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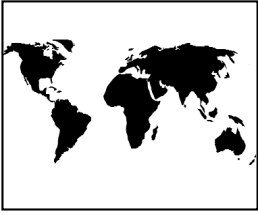
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# “Insight, creativity and thoughts on the environment”: integrating children and youth into human settlement development

*Louise Chawla*

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1. This article uses “children” in the sense defined by the CRC as “every human being below the age of 18 years”, and “youth” in the widely used, partially overlapping, sense of young people from the ages of 15 to 25.

**SUMMARY:** This paper discusses the benefits of involving children in planning and managing human settlements both for the children, as they learn the formal skills of democracy, and for the wider community, as young people contribute their knowledge, energies and perceptions about local environments, and remind adults of their rights and their special needs and vulnerabilities. Children learn active and responsible citizenship through opportunities to practise it – but this requires formal channels to incorporate children into school- and community-based programmes for evaluating, planning and caring for local environments. This paper reminds governments of the commitments they have made to such an approach in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda. It also discusses what underlies effective children’s participation in development planning, drawing on the author’s work as coordinator of the Growing up in Cities programme and on other innovative policies and practices. This includes a realistic sense of what can be accomplished; supportive adults; and particular efforts to involve girls, the youngest and those from marginalized groups.

## I. NEW PARTNERS IN DEVELOPMENT

SINCE THE ADOPTION of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, a new constituency of actors has entered the arena of human settlement development. The Convention contains 54 Articles, most of which address governments’ obligations to protect children from exploitation or abuse and to provide for their basic needs such as education and health care. In seeking to meet these obligations, most governments have a tradition of *protection* and *provision* for their youngest and most vulnerable citizens. Less familiar are a cluster of Articles that address children’s rights to *participation* in decisions that affect their lives, with the clear implication that this principle extends to decisions that affect the quality of the child’s living environment. These Articles challenge governments and other agents in human settlement development to see children not only as small and dependent members of society but, simultaneously, as potentially active citizens who already have ideas and energies to contribute.<sup>(1)</sup>

The CRC contains four Articles that relate directly to rights to participation as well as a number of Articles relevant to the quality of the living environment. The “participation” Articles address children’s rights to: express their views freely in all matters that affect them (Article 12);

freedom of expression and information (Article 13); thought, conscience and religion (Article 14); and association and peaceful assembly (Article 15). Guidelines for the implementation of the Convention explicitly advise that these rights apply to the quality of the child's physical environment.<sup>(2)</sup> Other articles also imply children's rights to healthy and facilitating environments, such as Article 6 that requires that state parties "...shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child". Article 24 speaks of "...the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health". Article 27 recognizes "...the right of every child to a standard of living adequate to the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development"; and Article 31 addresses the child's right to "rest and leisure", to "play and recreational activities" and "...to participate freely in cultural life and the arts." Article 29 observes that education should include preparation "...for responsible life in a free society" and "...the development of respect for the natural environment". In Article 23, the rights of mentally or physically disabled children to "...a full and decent life in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community" are recognized. In order to comply with the letter and the spirit of these Articles, governments need to facilitate the development of human settlements that foster children's health and survival and their participation in the social and cultural life of their communities, and to give children a voice in decisions that affect the quality of their natural and built environment.

Following the adoption of the Convention in 1989, and its rapid ratification by almost all member states, these principles have been embedded in a series of subsequent international agreements. The plans of action from the World Summits for Children in 1990 and 2002 emphasized the importance of healthy environments and noted that children have the highest stake in the preservation of the environment. Agenda 21 from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 recognized children and youth as a major group which must be involved in successful strategies for sustainable development;<sup>(3)</sup> and the Habitat Agenda from the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in 1996 recognized in its preamble that: "*The needs of children and youth, particularly with regard to their living environment, have to be taken fully into account*" (paragraph 13).<sup>(4)</sup> In the same paragraph, the preamble stated that: "*Special attention needs to be paid to participatory processes dealing with the shaping of cities, towns and neighbourhoods; this is in order to secure the living conditions of children and of youth and to make use of their insight, creativity and thoughts on the environment.*"

These documents reflect a high level of international agreement that children and youth are not only a population with special needs but also one with special energies and insights that they can bring to the process of human settlement development. Much remains to be done in areas of governments' traditional responsibilities to protect children from abuse and exploitation and to help provide for their basic needs. As Bartlett and colleagues<sup>(5)</sup> and Satterthwaite and colleagues<sup>(6)</sup> have documented, governments often fail, in practice, to give priority to children's survival and development, especially in the areas of economic and physical planning. Yet, beyond these traditional responsibilities, the importance of facilitating children's participation in planning and caring for their living environments has begun to receive growing recognition since the closing decade of the twentieth century. The inclusion of children and youth represents a new frontier in policy development, but one vital for the

2. Hodgkin, R and P Newell (1998), *Implementation Handbook on the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, UNICEF, New York.

3. United Nations (1992), *Agenda 21*, United Nations, New York.

4. UNCHS (1997), *The Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda*, UNCHS, Nairobi.

5. Bartlett, Sheridan (2002), *Children's Rights and the Physical Environment*, Save the Children Sweden, Stockholm; also Bartlett, Sheridan, Roger Hart, David Satterthwaite, Ximena de la Barra and Alfredo Missair (1999), *Cities for Children*, Earthscan/UNICEF, London.

6. Satterthwaite, David, Roger Hart, Caren Levy, Diana Mitlin, David Ross, Jac Smit and Carolyn Stephens (1996), *The Environment for Children*, Earthscan/UNICEF, London.

success of long-term goals for sustainability. Therefore, this article will focus on the implications and advantages of integrating children into the planning and management of human settlements, as well as on models for implementation.

## II. THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

IN A REPORT of ground-breaking work that consulted children in the evaluation of their local environments as a foundation for child-sensitive development policies, Robert Dodd, Director of Policy and Research at ACTIONAID, observed: "*Listening to smaller voices, by which children are brought into the process of planning, implementation and evaluation of endeavours undertaken in the interests of the whole community, means embracing the interlinked concepts of gender and generation.*"<sup>(7)</sup> The importance of involving women in community development is now widely acknowledged; and one measure of the success of the movement for women's rights is that it has opened the way for recognizing the special position of other groups within the family, such as children and the elderly. Yet, the benefits of involving children in community development and human settlement planning are only beginning to be understood. Attention to children, in particular, points human settlement policy in several new directions, beyond those already opened by women's involvement in development.

- Although it is true that policies to benefit women usually benefit children and other dependent family members as well, specific attention to children reveals that they may have separate needs. On some occasions, the needs of women and children may even conflict, such as when children stay out of school in order to lighten the burden of work on their mothers. Therefore, planning teams need to include a representative for children and, whenever possible, children need to have a voice of their own when development decisions are made.
- A focus on children draws attention to their special vulnerability to disease, pollution and other environmental hazards, with a corresponding need for new risk standards, policies and regulations to ensure, in fact, "...the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health" (CRC, Article 24). If environmental standards were adapted to children's needs, the result would be a safer world for all ages.
- Because children have the longest future of any group in society, they direct policy making toward long-term planning; the same orientation that sustainable development requires. Societies' investment in their children is the strongest reason for a commitment to sustainable development; and beyond this, children are societies' bridge to the future. Through participation in sustainable settlement planning, children gain the attitudes and skills that they will need to ensure the protection of the environment across generations.
- At the same time as they represent the future, children's rapidly developing bodies and minds must be nourished and protected in the immediate present, or a failure to meet their needs will have long-term consequences. The longer that societies postpone investments in the well-being of children, the higher the costs for remediation become, and some forms of psychological and physical damage may be irreparable. Attention to children highlights the urgency of investments in basic needs.

7. Dodd, Robert (1995), "Foreword" in Johnson, Vicky, J Hill and E Ivan-Smith, *Listening to Smaller Voices*, ACTIONAID, Chard, Somerset, page iv.

- Attention to children emphasizes the importance of a *human development* focus in planning. Whatever the economic indicators of a nation may be, if the children at all levels of society are not protected and nurtured, as a present good and as a foundation for peace and prosperity in the future, development in this basic sense of “good change” is not occurring. Global forces that are transforming political, economic, social and cultural conditions around the world are altering children’s environments, social networks, patterns of work and learning, and possibilities for action and self-expression in ways that are poorly understood; and children need to be involved in identifying and evaluating these changes.
- Given their relative lack of mobility and their dependence on immediately accessible resources, children draw attention to development at the community level. Small changes in the local environment may have a big impact on children’s lives. Although general policies for children’s welfare need to be enacted, specific configurations of risks and opportunities must be locally defined and addressed.

For these reasons, it is important not only to give children special consideration in planning and managing human settlements but also to incorporate children themselves into many decision processes. In this way, adults can be sensitized to children’s needs that they often overlook, and children can learn how to take an active and responsible role in caring for the local environment.

### III. CHILDREN’S ROLES IN PLANNING AND CARING FOR HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

THE PRECEDING IMPLICATIONS of a focus on children in human settlement decision making represent a shift in priorities that will tend to improve protection of the environment, public health and conditions for human development for all. They also suggest three main reasons for encouraging children’s participation in development:

- children will learn formal skills of democratic citizenship in this way;
- they are the best experts on local environmental conditions related to their own needs; and
- they acquire a foundation for lifelong habits of environmental interest, concern and care.

In fact, children need to participate as *citizens*, as *experts* and as *stewards of the environment*.<sup>(8)</sup>

With regard to their role as citizens, Hart<sup>(9)</sup> and De Winter<sup>(10)</sup> emphasize that children learn active and responsible citizenship through opportunities to practise it: it is not something they magically attain when they reach the legal voting age. Melton<sup>(11)</sup> has advocated what he terms a policy of “learner’s permits” in different spheres of participation. Rather than expecting that a certain age will automatically confer certain skills, policy makers and those who work with children need to structure opportunities for them to assume graduated levels of responsibility and independence in decision making.

The second reason for involving children in human settlement projects is that children are the best experts on local environmental conditions as they relate to their own lives. In some studies of community life, children have been observed, in fact, to be the heaviest users of outdoor space.<sup>(12)</sup> In their play and work, they often venture into areas that adults rarely

8. Wilhelm, Hanne (1994), “Norsk plan och bygglagstiftning: med barn och ungdomsplaner” (“Norwegian Planning and Building Act: child and youth participation”) in *Barn och byggd miljö: barnombudsmannens hearing (Children and the Built Environment: Child Ombudsman’s Hearing)*, 9 March 1994, Office of the Child Ombudsman, page 13.

9. Hart, Roger (1997), *Children’s Participation*, Earthscan/UNICEF, London.

10. De Winter, Micha (1997), *Children as Fellow Citizens*, Radcliffe Medical Press, Abingdon, Oxon.

11. Melton, Gary (1999), “Parents and children: legal reform to facilitate children’s participation”, *American Psychologist* Vol 54, No 11, pages 935-944.

12. Cooper-Marcus, Clare and Wendy Sarkissian (1986), *Housing as if People Mattered*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

13. Hungerford, Harold and Trudi Volk (1990), "Changing learner behaviour through environmental education", *Journal of Environmental Education* Vol 21, No 3, pages 8–21.

14. Chawla, Louise (1992), "Childhood place attachments" in Altman, Irwin and Setha Low (editors), *Place Attachment*, Plenum Press, New York, pages 63–86; also Chawla, Louise (2002), *Growing Up in an Urbanising World*, Earthscan/UNESCO, London.

15. See reference 5, Bartlett et al. (1999).

16. Chawla, Louise (1998), "Significant life experiences revisited: a review of research on sources of environmental sensitivity", *Journal of Environmental Education* Vol 29, No 3, pages 11–21.

17. Tilbury, D (1995), "Environmental education for sustainability", *Environmental Education Research* Vol 1, No 2, pages 195–212.

use. Therefore, environmental planning can benefit from children's local knowledge.

The third reason for involving children is that they need opportunities to learn lifelong habits of environmental concern and care. An extensive review of research into responsible environmental behavior found that the experience that correlates most highly with environmental care taking is practice in taking action.<sup>(13)</sup> When children in school programmes that only taught about environmental issues were compared with others in programmes that took them out into their communities to investigate, design and carry out strategies related to local issues, the children with experience in action were much more likely to continue to demonstrate responsible environmental behaviour according to their self-reports and reports by their parents and teachers. Knowledge about environmental problems, in and by itself, did not necessarily lead to action.

The preceding reasons imply formal channels for incorporating children into school- and community-based programmes for evaluating, planning and caring for local environments. There is another, equally important, expression of participation that may easily be overlooked, that of young people's need to participate in the social and cultural life of their communities and to learn about the environment informally as part of the fabric of their everyday lives. In research with young people themselves, when children identify their own priorities for good places in which to grow up, public and semi-public places that foster social inclusion, as well as green areas of "nearby nature", rank high on their lists.<sup>(14)</sup> Play and observation are vital dimensions of child development and, through these means, children prepare for informed and creative participation in the life of their societies. Work – when it is not exploitative – can also be a means through which children learn about their environment and feel a valued part of their societies.<sup>(15)</sup> Through these informal interactions, children can also acquire lasting habits of environmental care. In a study in which adults who work to protect the quality of the natural or built environment were asked about important childhood experiences that influenced their commitment, they frequently mentioned informal learning through positive experiences of the environment, and family role models of attentiveness to the physical world.<sup>(16)</sup>

Because human settlements need to be designed and managed with the goal of creating sustainable environments, Tilbury's remarks with regard to education for sustainability are a helpful framework for evaluating participation.<sup>(17)</sup> Tilbury notes that effective education for sustainability requires three parts:

- an education *about* the environment, in which children gain general information about ecological principles and knowledge about specific issues;
- an education *in* the environment, in which children spend time out in their communities through informal play and socialization as well as through structured programmes; and
- an education *for* the environment, in which they learn how to act effectively on issues of particular concern.

This broad definition of an education for sustainability implies, in turn, a broad conception of means to promote full participation, from structured approaches such as school- or community-based programmes for environmental learning and action, to opportunities to be out in the local environment and to find positive experiences and role models.

#### IV. PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION

THE MOST EFFECTIVE programmes that engage children and youth in human settlement planning and management have a realistic sense of what can be accomplished, also strategies for success and ethical principles for work with children.<sup>(18)</sup> There are many forms of participation and different methods are appropriate for different age groups, goals and settings. Therefore, before initiating a participatory project, it is important for project leaders to carry out what Driskell<sup>(19)</sup> calls a “start-up checklist” that reviews goals, constraints and opportunities, resources in terms of people, funding and time, the contributions that can be expected from different members of the coordinating team and from a network of interested stakeholders, and the communities of young people who will benefit the most from involvement.

The most widely used model for evaluating efforts to engage children in decision making is the “ladder of participation” that Hart<sup>(20)</sup> adapted from Arnstein.<sup>(21)</sup> Hart notes that much work that terms itself children’s participation is, in fact, not authentic participation at all but manipulation, decoration or tokenism. Participation is authentic when children understand clearly what they are doing and voluntarily choose to contribute. At the lowest level, children may be mobilized to help with short-term actions, such as cleaning up litter or carrying health messages home to their families, if they agree with these goals. Genuine democratic processes do not begin, however, until children are consulted about their own ideas, and their views are taken seriously. Hart observes that participatory processes of this kind may be either child-initiated or adult initiated. Although he places child-initiated activities at the top of the ladder of participation, he notes that, in practice, whether activities are best initiated by adults, with decision making shared with children, or by children, with decisions shared with adults, or initiated and directed by children alone, depends on a project’s goals and conditions.

In the realm of human settlement development, most achievements require complex negotiations among numerous stakeholders. Children may take leadership in charge for limited areas such as a play space, but actions on most environmental issues are highly political and require a broad coalition of actors. The movement for children’s rights, including rights to participation, is often compared to the movement for women’s rights – but there is the critical difference that women have an actual, or potential, political power that children lack. As women become empowered, they can run for office and other positions of influence and elect politicians who will be responsive to their needs. Children cannot. Even when children initiate projects themselves, when the time comes to implement their ideas, they continue to need adults who will stand beside them and ensure that they are treated with respect. The movement for children’s rights, including children’s participation, requires a partnership of supportive adults working with children, their families and their communities.

The movement for women’s rights may be taken as a model, however, in terms of the history of its progression from a rhetoric about women as a universal category to a more nuanced understanding that “women”, in fact, include many different groups with different opportunities and needs. Children also differ along lines of age, class, ethnicity and gender. In evaluating how environmental decisions affect them, the neighbourhoods and dwelling types in which they live may also be decisive. There-

18. Johnson, Vicky (editor) (1995), Special issue on “Children’s participation”, *PLA Notes* 25, International Institute for Environment and Development, London; also Chawla, Louise (editor) (2001), Special issue on “Children’s participation – evaluating effectiveness”, *PLA Notes* 42, International Institute for Environment and Development, London.

19. Driskell, David (2002), *Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth*, Earthscan/UNESCO, London.

20. See reference 9.

21. Arnstein, Sherry (1969), “A ladder of citizen’s participation”, *American Institute of Planners Journal* Vol 35, pages 216–224.

fore, it is critical to consider all the different populations that environmental decisions affect, and to find means to reach out and involve those who may be the most vulnerable and easily overlooked. When groups include both sexes, a range of ages, and different classes and ethnic groups, special care must be taken that girls, the youngest and those from marginalized groups have adequate opportunities to express themselves.

In reaching out to include children in partnerships for environmental change, it must also be kept in mind that a right, by definition, is an area of individual autonomy that a person may choose to exercise or not.<sup>(22)</sup> Children need to feel free to enter or leave a project without coercion, and with as clear as possible an understanding of the project's aims, strategies and limits. In work with children, the need for transparency in operations has particular meaning. It is not enough just to discuss goals and plans with children at the outset of a project. At every stage, it is necessary to listen to children's own understanding of what they are doing and why, and to seek age-appropriate ways to explain what may be bewildering processes of political, social, physical and ecological change. Doing so will not only expose areas of confusion that need clarification, but children's own constructions of events and reasons for action may enlarge adults' perspectives of a project's purposes and possibilities.

A related consideration is that efforts to upgrade community quality must often deal with frustratingly slow bureaucracies and even government resistance – especially in low-income areas. Therefore, in addition to long-term goals, it is important that community action plans incorporate some short-term goals that are within community members' own control, so that children will be motivated by a series of successes and "mastery experiences", building a sense of competence and agency as they proceed.<sup>(23)</sup>

Finally, it must be remembered that not only does the inclusion of children and youth in decision making represent a new frontier in human settlement policy but this principle conflicts with traditional values in cultures where children are expected to be seen but not heard and where obedience is considered children's highest virtue. Therefore, educating adults to understand the benefits of young people's engagement is a critical part of participatory processes. Although young people need opportunities to generate and develop ideas of their own, they also need occasions to meet with those of other ages to define shared concerns and join forces to work towards common goals.

## V. PROCESSES FOR PARTICIPATION

GIVEN THE OFTEN competitive interests of different stakeholders in human settlement decisions, as well as children's political, economic and physical weakness relative to adults, many efforts to involve children in evaluating, planning and caring for their communities are adult-initiated. Many of these efforts have adapted already established processes for work with other marginalized groups. This section will briefly review some time-tested models of this kind to involve children in decision making.

In urban development, the prominent urban planner Kevin Lynch created a programme of activities called Growing Up in Cities. First implemented in the 1970s, the project was revived in the 1990s and continues to spread in sites around the world.<sup>(24)</sup> Growing Up in Cities is currently supported by UNESCO's MOST (Management of Social Transformations)

22. Shapiro, I (1986), *The Evolution of Rights in Liberal Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

23. Chawla, Louise and Harry Heft (2002), "Children's competence and the ecology of communities", *Journal of Environmental Psychology* Vol 22, pages 201–216.

24. See reference 14, Chawla (2002); also see reference 19.

Programme, as well as other international and national agencies and foundations.<sup>(25)</sup> The project has grown out of the tradition of advocacy planning, in which urban planners seek to organize and give voice to marginalized populations, as well as a tradition of urban environmental education, which brings planners and other environmental professionals together with teachers and local leaders in schools and community centres.<sup>(26)</sup> Since the 1990s, it has assimilated the goals of poverty reduction and sustainable development and, since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, the project has had special relevance to the goal of integrating children into Local Agenda 21 planning.<sup>(27)</sup>

Growing Up in Cities is a programme of action research that uses a variety of methods to engage young people in evaluating their communities, determining their priorities for change, and helping to implement local improvements. Methods have included drawing, mapping, interviews, time schedules, photographs, model-building, child-led tours through the community, focus group discussions, role play, visioning and ranking exercises, and other individual and group activities to understand how a community functions for its children, what the existing resources for children and families are, and the areas that need improvement. Information gathering may also include observations of public places and other spaces that children use, maps and photogrids to document local environmental conditions, and interviews with parents and city officials with regard to their own concerns relating to environments for children and their perceptions of urban change and its impact on children across time. At its best, the project initiates ongoing processes for community improvement in which children continue to participate. Depending on the resources available, the project may be school-based, anchor itself in existing city and community programmes, or use work with children as a way to catalyze more inclusive community development for all ages.<sup>(28)</sup>

As well as improving local conditions for children, Growing Up in Cities seeks to create a network of committed people in city government and civil society organizations who are willing to press for more child-friendly urban policies. Therefore, project leaders also work to educate policy makers and the public about urban issues that affect children, using public exhibits and events, publications and other media. Whenever possible, children and adults collaborate in planning and presenting these events.

Several projects to involve children in participatory settlement planning have adapted processes of Participatory Rural Appraisal that have been pioneered with adults.<sup>(29)</sup> Some of these methods parallel those in Growing Up in Cities, such as mapping, drawing, interviews, time schedules, child-led walks and ranking exercises. Other methods include seasonal calendars to chart local cycles of work, social network charts, diagrams of environmental change and flow diagrams to identify the effect of changes on family life. These methods have been applied by a number of agencies, including ACTIONAID and Britain's Department for International Development.<sup>(30)</sup> In order to engage entire communities in efforts to upgrade living conditions and to identify shared priorities, Save the Children Norway<sup>(31)</sup> has pioneered a version in which a project team introduces its goals to the community in an initial meeting, and then invites village members to work in five groups: children, older women, younger women, older men, and younger men. Each group works through a battery of information-gathering activities, ranks its priorities

25. For further information about Growing Up in Cities, see: [www.unesco.org/most/growing.htm](http://www.unesco.org/most/growing.htm)

26. Bishop, J, J Kean and E Adams (1992), "Children, environment and education", *Children's Environments* Vol 9, No 1, pages 49-67.

27. Chawla, Louise (2001), "Putting young old ideas into action: the relevance of Growing Up in Cities to Local Agenda 21", *Local Environment* Vol 6, No 1, pages 13-25.

28. See, respectively, the following chapters in Chawla (2002) (see reference 14): Malone, Karen and Lindsay Hasluck, "Australian youth", pages 81-109; Cosco, Nilda and Robin Moore, "Our neighbourhood is like that!", pages 35-56; Swart Kruger, Jill, "Children in a South African squatter camp gain and lose a voice", pages 111-133.

29. Pretty, Jules, Irene Guijt, John Thompson and Ian Scoones (1995), *A Trainer's Guide for Participatory Learning and Action*, International Institute for Environment and Development, London.

30. For the ACTIONAID report, see reference 7, Johnson, Hill and Ivan-Smith (1995). For examples from DFID projects, see Nurick, Robert and Vicky Johnson (2001), "Putting child rights and participatory monitoring and evaluation with children into practice", *PLA Notes* 42, International Institute for Environment and Development, London, pages 39-47.

31. Guijt, Irene (1996), *Moving Slowly and Reaching Far/Participatory Planning in Redd Barna Uganda*, International Institute for Environment and Development, London; also Guijt, Irene, Andreas Fuglesang and T Kisadha

(1994), *It is the Young Trees that make a Thick Forest*, International Institute for Environment and Development, London; and Sandborg, K (1996), *Giving Voice to Children*, Redd Barna Uganda, Kampala.

32. Iyer, Lalitha and David Goldenberg (1997), *Improving Habitat for Children*, PLAN International, Woking, Surrey.

33. Rajbhandary, Jasmine, Roger Hart and Chandrika Khatiwada (2001), "Extracts from the children's clubs of Nepal: a democratic experiment", *PLA Notes 42*, International Institute for Environment and Development, London, pages 23–28.

34. See reference 9.

35. Johnson, Vicky et al. (1998), *Stepping Forward*, Intermediate Technology Publications, London; also Adams, E and S Ingham (1998), *Changing Places*, the Children's Society, London; and Stapp, W B, A E J Wals and S L Stankorb (1996), *Environmental Education for Empowerment*, Kendall-Hunt Publishing, Dubuque, IA.

36. Boyden, Jo and Judith Ennew (editors) (1997), *Children in Focus – A Manual for Participatory Research with Children*, Save the Children Sweden, Stockholm.

37. Fuglesang, Andreas and Dale Chandler (1997), *Children's Participation: A Case for a Strategy of Empowerment in Early Childhood*, Save the Children Norway, Oslo.

and, in the end, presents an action plan to the assembled community. Shared priorities for change – including some of the children's ideas – are then combined into a community action plan for implementation by the community as a whole. In addition, Save the Children commits itself to continue to address child-specific needs. PLAN International uses a similar approach in its site assessments, but divides groups of children into those from 6–12, adolescents in school, and adolescents not attending school.<sup>(32)</sup>

Perhaps the most ambitious programme to support children's own initiatives to identify and address their needs is the network of children's clubs that extends across Nepal.<sup>(33)</sup> Using different democratic processes, children themselves manage the clubs and plan and carry out activities. Outside organizations provide support in the form of training, small grants and convening meetings where club leaders can exchange experiences.

Numerous other programmes that engage children in community development are detailed by Hart in his handbook on *Children's Participation*.<sup>(34)</sup> Other case studies are reported in *Stepping Forward*, edited by Johnson and colleagues, *Changing Places* by Adams and Ingham, and *Environmental Education for Empowerment* by Stapp, Wals and Stankorb.<sup>(35)</sup> *Children in Focus* by Boyden and Ennew<sup>(36)</sup> is a manual for participatory research with children regarding all areas of their lives, but many of its methods can be applied to human settlement issues. In *Children's Participation: A Case for a Strategy of Empowerment in Early Childhood*, Fuglesang and Chandler<sup>(37)</sup> note that when the idea of children's rights to participation is applied to early childhood, it needs to be broadly conceived to include the training of child-care workers and family care-givers to engage with children in ways that foster the development of self-confidence and a sense of agency and success in problem solving, thus building a foundation for effective participation through more formal channels in later life.

## VI. POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO FACILITATE PARTICIPATION

MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES AND community leaders have much to gain by encouraging the participation of children and youth in planning and managing the places where they live. In the language of the Habitat Agenda, young people have insight, creativity and thoughts to contribute to the shaping of their cities and towns. At the same time, they learn the habits and practices of democratic government and environmental care. In the often contested spaces of human settlements, however, young people's participation requires the partnership and facilitation of adults. If municipal governments, development agencies and community organizations want to create opportunities for authentic participation, there are a number of steps that they can take.

**Invest in people who can facilitate participation.** Successful participatory projects require a team of people who can:

- engage children, youth and their families;
- network to build support for the implementation of children's ideas;
- lobby for more child-sensitive policies and practices; and
- train others in participatory ideas.

In other words, the process requires extensive investments of time by

people who are skilled at working with community and government leaders on the one hand and young people and their families on the other. People with these skills require institutional support, whether they work in government offices, development agencies, non-governmental or community organizations, or universities. To catalyze people-centred and child-centred development of this kind, development organizations must shift from a primary investment in capital construction and *products* to a primary investment in *people* and *process*.

**Train people who work with children.** An investment in people requires a corresponding investment in training. The principles of children's rights, including the right to participation, need to be incorporated into the education of everyone who works with children, such as parents, teachers, child-care workers, youth workers, doctors, nurses, police officers and juvenile justice workers. People whose decisions affect the quality of life of children and their families, including planning officials and development agency staff, also need to be aware of children's rights.

**Institutionalize children's inclusion.** The ultimate goal for participatory initiatives is to make it "practice as usual" to include children and youth. There are a number of mechanisms to achieve this end:

- the appointment of a children's representative at city or municipal levels and in smaller jurisdictions, with input into decisions that affect children indirectly as well as directly, including budget decisions;
- similar staff positions in agencies and organizations whose work affects children;
- the inclusion of child representatives on community development committees and other decision-making bodies;
- the creation of children's councils with advisory powers and real powers of review over decisions that affect children's lives;<sup>(38)</sup>
- the creation of school-based and out-of-school curricula that involve children in the study and improvement of their local environment;
- the creation of certificate courses in children's rights and participation; and
- fixed budget lines to support participatory initiatives.

A local plan of action should be written or rewritten to bring local practices into alignment with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda.<sup>(39)</sup>

**Use qualitative as well as quantitative standards and indicators.** Child- and people-centred development operates on the principle that human settlements are ultimately to be judged by the quality of the lives of the people who reside there. Quantitative indicators of health or income may measure important pre-conditions for well-being, but whether lives are meaningful and fulfilling must be expressed by people themselves through inclusive processes of participation.

**Recognize participatory research as a significant contribution to agency planning and academic prestige.** Many government offices and development agencies dismiss community-based research as irrelevant, while many universities dismiss applied participatory research as insignificant. The result is that development decisions are usually made without the systematic inclusion of community members' perspectives and ideas, while agency staff or university researchers who facilitate this kind of work go unsupported. When this circle of disinvestment and disincentive is broken, agencies and universities can form collaborations to contribute to community revitalization.

**Invest in communities.** Child-centred participatory processes involve

38. See the paper by Eliana Guerra, "Citizenship knows no age: Children's participation in the governance and municipal budget of Barra Mansa, Brazil" in this issue of *Environment and Urbanization*.

39. See reference 5, Bartlett et al. (1999)

meeting communities half way by capitalizing on existing energies, resources and ideas, and by making resources available as they are needed for grassroots initiatives, thus strengthening community members' sense of control over their lives. As processes like this achieve progressive improvements and build a sense of hope in communities, they can function proactively in order to prevent children and their families from falling into homelessness and other extreme circumstances.

**Strengthen municipal authority and budgets.** Many municipal governments are crippled in their ability to respond to communities' needs because they have the responsibility to provide services but without the corresponding authority or funds. Yet, this level of government is much more accessible to community groups, including groups of children, than are distant officials in national or provincial capitals. Therefore, support for participatory community development must include support for government at the levels closest to citizens.

**Create community-based curricula.** The study of their own local environment and lives can motivate young people to enjoy practising skills of writing, reading, drawing, measuring, calculating, designing and public speaking through approaches that make learning relevant and applied. In-school and out-of-school programmes to evaluate and improve the local environment have the potential to create alliances among teachers, youth workers and resource people from government, universities, community organizations and non-governmental organizations.

## VII. "MOVING SLOWLY AND REACHING FAR"

A REVIEW OF efforts to integrate children into human settlement planning has aptly described it as a process of "moving slowly and reaching far".<sup>(40)</sup> Institutionalizing children's engagement in the planning and care of their environments, and enabling adults to see children in terms of their competencies as well as their weaknesses, requires many progressive steps. The benefits for society as well as for children themselves, however, can be profound. As previously observed, a focus on children in development planning leads to attention to human development, community quality, basic needs, health-promoting environmental standards and the long-term consequences of decisions – a set of priorities which would increase social and environmental well-being for all ages, now and in the future.

A United Nations Commission on Population and Quality of Life concluded that a decent standard of living for all will require simultaneous attention to the carrying capacity of the planet and the caring capacity of society.<sup>(41)</sup> Children stand at the heart of both agendas for change. They have the longest-term investment in the protection of the environment and the creation of sustainable settlements, and investments in their care will bear the longest-term returns to their society as well as to themselves. The principles of children's right to participation affirm not only that work to improve social and environmental conditions will serve the interests of children now and in the future but also that children themselves can be active, insightful and energetic allies in achieving this goal.

40. See reference 31, Gujit (1996).

41. Independent Commission on Population and Quality of Life (1996), *Caring for the Future*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

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