

SHAPING A COUNTRY'S FUTURE

With Children and Young People

NATIONAL PLANS OF ACTION FOR CHILDREN

Involving Children and Young People in their Development

SUMMARY GUIDE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The 2002 UN General Assembly Special Session on Children concluded with a commitment by world leaders and governments to create a better world for children. The process for doing this is outlined in the Outcome Document, 'A World Fit for Children' which contains:

- A 'Declaration' of key principles and objectives
- A global 'Plan of Action'.

A copy of the document can be found at www.savethechildren.net

In order to help achieve the global plan, governments agreed to prepare *National Plans of Action* for children by the end of 2003. These National Plans of Action will explain how each government will work towards achieving the goals and targets of the global plan within their country.

Because the National Plans of Action are being developed to make children's lives better and to make a reality of their rights, it is vital that children and young people themselves are able to contribute towards the design and development of these Plans. Children are the key 'stakeholders' whose views need to be heard when discussing the right goals to choose and the best way to achieve them.

But how should civil society support children and young people's involvement in the National Plan of Action processes? In order to answer this question Save the Children decided to ask over 4500 young people from 14 countries, what they thought governments, civil society and young people should do. This report is a summary of the views of these children and young people and includes *their* suggestions and ideas about ways in which governments can involve them as they set about developing their National Plans of Action.

The information presented in this briefing is a summary of the complete report "Shaping a Country's Future" available at www.savethechildren.net. Summary Guides also exist for government and young people, these guides are also available at these websites or through Save the Children offices.

WHY INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE?

Children and young people clearly indicated that they want to be involved in the development of National Plans of Action. The main reasons they gave were:

- They are the people directly targeted by the plans and the most important stakeholders
- They are the people with the most direct experience of the situation of children and they can help governments understand their problems better.
- Children are not all the same and governments need to hear the views of different groups of children
- They have a right (contained in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) to be consulted on all decisions which affect them
- Children and young people can – and want to – play a part in supporting the implementation of the plan
- They will improve the effectiveness and impact of the plan, making it more successful.
- It helps to build democracy and encourages responsibility among children for their lives, communities and societies
- Children and young people feel they have valuable resources to bring to the processes – new ideas and a future-oriented perspective.

HOW CAN CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT?

Children and young people's participation in the development of National Plans of Action requires different kinds of support such as:

- ◆ Access to information
- ◆ Access to resources (including money, places to meet and computers)
- ◆ Training in skills such as facilitation, advocacy and negotiation
- ◆ Opportunities to share information and approaches with other groups of children and young people

Civil society groups – parents, community associations, Non Governmental Organizations, etc - can play an important role in providing that support. The children and young people in the consultation had a variety of ideas about the kind of civil society support that would be useful. This included:

- Moral and financial support to stay involved
- Persuading government that children and young people's involvement is practical and worthwhile
- Training of children to facilitate the maximum participation of children and young people in the NPA process e.g. giving children and young people access to new skills and knowledge to improve their effectiveness in consultations.
- Training of adults in government to overcome their resistance to children and young people's involvement and to give them the confidence and skills to encourage children's involvement
- Support to capacity-building with child-led and youth-led organisations
- Acting as an intermediary and facilitator between government and children and young people
- Supporting peer (child-led) research to produce evidence to support children's advocacy
- Producing child friendly versions of key documents

- Working with children and young people to follow up on government promises and hold governments accountable
- Organising meetings to share information and consult with children and young people
- Helping children and young people learn more about how governments work and how they can contact the right people – who, where and how?
- Taking special action to ensure all young people are part of the processes, including young people with disabilities, children under the age of 12, rural and urban children, boys and girls, children in armed conflict, orphans and marginalized young people
- Understanding that participation experiences only become positive if they are carried out within a framework of respect for the interests of children and young people, if they are based on real participation and no attempt is made to stigmatise them or manipulate the children and young people involved
- Following up on consultations with children, to let them know what happened next and what progress is being made

HOW COULD CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE BE INVOLVED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF NPAs?

The development of National Plans of Action is the *beginning* of the process of creating a better world for children. Once the National Plans of Action have been prepared they need to be turned into practical action and regularly checked to see if they are achieving their goals and targets. Children and young people would like to be able to contribute to the implementation of the National Plans of Action as well as play a part in the monitoring of their success or failure in achieving their goals. Civil society groups could support this process by:

- Helping with the creation of a permanent, representative group of children and youth to be in continuous contact with the NPA process
- Supporting children to work with their own organisations and other adult community-based and national organisations to review and monitor implementation at different levels
- Facilitating regular feedback meetings with government to discuss progress in implementing the National Plan of Action
- Providing children and young people with information and regular feedback on the progress of implementation
- Organising ‘Monitoring days’ to see if what was agreed in the National Plan of Action was being implemented.

THE ROLE OF SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children’s country programmes and their local partners played a key role in facilitating children’s participation in the Special Session process. Many of these programmes will now be a part of the follow-up process, especially in efforts to maximise children’s participation. Various tools – including these summary guides – have been prepared to provide strong support to children’s participation in the follow-up at country and regional level.

UNICEF and other NGOs may also be able to assist in this process.