

SYNOPSIS OF FOCAL POINT 2 PANEL DISCUSSION

The challenges of child participation for the various stakeholders.
From submission to cross-generation dialogue

In this area, ten experiences were presented by States, two experiences by civil society and we received comments from two experts on the subject. It should be added that presentations on this focal point were entirely cross-generational, as were the discussions that followed them. This implied that more than 80 children and adolescents attending the Third Forum took part in developing the focal point. Finally, it should be noted that when drafting this document, due consideration was given to the three documents drafted by the children and adolescents participating in the Third Pan American Child Forum.

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The States have shown progress in incorporating child participation into their legal frameworks, national plans, and in some cases, public policies, but greater efforts are needed to promote and guarantee this right, which is reflected in implementation, coverage, structures and public investment.

The need for a triple paradigm shift (adult, child, institutions) was highlighted, in order to position us/them effectively as promoters and protectors of the rights of children and adolescents. This must be accompanied by an understanding of participation as a right, a principle inherent to children as individuals and which always requires appropriate adult support (this involves overcoming adult-centric attitudes and control to build relationships of trust, greater mutual awareness, horizontal communication, self-care and cooperation). Greater openness of the adult world to listen to them, take their opinions into account and share power (be able to do, be able to think, be able to propose, be able to implement, be able to evaluate).

State policies and plans to promote participation must consider all socialization areas: families, schools, communities, the Internet. In all of these areas, processes should be promoted where children and adolescents can express their voices and influence decision-making in the issues that affect them. Promote and support the organizational manifestations of children and adolescents in their decision-making processes.

Train/provide support in the richness of cross-generation dialogue, in the need to learn to listen to us, work on attitudes, skills and knowledge that make it possible to confront the adult world's fear of sharing power with children. The challenge of being able to listen to what we often do not want to hear, when children's opinions do not match ours. In this respect, we recall the question posed by the Canadian delegation during the General Assembly of the Third Forum: *"if adults disagree with what we think, we cannot be part of decision-making? Or, if we cannot say anything, but we are at the table, it is just as if we were not there"*.

The process of cross-generation dialogue is always a collective construction, which requires joint learning, and a deep sense of solidarity and cross-generational cooperation. The opinions of children and adolescents often denounce what is lacking, what they understand that adults did wrong, they shed light on our mistakes, exposing the difficulty of the adult world to learn from its mistakes...

The contributions that Latin America can make to participation experiences are significant and can also contribute to the flexibility of areas such as the UN and the OAS (which is a good practice this week). Promote venues where children can interact with suitable people, those who can change things (keep in mind the relationship between influence and impact).

The promotion of child and adolescent participation requires a confident and cooperative partnership of States with civil society. A partnership based on cooperation and not distrust.

There is a need to actively promote networking, facilitate exchanges, knowledge and platforms for action and advocacy.

Consultation processes must be transcended and progress made towards the inclusion of children's voices and proposals. Children demand specific commitments and expressions of active listening that reflect their contributions in decision-making; considering participation as a process makes it necessary to establish monitoring and accountability mechanisms, validated and implemented by children and adolescents and their interlocutors.

- Children and their organizations have as their common goal the struggle for and defence of their Rights, the Rights established by the CRC. The States must ensure the existence of safe participation areas.

- The advances of the digital environment should be taken into account, and the use of technology and social networks should be promoted in order to strengthen their right to informed participation. Participation in times of the Internet, offline/online, the use of technologies for empowerment and participation, the importance of digital literacy and the construction of genuine digital citizenship.

It was also pointed out that the situation of migrant children throughout the region invites us to consider how to include them in terms of their right to be heard and to be aware of their perspectives.

Participation was emphasized as a principle and right for all children without discrimination (all ages, disabilities, gender and other forms of diversity, territories, social status, etc.).

It is necessary to systematize experiences, gather lessons learned, promote monitoring, evaluation and follow-up processes. Especially with regard to children's participation and influence on public policy.

Not all children are familiar with the CRC; it is necessary to provide information regarding their rights, their promotion and the construction of responsible citizenship. This is an ongoing, cross-generational task which must take place in the different environments in which children and adolescents circulate (families, schools, communities, the Internet, etc.).

There was agreement on the importance of displaying and making visible the results of our cross-generation dialogues (bearing in mind the before-during-after process).

Participation empowers children and adolescents by reminding them that all power implies a responsibility; an example of which is that speaking must be accompanied by the ability to listen.

Another central aspect relates to the need to raise the awareness of and train adults on what rights-based participation means. It is important to recall that the ultimate goal of child participation is the realization of child rights (links between article 12 of the CRC, as a cross-cutting principle, and Observation No. 12), listening to the voices of children and adolescents is a necessary but insufficient stage; the challenge today is to turn those opinions into action (achieving greater incidence).

The experiences of child participation are mainly led by adults through processes devised by adults, which poses the challenge of a shift which will allow us to share decisions and positions of power on the basis of their design, implementation and evaluation...

It has been shown that children are capable of establishing structures and participating in strategic and managerial processes, we saw concrete examples of child-adult partnerships with concrete results (for example, in the drive in the area of the law on corporal punishment).

Children are experts, well aware of the human rights violations that affect them and can participate with concrete recommendations and solutions, but they can also create venues for child participation.

It is necessary to promote programmes for children in the most vulnerable situations, with the active participation of children and adolescents themselves (children know how to communicate with their peers); they should be an important part of the networks for the promotion and protection of rights (not be seen as the problem but as part of the solution).

Last but not least, the importance of a strong legislative framework on child and adolescent participation was mentioned, as it allows for the establishment of institutions and institutional mechanisms that facilitate achieving real impact on decisions that affect them.

The challenge is to provide children and adolescents with user-friendly information in quantity and quality, adapted to their characteristics (age, culture, environment, disability, etc.), so that each child and adolescent can generate and develop his or her own opinion. On this point, extreme care must be taken with regard to the risk of adult-centrism and respect for progressive autonomy, the best interests of the child and non-discrimination.

Subsequently, mechanisms must be ensured that allow for genuine cross-generation dialogue that will enable turning that opinion into action, establishing, in cross-generational agreement, forms for follow-up and monitoring of the proposals made.