

child rights

in focus

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NEWSLETTER OF THE CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE • Issue Number 1 • May 2004

DIKWANKWETLA – Children in Action!

Children's participation in the Children's Bill

Namhla Mniki, HIV/AIDS Programme

Child rights activists worldwide agree that children's participation is crucial in the pursuit of children's rights. With the review of the Child Care Act of 1983 currently underway, the Children's Institute has embarked for the first time on a project to explore the facilitation of *children's participation in legislative processes*.

Once legislated as an Act, the new Children's Bill stands to be perhaps the single most important piece of child-related legislation in South Africa. The Children's Bill Child Participation project is thus a process to involve children in the debates and decision-making processes that will inform the final provisions in this bill, with a particular emphasis on children made vulnerable in the context of HIV/AIDS.

Twelve children between the ages of 12 and 17 years were selected from partner organisations in Limpopo, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and North West Provinces to participate in the project.

To equip child participants to engage with the bill, and to articulate their opinions about it, a capacity-building programme was designed. This entailed participatory workshops focusing on developing legislative literacy and supporting the children to become advocates.

To assist in developing their legislative literacy, a resource pack containing a child-friendly version of the Children's Bill was developed. The pack also contained activities to enable children to learn about the current content of the Children's Bill, and to develop opinions about what was lacking in the bill, and what they were satisfied with.

In supporting the children to become advocates, they designed an advocacy campaign strategy, identifying themselves as heroes of the AIDS pandemic. The strategy includes talking to other children about the bill; engaging with decision-makers about their concerns; performing radio dramas, rap songs, poems, and designing posters and t-shirts. The group chose to call themselves **Dikwankwetla – Children in Action**, and their slogan is “**Children are the future, give them their rights**”.

Some of the main challenges in facilitating this process have been:

- Balancing popular education methodologies with the fact that the children had to be “taught” about the content of the current draft bill,
- Linking the relevance of the provisions in the bill to the children's lives, and
- Structuring the children's participation in such a way that they do not feel overburdened with the responsibility of changing legislation, in addition to having to deal with their own very difficult socio-economic conditions.

The facilitation of this process has again highlighted the importance of close collaborations across disciplines. Also, it was crucial to use effective participatory methods and tools in the workshops. Lastly, child-friendly policy or legal documents is invaluable in facilitating child participation in legislative processes.

[back to contents page](#)



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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.



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