



UNITED AND PROUD FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Briefing booklet for Botswana Children’s Month of Broadcasting



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PREAMBLE

UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential.

UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and strives to establish children's rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children. Botswana acceded to the CRC in 1995.

The Children's Act of 2009 essentially incorporates the CRC into national legislation. The Act provides for the promotion and protection of children's rights, promotion of the physical, emotional, intellectual and social development and general wellbeing of children, protection and care of children. The Government of Botswana is currently setting up the institutions required to implement the Act, as well as reviewing other legislation which will need to be revised in light of the Act.

The Act provides that girls and boys below 18 years have the right to be involved in, and to influence, processes, activities and decisions that impact their lives, their families, their communities and the nation at large. This is essential to improve access and relevance of other services in health, education, social services and the environment. It also provides valuable experience while growing up to learn to be fully engaged and active citizens throughout their life, and to learn to respect the views of others, both older and younger than themselves.

It means having the opportunity to access information, to form views, express ideas, and play different roles in society.

The Setswana proverb denotes this when it states that "*Botlhale jwa phala botswa phalaneng*" meaning that elders can learn a lot from children.

Participation also has risks that need to be managed to avoid exploitation of children, exposure of children to abuse, neglect or the formation of gender discrimination or other forms of inequality that is not justifiable in a democratic society that champions human rights.

In Botswana, opportunities for significant participation remain limited, for example in the ways of teaching in schools, the lack of voice in Kgotla meetings, etc. The Children's Act has mandated the formation of national and sub-national Children's Consultative Fora as one way to open up the space for children's participation. The Children's Consultative Forum (CCF) has been established by the Children's Act.

BOTSWANA CHILDREN'S MONTH OF BROADCASTING

The Children's broadcasting was launched by UNICEF in 1991 as International Children's Day of Broadcasting in order to encourage broadcasters worldwide to create awareness for children issues.

ICDB, has always been commemorated every first Sunday of March. This is day when broadcasters around the world "Tuned in to Kids". Broadcasters would air quality programming for and about children. Over the years, children's participation became a keystone of the ICDB. Broadcasters began to allow children to be part of the programming process, to talk about their hopes and dreams and share information with their peers.

Television and radio play a vital role in raising awareness of global issues. Television and radio also play a tremendous and very critical role in shaping children's lives. UNICEF urges broadcasters to advance overall child development in their countries by producing documentaries that detail the plight of children, dramas that help break down gender stereotypes and reduce discrimination and animation that both teaches and entertains. Television and radio can become meaningful, positive media experiences for children and young people.

In light of the UNICEF 70th Anniversary and Botswana's 50th Anniversary, UNICEF has extended the commemoration to the entire month of March, hence Botswana Children's Month of Broadcasting.

UNICEF encourages broadcasters to open airwaves to youth throughout the year, as the BCMB moves from being just one month to an overarching initiative to involve more young people in the media process.



COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

- To build a strong voice for children and young people, championing their rights and reducing the impact of inequalities, so that every child, especially the most vulnerable, can grow up safe, happy and healthy.
- To take stock and highlight, through available communication channels, the progress achieved for children in Botswana since the CRC was adopted through the Children's Act and reaffirm its continued relevance;
- To highlight, through a series of national events and initiatives, innovative solutions to some of the most pressing challenges to realizing children's rights;
- To give internal and external stakeholders substance to advocate for the inclusion of child-centered goals in the post-2015 agenda.
- To create content about the Children's act to which public audiences, advocates and influencers can relate.

Key Audiences

- Children
- Parents
- Decision-makers
- Journalists

Key Partners

- Broadcasting media; BTV, eBotswana, Radio Botswana 1 and 2, Gabz FM, Duma FM and Yarona FM.
- Print media; Sunday Standard, Mmegi, Botswana Guardian, Gazette, The Patriot, Weekend Post and Daily News.

Key Messages

- Child participation involves encouraging and enabling children to make their views known on the issues that affect them.
- Put into practice, participation is adults listening to children — to all their multiple and varied ways of communicating.
- Child participation ensures that children's freedom to express themselves and takes their views into account when coming to decisions that affect them.
- Engaging children in dialogue and exchange allows them to learn constructive ways of influencing the world around them.

THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION

Several provisions in the Convention on the Rights of the Child reflect children's right to participation. Participation is one of the guiding principles of the Convention, as well as one of its basic challenges. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to participate in decision-making processes that may be relevant in their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard—within the family, the school or the community. The principle affirms that children are full-fledged persons who have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them and requires that those views be heard and given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity. It recognizes the potential of children to enrich decision-making processes, to share perspectives and to participate as citizens and actors of change. The practical meaning of children's right to participation must be considered in each and every matter concerning children.

As a fundamental right of the child, the right to participation stands on its own; it requires a clear commitment and effective actions to become a living reality and therefore is much more than a simple strategy. It was for this reason that the Committee on the Rights of the Child identified the right to participation as one of the guiding principles of the Convention. Participation is an underlying value that needs to guide the way each individual right is ensured and respected; a criterion to assess progress in the implementation process of children's rights; and an additional dimension to the universally recognized freedom of expression, implying the right of the child to be heard and to have his or her views or opinions taken into account.

Respecting children's views means that such views should not be ignored; it does not mean that children's opinions should be automatically endorsed. Expressing an opinion is not the same as taking a decision, but it implies the ability to influence decisions. A process of dialogue and exchange needs to be encouraged in which children assume increasing responsibilities and become active, tolerant and democratic. In such a process, adults must provide direction and guidance to children while considering their views in a manner consistent with the child's age and maturity. Through this process, the child will gain an understanding of why particular options are followed, or why decisions are taken that might differ from the one he or she favoured.

Free from pressure and manipulation

The child's participation is a right and children therefore are free to express their views or, if they prefer, to not do so. Children should not be pressured, constrained or influenced in ways that might prevent them from freely expressing their opinions or leave them feeling manipulated. This principle clearly applies in some judicial proceedings, in which a child is forced to participate as a witness even if the legal outcome may contravene the child's best interests.

In many countries, children are expected to join judicial proceedings as witnesses yet are rarely entitled to directly launch complaints as victims—even in cases where the child has been ill-treated or sexually abused. Such laws often foresee the possibility of parents or caregivers launching the complaint on behalf of the child—which of course does not address situations in which a child is a victim within his or her own family.

Children's evolving capacity

The Convention sets no minimum age at which children can begin expressing their views freely, nor does it limit the contexts in which children can express their views. The Convention acknowledges that children can and do form views from a very early age and refers to children's 'evolving capacity' for decision-making. This means, for example, that parents and, where appropriate, members of the family and wider community are expected to give appropriate direction, guidance or advice to children. But parents' guidance and advice takes on greater value and meaning as children grow and develop, gain maturity and experience, become more autonomous and more responsible.

In a manner consistent with the child's age and maturity, there will be various ways of creating the right atmosphere to enable the child to freely express his or her views. Within age groups, the ability, confidence and experience of the individual child in assessing his or her own situation, considering possible options, expressing views and influencing decision-making processes will all have a bearing on how such an atmosphere can be achieved.

Among children, it is important that the older and more advantaged foster the participation of the younger and most disadvantaged, including girls, the poorest, children belonging to minority and indigenous groups and migrant children.

The role of parents and others

The child's evolving capacity represents just one side of the equation: the other involves adults' evolving capacity and willingness to listen to and learn from their children, to understand and consider the child's point of view, to be willing to re-examine their own opinions and attitudes and to envisage solutions that address children's views. For adults, as well as for children, participation is a challenging learning process and cannot be reduced to a simple formality. Fulfilling the right of children to participate entails training and mobilizing adults who live and work with children, so that they are prepared to give children the chance to freely and increasingly participate in society and gain democratic skills. Parents and other family members are most obviously included in this group, as well as teachers, social workers, lawyers, psychologists, the police and other members of the society at large.

Ensuring appropriate information

As mentioned earlier, children's right to participation as outlined in article 12 is closely linked to freedom of expression. It is also related to fulfilling the right to information, a key prerequisite for children's participation to be relevant and meaningful. It is in fact essential that children be provided with the necessary information about options that exist and the consequences of such options so that they can make informed and free decisions. Providing information enables children to gain skills, confidence and maturity in expressing views and influencing decisions.

Article 15 states that children have the right to create and join associations and to assemble peacefully. Both imply opportunities to express political opinions, engage in political processes and participate in decision-making. Both are critical to the development of a democratic society and to the participation of children in the realization of their rights.

Participation is the path to other rights

The right to participation is relevant to the exercise of all other rights, within the family, the school and the larger community context. Thus, for example:

- **Adoption.** As one of "the persons concerned," the child should be heard in any judicial or administrative adoption proceedings. Article 21(a) refers to the informed consent of persons concerned, including the child.
- **Separation from parents.** In decisions to be taken on the need to separate a child from his or her parents (for example, on the basis of abuse or neglect),

the child—as an "interested party"— must be given an opportunity to participate and make his or her views known.

- **Name change.** In a decision to be taken on the changing of a child's name, the views of the child should be taken into consideration.
- **Right to health.** Children are entitled to be informed, have access to information and be supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition (article 24(2)e) so that they may enjoy their right to health.
- **Education.** Children's participation takes on a special dimension in the area of education. Education should give children the opportunity to develop their talents and abilities to full potential, to gain confidence and self-esteem, to use their initiative and creativity, to gain life skills and take informed decisions and to understand and experience pluralism, tolerance and democratic coexistence. In brief, the right to education means the right to experience citizenship. To achieve citizenship and all it entails, children must be perceived not as mere recipients of knowledge, but rather as active players in the learning process. It is for this reason that the Convention puts so much emphasis on the aims of education (article 28) and on an educational system that respects the child's human dignity.

Genuine participation versus tokenism

Participation cannot be genuine if children have no opportunity to understand the consequences and the impact of their opinions—such non-genuine 'participation' often merely disguises what is actually the manipulation of children, or tokenism. Again, the key to genuine participation is ensuring respect for children's views. In addition to facilitating and supporting activities to foster child participation, it is becoming increasingly important to consider whether and how to ensure follow-up of children's recommendations and concerns.

Children's referendums and the 'What do you think?' project are but a few examples of a worldwide movement to increase the spaces and opportunities for child participation. In all such activities, strong monitoring and evaluation components must be present and initiatives tested against the principles of the Convention. Is the activity in the best interests of the child? Is any form of discrimination present? Do the most disadvantaged and marginalized children have opportunities to participate and are their voices heard? Are children genuinely participating? Can children make a difference in decision-making processes?

CHILD PARTICIPATION MYTH AND REALITY

Myth: Child participation means choosing one child to represent children's perspectives and opinions in an adult forum.

Reality: Children are **not** a homogeneous group, and no one child can be expected to represent the interests of their peers of different ages, races, ethnicities and gender. Children need forums of their own in which they can build skills, identify their priorities, communicate in their own way and learn from their peers. In this way, children are better able to make their own choices as to who should represent their interests and in which ways they would like their viewpoints presented.

Myth: Child participation involves adults handing over all their power to children who are not ready to handle it.

Reality: Participation does **not** mean that adults simply surrender all decision-making power to children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is clear that children should be given more responsibility – according to their “evolving capacities” as they develop. In many cases adults still make the final decision, based on the “best interests” of the child – but with the CRC in mind, it should be a decision informed by the views of the child. As children grow older, parents are to allow them more responsibility in making decisions that affect them – even those that may be controversial, such as custody matters following a divorce.

Myth: Children should be children, and not be forced to take on responsibilities that should be given to adults.

Reality: Children should certainly be allowed to be children, and to receive all the protection necessary to safeguard their healthy development. And no children should be forced to take on responsibilities for which they are not ready. But children's healthy development also depends upon being allowed to engage with the world, making more independent decisions and assuming more responsibility as they become more capable. Children who encounter barriers to their participation may become frustrated or even apathetic; 18-year-olds without the experience of participation will be poorly equipped to deal with the responsibilities of democratic citizenship.

Myth: Child participation is merely a sham. A few children, usually from an elite group, are selected to speak to powerful adults who then proceed to ignore what the children have said while claiming credit for ‘listening’ to kids.

Reality: Children's participation, in many instances, has proven to be very effective. Rather than setting up an ineffectual system, it is up to all of us to devise meaningful forms of children's participation that benefit them and, in turn, society as a whole.

Myth: Child participation actually only involves adolescents, who are on the verge of adulthood anyway.

Reality: The public, political face of children's participation is more likely to be that of an adolescent than a 6-year-old, but it is essential to consult children of all ages about the issues that affect them. This means participation within schools and families, when decisions about matters there are being discussed. At every age children are capable of more than they are routinely given credit for – and will usually rise to the challenges set before them if adults support their efforts.

Myth: No country in the world consults children on all the issues that affect them and no country is likely to do so soon.

Reality: That's partly true. However, all countries that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child have committed themselves to ensuring participation rights for children, e.g., the rights to freely express their views on matters that affect them and to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, association and peaceful assembly. And almost every country can now show significant advances in setting systems and policies in place to allow children to exercise these rights.

Myth: Children may be consulted as a matter of form but their views never change anything.

Reality: Where children's views are sensitively solicited and sincerely understood, they often change a great deal: they may reveal things that adults would never have grasped independently, they can profoundly change policies or programmes and in some cases protect children from future harm. The consultation of even very young children can produce remarkable results. The problem is that such careful consultation of children remains rare.

Myth: Children's refusal to participate negates their rights.

Reality: Actually, resistance itself can be an important part of participation. Whether in the give and take of the home, in the refusal to accept punishment at school, or in one's attitude towards civic engagement in the community, resistance can signal a child's or adolescent's opinion about an issue or feeling about the terms of their involvement. Adults should recognize resistance as a form of communication and respond to it through understanding, dialogue and negotiation, rather than by trying to prevent it through force or persuasion. In no situation should children be forced to participate.



IDEAS FOR ACTION FOR BROADCASTERS AND PARTNERS

Build capacities to work with children:

- Train staff in methods of working with children and young people; build capacity of staff to understand and recognize the potential and participation.
- Develop training and materials to explain reasons and benefits for children's participation.

Support children's existing actions, projects and groups:

- Seek out existing children's groups and youth organizations.
- Find out what children and young people are already involved in and who is working with them.
- Consult with children and learn from them about local issues and about children's concerns.
- Through consultation between agencies and children, allocate roles and responsibilities to
- Children on television and radio programmes.
- Provide information to children in age-appropriate formats.
- Set up mechanisms for children to provide feedback from children on various media.

Develop capacities of children:

- Support older children to teach younger children especially television and radio role Models.

Create safe spaces for children

- Provide safe spaces for children to meet and plan activities for themselves. Support children to run their own community centres and activities.

Child protection

- Ensure that effective child protection policies, media ethics procedures and mechanisms are in place and are adhered to.

Partner with agencies who work with children

- This can be more efficient than trying to build up the capacities of other organisation. Partner with local civil societies that have experience in and capacity for working with children at the community level. Be careful not to undermine the capacity or agendas of local agencies.

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