

child rights

in focus

Research • Advocacy • Education

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE • ISSUE NUMBER 6 • MARCH 2007

Evaluating a child participation project at the CI

Wanjirũ Mũkoma, HIV/AIDS Programme

The *Dikwankwetla – Children in Action Project* started in 2003 with the aim of facilitating children's input into the drafting of the Children's Bill. '*Dikwankwetla*' means '*heroes*' in isiXhosa, and the project participants today number 11 children and youth, now aged 14 – 19 years. They were selected from the North West, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo provinces. The children were highly effective in making oral submissions at the national and provincial parliaments on what is now the Children's Act, while they are currently also giving input on the Children's Amendment Bill at the various provincial parliamentary hearings (see [accompanying report](#) by Lucy Jamieson).

In December 2006, the Children's Institute held a workshop in Cape Town to evaluate the project. The workshop was attended by nine of the children and three caregivers. The aim of the workshop was to provide the children and caregivers the opportunity to evaluate the project and their experiences, focusing on processes, outcomes and perceived impacts. The workshop format was participatory, engaging the children and caregivers in defining the evaluation agenda.

Overall, the children concluded that the project had achieved its objectives:

“The first objective of the project was to convey the message to the Members of Parliament. That goal was reached.”

The children felt that they had made an important contribution to the legislation through their submissions in Parliament. The experience made a lasting impression on all of them:

“It felt very important to be in Parliament ... we managed to make our submissions although the committee was made up of adults only and no youth representatives ... the parliamentarians mentioned our work and this makes us feel we have made an impact.”

They also expressed tremendous personal growth as a result of their participation in the project: *“We are now confident to share our personal experiences with others.”* The children have also become well known in their communities through their advocacy work and campaigns and are often invited to speak about children’s rights at various forums. They consider themselves as role models to other children:

“We are role models; we help other children with their problems, help others realise the importance of children’s rights.”

However, the children also acknowledged various challenges that they had to face in promoting awareness of children’s rights in their communities, such as negative attitudes from adults who did not want to hear about children’s rights:

“Some parents still don’t want to hear about children’s rights because they think the rights overpower them and make children disrespect them.”

The children and caregivers indicated that they greatly appreciated the opportunity to evaluate the project, as was expressed by this caregiver:

"I have never in my life attended a workshop where I just evaluated. In other workshops we just fill in forms as we walk out but this one was so detailed and I have learnt so much."

But the reality of saying goodbye to each other for the last time was captured in this note from *Dikwankwetla* member Kurt in reflecting on his experiences of the workshop once they had returned home:

"Hi all,

Thinking back on the last workshop we had, I think we'll all agree that it was amazing but also filled with sadness as it would be the last time we would see each other as Dikwankwetla. We met new people like Wanjiru and Gabs, who we all enjoyed spending time with. I personally enjoyed just looking back at all we've done and the friendships I've made. What made it even more special was that it coincided with my birthday – a day I'll never forget.

All there is left to say now is thank you to all for making the final workshop and Dikwankwetla a success."

For more information on this project, contact [Wanjirũ Mũkoma](#).

[back to contents page](#)



The Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, aims to contribute to policies, laws and interventions, that promote equality and realise the rights and improve the conditions of all children in South Africa, through research, advocacy, education and technical support.



