

## Gauging children's participation through participation

According to UNICEF (2011), since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) child participation has been the focus of an increasing flood of initiatives<sup>1</sup>. Yet consultations from the field reveal that gaps remain in how to engage children meaningfully, as well as how to gauge and measure their participation in the communities, especially decision-making.

The tool we are sharing consists of a series of activities used to gather information, from children themselves, about their participation in their community. The data collected through this tool can be used as baseline about children's participation (from the perspective of boys and girls) as well as a starting point for their participation in the community.

The main activity of this tool is *community drawing or mapping* which provides a way for children to not only talk about, but also show their experience in more tangible terms.

It will help identify the challenges (risks) children face in a community as well as the strengths of the community in terms of children's participation. The activity may also elicit discussions about more sensitive topics such as exclusion or risky behavior, and therefore facilitators should prepare to handle such topics should they arise.

The tool was used successful in Equitas' programming in Tanzania, Haiti and Colombia, with a total of 96 children ranging from the ages of 8 to 15 in six communities.

*"The participatory thrust of the CRC demands considerable –sometimes profound – change in the cultural attitudes towards children. Even adults who are utterly sympathetic to the principle of enabling children to express their views may often feel uncomfortable with the ways, means and implications of putting this into practice. Indeed, children themselves frequently experience similar feelings of unease." (Unicef, 2011)*

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF. (2011). Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-Making. Retrieved Online: <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/insight6.pdf>

## Tool for gathering baseline data on children's participation

### Objectives

- To measure children's perception of their participation in their community
- To identify barriers to their participation
- To identify community strengths with respect to children's participation

**Total time:** 3-4 hours

### Participants:

- Between 12 and 15 children in total; equal number of boys and girls
- One of the following, three age groups 8-10, 11-13, 14-15

**Note:** You may wish to repeat the process with more than one group if you want to include more than one age group.

### Materials

- Copies of note-taking template
- Two (2) sketch maps of the community drawn on large sheets of paper (i.e. roads, physical landmarks. More detail can be added for children ages 8-10)
- Coloured crayons for each group
- Camera (recommended if you wish to take photos)
- Ball

### Facilitation team

- 2 facilitators (one male and one female)

**Note:** Young children may require more support. You may want to plan for a third facilitator.

### Time for post-activity documentation (facilitators and note taker)

- 45-90 mins

### Facilitation tips

- Use the tool as a learning opportunity. Suspend judgment, listen, learn and discuss.
- Ensure the children feel welcome and comfortable—use songs and little games to build the relationship between the group and facilitators.
- **Allow enough time.** The mapping activity may take between 20 to 45 minutes but more time will be needed to allow the children to present their maps. The children's presentations are crucial not only for you to understand the meaning behind the drawings but also hear directly from them. The timing provided is a suggestion and is flexible.
- Some of the questions provided in this tool, may need to be modified for children 8-10.

## AGENDA for facilitators

### Arrival of the children

1. As the children arrive, welcome them informally, and help them feel at ease.
2. Ensure you have permission from the parents to take and share photos of the children participating.

30 min

### Activity 1 –Welcome

*This first activity aims to build a relationship with the children and create a safe environment for them to share their thoughts and opinions.*

1. **Invite the children to sit in a large circle.** Introduce yourselves. Have the children introduce themselves by saying their name and one thing about themselves (e.g., favorite food, what they want to be when they grow up, their favourite game or song).
2. **Ask the children to suggest a song** they would like to sing or a **game** they would like to play. Sing the song or play the game as a group. Use this as an opportunity to begin building a friendly and welcoming environment.
3. **Explain the purpose of the day, the activities and the steps that will follow.**  
*Example: Today we will do a number of activities together to learn about you— where you play, where you learn, the places you feel safe or not safe. We want to learn about the issues in your community from your perspective. This information will help us for a project we working on in your community to increase your participation in decisions that affect you directly.*

*We will be taking notes from our discussions with you today.*

*We will then come back in a few months to share what we learned from you and other children and adults in the community and discuss what we will do together next.*

4. **Explain what we are going to do today.**  
*Example: We want you to work together in groups to draw a map of your community, including the places you go, the people you see and the things you do. We are going to help you make the drawing by asking you some questions. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. This is a chance for you to share your stories of your day-to-day lives.*
5. **Create a safe environment.**  
Before you start, ask the children the following questions:

- *Do you think that children have a right to be heard or to have an opinion?*  
Once the children have spoken, re-enforce the importance of speaking loudly so that everyone can hear.
- *What do you think we should do if someone in the group feels sad or angry or upset during an activity? What can we do as a group? What can we do as facilitators?*

#### 6. Transition

Explain: *We are going to begin by playing a game to get everyone warmed up!*

**10 min**

### **Activity 2 - Game: Exclusion by numbers!**

**The purpose of this activity** is to provide children with a concrete experience to help them discuss the issue of exclusion and inclusion in the community.

#### **How to play**

1. Ask the children to move around the room or play area.
2. Ask the children to walk around like an animal or making the sounds of an animal they like.
3. After a short length of time, shout out a number that is smaller than the number of players. The children must then quickly form groups containing that number of people. If possible, play a couple of rounds by shouting numbers that enable every child to find a group. After a few rounds, shout out random numbers. Children who do not succeed in becoming part of a group are eliminated.  
  
**Note:** It is okay if some of the children who were eliminated are sad or unhappy; this is an important part of the game. Talk to them about their feelings during the group discussion.
4. Now, ask the members of each group to form a huddle and to find something they all have in common, for example, a sport that they all like to play or a food that no one likes, or a colour that they are all wearing.
5. Invite the children who were eliminated to rejoin the group and continue the game using a different number for forming groups.

### **Group discussion**

Here are some guiding questions, which take children from their personal experience with the game, to transferring their learning to real life.

- How did you feel when you found a group that you could join?
- Was it difficult to find things that you shared in common?
- How did you feel when a group rejected you?
- Have you ever been excluded at school or by your friends? Why?
- Can you think of some people who are often excluded?
- What can we do in our group to make sure no one is excluded?

### **Activity 3 - Community Mapping<sup>2</sup>**

**The purpose of this activity** is have children create a community drawing or map where they identify safe and unsafe places, activities they like, and places where they make decisions.

**10 min**

#### **PART A Orientation to the map**

1. Tell the children that they are going to complete a map of their community. Hold up one of the large sheets of paper with an outline of the community (roads and landmarks).
2. Ask the group a few questions about the map such as ‘where would the school be?’ so that the children can orient themselves.
3. Once the children have oriented themselves, ask them why they think the map is important.
4. Then ask them to close their eyes and imagine their community. Ask them to think about where they live, what they do every day, who they see etc.
5. Divide the children into two groups—girls in one group, boys in another. This will provide you with gender disaggregated data. Ask each group where they would like to work and move to that space. The female facilitator should sit with the girls. The male facilitator should sit with the boys.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the International Institute for Child Rights and Development’s Social Mapping tool.

**10 min**

**PART B Adding important places to the map**

**Note:** For this stage (Parts B, C and D), each facilitator should jot down any notes and observations about the conversation, to add to the data collected.

1. In each group, begin by asking the children if they have any questions. Encourage them to discuss the map and what they should add. Allow them time to draw their additions.
2. After a few minutes ask them to consider the following questions, allowing time for them to draw anything new after each one.
  - Did you include places where you go everyday? If not, which ones can you add? Add them now.
  - Where are the people that are important to you? Did you include those places? If not, add them now.
  - Have you drawn places you like to play? If not, add them now.
  - Where do young people not like to go? Did you include any of those places? If not, add them now.

**10 min**

**PART C Marking the most important places**

1. Explain to the children that to help us better understand their pictures, you're going to ask them to do the following
  - Circle 3 places they think are most important.
  - Put an X beside three place that they feel are most unsafe.
  - Put a heart on places where there are people who are important to them.
2. Ensure that you give children enough time to add each item and that they take the time to identify together the places that are really important or unsafe.

**15 min**

**PART D Marking places where children make decisions**

1. Explain to the children that we will now discuss where they make decisions and where decisions are made for them. For example, when they are at school, who makes the decisions about what they do? Encourage them to discuss where they make decisions and where decisions are made for them. (Home, playground, church, school etc.)
2. Give the children blue cutouts to stick on places on the map where decisions are made for them and green cut outs for where they make decisions.

3. Once they have finished, explain to the children that they are going to present their maps in the circle to the whole group about the places you have drawn and marked as important. Ask if them how they would like to present the map.

**Transition:** Play a short game or sing a song as a group when the boys and girls come back together to re-energize the group.

## **Activity 4 Show, tell and recommend**

**10 min**

### **PART A Community map presentations**

1. Invite the children to sit back in the circle to present their maps.
2. Explain the following: Now that you have drawn pictures of your community, it is time to share your picture. When you present, tell us about the places you have drawn and what you have marked as important.
3. Ask the girls to present first and then the boys. If there are more than two groups, alternate between girls and boys groups. It is important to encourage the children to tell their stories; this is where you will get rich information.

**20 min**

### **PART B Group discussion**

1. Once the children have presented their maps, place both maps in the center of the circle and have the children gather around them. Lead them in a group discussion to give the children an opportunity to provide more information. Guiding questions are provided below to choose from. Some of the questions will have been answered in the children's presentations. For each question you ask, alternate between asking the boys and girls to answer first. Be sure to ask the children for clarification when needed. Try to understand the 'whys' that emerge (such as why something is important or why girls are not allowed). Use the template provided to collect the information and note any common themes that emerge.

#### **Questions**

##### *Important places*

- Why are the places you circled on your drawing important?
- Did girls circle different places than boys? Why or why not?

- You told us about and drew hearts on places where there are people who are important to you. Who are they? Why are they important?

#### *Gender differences*

- You drew some places where you play, what do you do there?
- Where do boys and girls do separate activities? What are they?
- Why do girls and boys do different activities? How do you know if an activity is for girls or boys?
- When girls and boys play together, who makes the decisions about what to play? Why?
- Why do boys have different activities/chores than girls?

#### *Inclusion/exclusion*

- Are there any children who we do not see in any of these places? Who are they? Why are they excluded?

#### *Safe and unsafe places*

- Why do you feel that the places you marked on your drawing with 'Xs' are dangerous? Where are there safe places?
- Are the places where girls feel safe and where boys feel safe different? Why?

#### *Decision Making*

- Who usually makes decisions about:
  - when you can play?
  - who you can play with?
  - your religious activities?
  - how late you can stay out?
  - what chores you have to do?
  - what you can wear?
- In your home, who makes decisions
  - for your family?
  - about family gatherings or meetings?
  - about what the family eats?
  - about money?

**20 min**

### **PART C Formulating recommendations**

1. Ask children to help you generate a few ideas regarding:

- How to make the community safer for children, and in particular for girls



- What adults could do to include children in decisions about things that affect them
- What children and adults can do to ensure there is more fairness? Eg. between boys and girls? Mothers and fathers? Children and adults

## **Activity 5 – Evaluation**

**10 min**

### **Part A What’s hot or what’s not?**

1. Pass a ball around the circle and ask each child what they liked or didn’t like, by saying “What was hot about today was...” “What was not hot was...”
2. Close with a song. Ask the children to choose and sing it together.
3. Thank everyone for coming. Remind the children that you will be back to share what you learned from them and other adults in the community, and discuss what you will do together next.
4. Close the session.

### **Facilitator debrief**

It is important for facilitators to discuss and document their impressions immediately following the focus group. This will help later when you analyzing the data. Use the questions below to guide your discussion.

- What surprised you? What didn’t surprise you?
- What were the main themes/issues raised during the focus group?
- What, if any, were the limitations that could have an impact on the data collected?
- What are the 2 or 3 most useful things that you learned in this focus group?