

Overview



Part 2 contains nine essays that examine children's rights to participate in social dialogue. Policy-makers, planners and professionals are encouraged to include children in every stage of decision-making about services – from policy-making and programme design to delivery and evaluation.

The essays highlight potential benefits for children, adults and key government services, give examples of best practice and recommend key interventions that could help realise children's rights in practice.

Setting the scene

Children's rights to participate in social dialogue

(pages 22 – 29)

Children's rights to participate in social dialogue are protected in international and national law. These include the right to be heard, freedom of expression, the right to access information and the right to dignity and equality. Children's participation in decision-making is critical in ensuring the realisation of children's other rights to education, health, safety, shelter, social security and protection. Policy-makers, planners and professionals working with children have a responsibility to listen to children and take their views seriously in order to make decisions that promote children's best interests.

Effective children's participation in social dialogue

(pages 30 – 35)

What is children's participation in social dialogue and how can we make it work for everyone? This essay defines children's participation in social dialogue and outlines how it can improve service delivery, strengthen democracy and enable children to cope better in resource-poor settings. It explores some of the key challenges and what is required to support a two-way conversation between adults and children, in which both parties are able to express themselves and to be heard.

Children's participation in social dialogue

Children's relationships with professionals

(pages 36 – 42)

Children's right to participate in decision-making has profound implications for the way in which professionals work with children. Focusing on the health care system, this essay illustrates how children's participation can help reduce workloads and improve health outcomes for children. Change starts with the self – with small shifts in practice that help build trust and communication with children and their families. These changes in professional practice need to be supported through training and must be integrated at all levels of service delivery.

Children and school governance: Representation, participation and power

(pages 43 – 48)

Children have the right to participate in the governance of services, including schools, where they have a voice on learner representative councils and school governing bodies. Participating in collective action and decision-making is good for children and good for schools, yet can be challenging to put into practice. The essay explores issues of representation, power and diversity and highlights what is required to strengthen children's participation and ensure that these structures do not exclude or marginalise children.

Children's involvement in government policy and budget analysis

(pages 49 – 53)

Children's participation in policy development and the planning, implementation and evaluation of services is essential if services are to meet children's needs. Yet the language of government policies and budgets is often inaccessible to children. Meaningful participation requires an ongoing process of dialogue: Children need access to information in child-friendly formats and the opportunity to express their views on government budgets and policies. Decision-makers need to take these views into account when planning, implementing and evaluating services.

Children and the media: Voices worth hearing?

(pages 54 – 58)

Children are often portrayed as passive victims by the news media, and are seldom given the opportunity to share their views. Yet children's participation in the media can provide young people with a platform to express their point of view, influence decision-making and achieve change. In describing the work of two projects that enable children's participation in the media, the essay illustrates how direct children's involvement can result in more informed media coverage, a more ethical approach to children, and a more accurate portrayal of children's experiences, insights and opinions.

Reflections

Children's experiences of participation

(pages 59 – 64)

Children recognise the value of their contributions, reflect on their own experiences of participatory processes and describe what adults need to do to ensure children feel that their views are respected and taken seriously. Participation benefits both children and society, and the essay describes how participation

builds children's self-confidence, communication skills and support networks, enabling children to withstand peer pressure and to play a pro-active role in their communities.

Unsettling the status quo: Children's challenges to adult perceptions and practices

(pages 65 – 69)

Many children in South Africa are excluded from discussions about important matters in the family and community. Yet, a children's radio project in a small village in KwaZulu-Natal is changing the way adults and children talk to one another. In their role as reporters, children are able to set the agenda, ask adults questions and get the answers they need. Through interviews and radio broadcasts, children are shifting adult perceptions and engagement with children – and adults are beginning to appreciate children's capacity to engage with important issues, and to include children in conversations.

Conclusion: Children as citizens

(pages 70 – 73)

Children can enjoy the benefits of citizenship only if they are included in all forms of social dialogue. The final essay draws on democratic citizenship theory to analyse the key lessons for children's citizenship emerging from the preceding essays. It summarises recommendations to professionals and policy-makers to help them overcome the challenges they face in including children in decision-making. The essay also challenges researchers to address the gaps in knowledge around children's participation – for example, the role of social media in connecting children and allowing for mobilisation and participation in social dialogue.

Children's participation in the South African Child Gauge 2010/2011

The poster accompanying this issue of the *South African Child Gauge* was designed in collaboration with children over a series of four workshops (see pp. 20 – 21). The children's artwork and photographs illustrating key elements of this process are featured throughout this issue.