more footbridges, and the problems of alcoholism in their village. The enthusiastic reaction of the media and local government officials is positive, but should be contrasted with, for instance, the negative reaction of the Supreme Court to a much more fundamental issue – ie, the right of children to be recognised as workers, and to organise children's unions.

There is a pattern that emerges from the analysis. Children have proved most successful in influencing decision-making at the local level, where it is less likely to challenge the power relations of society, or engage in decision-making on issues significant enough to be referred to as 'policy'. Few interests are threatened if children get together to improve access to services at a local level, because individual empowerment only represents a minor threat to the status quo. However, vested interests are threatened if children try to enter a legal space such as the Supreme Court and use it

to their advantage. Achieving change at the 'intermediate' level of Kabeer's model of empowerment, concerning institutional rules, norms and practices, or at the 'deeper' level, concerning structures of constraint such as class, gender and age, is difficult and threatens the interests of others.

This echoes the challenges experienced by 'empowerment' NGOs which decide not to undertake service provision activities in favour of making members aware of their rights and giving them a sense of their agency (Williams, 2002). While the first approach improves services, the second attempts to transform fundamental power relations. There are also parallels with the distinction between Practical Gender Needs (PGNs) and Strategic Gender Needs (SGNs) (Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1993) in the gender and development discourse.

In the light of these findings, the key question for policy-makers, NGOs and young people's organisations interested in encouraging children's participation is whether sustainable channels of local influence, such as the Makkala Panchayats, can be scaled up to regional or even national level. While it is sensible to start locally and develop expertise, it is not simply a matter of expanding the scale. As the foregoing analysis suggests, those in positions of power are liable to generate resistance to children and young people's participation in any but the most local of issues. A long process of education and awareness-raising is necessary to ensure that government officials, service providers and other adults are aware and supportive of children's rights and agency. As O'Neill (2000) points out, rights are meaningless unless they are accompanied by an acknowledgement of their corresponding obligations by those responsible for fulfilling them.

Although the children in the five case studies outlined here are slowly moving towards being active citizens, their progress is fraught with difficulties and setbacks. A better understanding of the ways in which children might influence policy processes most effectively would enable these unions and other groups of children and young people to achieve policy influence more easily. As McGuigan (2003: 24-5) argues, 'supporting children and young people to influence public policy is still a relatively new area of work [so] it will be crucial that future impact assessments, of child participation and citizenship work, explicitly include this focus'. The findings of this report represent a preliminary step in this direction, identifying some issues upon which children are currently able to exert some degree of policy influence, and the channels by which they have achieved this. The next step will involve research and practice on expanding and strengthening these successful areas of interaction, while building adult support for children's rights and encouraging an institutional willingness to recognise their voices.

Appendix 1- Interviewees and questionnaire respondents

Both interviews and questionnaires are referred to by the name of the interviewee/questionnaire respondent and the relevant date. For instance, a reference to the questionnaire responses of Mr Sorake would be referred to as (Sorake 12/8/03).

Interviews:

- Interview with **Christina Archer** (Desk Officer South and Central Asia Region, Save the Children UK): 12th May 2003
- Telephone interview with **Rita Panicker** (Director, Butterflies Programme of Street and Working Children, Delhi): 23rd July 2003

E-mail questionnaires:

- **Sharada Devi** (Field activist for Concerned for Working Children): 12th August 2003
- **Jayashekar** (Field activist for Concerned for Working Children): 12th August 2003
- **Claire O'Kane** (ex-VSO volunteer with Butterflies; now working for Save the Children UK in Afghanistan): 8th August 2003
- **Kavita Ratna** (Director of Communications, CWC): 15th August 2003
- **Vinay Kumar Sorake** (Indian MP for Udipi constituency in western Karnataka): 12th August 2003

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The Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Centre (CHIP) is a collaborative venture between Save the Children and the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC). CHIP is working with both researchers and advocates, north and south, to produce research, and influence policy and practice on childhood poverty in the wider context of chronic poverty.

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Directors: Dr Caroline Harper and Professor David Hulme

Using five case studies from South Asia, the paper analyses children and young people's participation in policy processes which affect childhood poverty. It specifically examines the factors which influence the extent and success of children's engagement with decision-makers. It discusses the motivations for children's participation, the nature of their involvement and the nature of the 'policy spaces' in which children and young people have engaged, and identifies factors which enable or constrain their control over policy processes and outcomes.

The paper finds that children have been more effective in influencing local-level decision-making than policies which significantly challenge society's power relations. Similarly, empowerment of children and young people has mostly been at the individual level rather than at levels which achieve changes in social norms, practices and structures. Concluding that children and young people's involvement in 'institutionalised' policy spaces has greater potential for long-term policy influence than one-off issue-based events, the paper further shows that children have only enforced accountability where formal mechanisms have been in place for monitoring the implementation of decisions.

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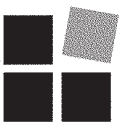

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