

# 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 GOVERNMENTS

#### 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'.

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.

In the global Plan of Action governments agreed that "We must respect [children and adolescents'] right to express themselves and to participate in all matters affecting them, in accordance to their age and maturity." 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 about the right goals to choose and the best ways to achieve them.

But how should governments 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 children and young people from 14 countries, what they thought governments, civil society and young people should do. This briefing is a summary of their views and includes *their* suggestions and ideas about ways in which children and young people can be involved in developing their country's National Plans of Action.

The information presented in this briefing is taken from the complete report "Shaping a Country's Future" that is available at [www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net). Summary Guides also exist for civil society and young people, these guides are also available at [www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net).

## **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 GOVERNMENTS INVOLVE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL PLANS OF ACTION?**

Children and young people would welcome the opportunity to be involved in the preparation of National Plans of Action for children. They believe that their involvement would improve the quality and relevance of such plans. If this is to happen, governments would need to take a range of steps to create the right sort of environment for genuine children and young people's participation in the NPA process. Children and young people in the consultations came up with a wide range of practical and detailed suggestions of how governments could do this. They include:

- Involve children from the start and encourage their involvement throughout the whole process
- Be transparent about the process for the development of the National Plan of Action - be clear about the timetable and explain what is happening at all points
- Provide all the relevant information on children's issues and the NPA process in simple language and circulate it widely e.g. by radio or a special newsletter. Child friendly documents relating to the Special Session including the outcome document, "A World Fit for Children", regional reports and a look at the progress made for children during the 1990s are available at [www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net)
- Allow enough time!
- Make sure that children and young people have advance information about meetings
- Use 'child-friendly' approaches to encourage children and young people's participation – where necessary, change the way adult procedures work.
- Be open about the resources that are available to support the process

- Try and create opportunities to involve as many children and young people as possible in the process e.g. through setting up forums and debates or going around schools to explain what is happening
- Keep children and young people regularly updated on progress
- Give children and young people quick responses as well as regular feedback on their contributions
- Remember that action is as important as talk – deliver on commitments
- Make the process as fair and honest as possible
- Use schools as a key place for distributing information, encouraging debate and bridging the gap between politicians and children and young people
- Consider using young ‘mentors’ or advisors to support the process (i.e. young adults with experience of similar processes), as well as ‘experts’ who could help children and young people turn their ideas into practical proposals in the ‘right’ language
- When children and young people make good suggestions, make sure that their ideas are incorporated into the NPA and acknowledged
- Make sure that the government officials involved in developing the National Plan of Action understand the importance of children and young people’s involvement, are trained in child rights and know how to support children and young people’s participation
- Special considerations need to be made 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.
- Children and young people need to know more about how governments work and how they can contact the right people – who, where and how?
- Governments should consider how they could listen more carefully to children and young people’s views and set up mechanisms and channels to make this happen. Once they have done that, they should make sure that all children and young people know about these channels of communication.
- Governments should consider setting up a place in government with particular responsibility for children and youth such as a Minister for Children or a Children’s Office.
- Governments should note 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
- It is important to follow 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 playing a part in the monitoring of their success or failure in achieving their goals. They suggested that this could happen in various ways:

- Through the creation of a permanent, representative group of children and young people to be in continuous contact with the NPA process
- Children could work with their own organisations and other adult community-based and national organisations to review and monitor implementation at different levels
- Through regular feedback meetings by government to discuss progress in implementing the National Plan of Action
- ‘Monitoring days’ could be organised 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 and regional programmes 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.