

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 YOUNG PEOPLE

GETTING STARTED - WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

In May 2002 the United Nations General Assembly held a Special Session on Children at its headquarters in New York. This was an opportunity for governments to plan how they could improve the lives of children around the world over the next ten years. In order to do this, governments agreed to a global Plan of Action. This Plan of Action can be found in a document called, 'A World Fit For Children', available in a 'child friendly' format at www.savethechildren.net. The document sets out a number of key priorities and targets for the world community over the next ten years. Four key issues facing children were identified for priority action:

1. Health
2. Education
3. Protection from violence, abuse and exploitation
4. HIV/AIDS

To help them achieve the global action plan, governments of the world 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 the goals and targets of the global action plan within their country.

At the Special Session and in all the events leading up to it, the voices of many children and young people were heard. This showed the important contribution children and young people can make in decisions that affect them and how important it is for decision-makers to consult with children and listen to them. Much excitement for involvement in 'follow-up' processes was generated among children all around the world. Children and young people made it clear that they want to be meaningfully involved in the development, implementation and monitoring of their country's National Plans of Action.

But how can children and young people ensure that they are meaningfully involved 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 briefing is a summary of the views of children and young people and includes *their* suggestions and ideas about ways in which young people can move forward with the National Plan of Action processes.

The complete report on this consultation is called "Shaping a Country's Future" and is available at www.savethechildren.net. Summary Guides also exist for government and civil society, these guide are available at www.savethechildren.net.

CONVINCING DECISION MAKERS

The first thing you may have to do is convince politicians and other key decision-makers that child participation works and that it is important. We recommend that you come up with your own arguments about why it is important but, to get you started, here is a list of the reasons that the children and young people involved in the consultation used;

- Children and young people are directly targeted by the plans and are the most important stakeholders
- Children and young people have 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
- Children and young people 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
- Children and young people 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.

BEING PREPARED FOR PROBLEMS

While you may be clear about your right to participate and to be actively involved in the National Plan of Action process, this may not be so clear to all the other people involved. It is therefore important to identify potential obstacles which could block the involvement of children and young people in the development of your country's National Plan of Action and to find ways of overcoming these barriers. Some of the barriers to the active participation of children and young people that have been identified include:

- Negative attitudes by government officials and politicians, including a lack of appreciation for children and young people's contribution
- Not knowing how to contact the right people in government or not having regular communication with them.
- Practical difficulties facing children and young people in keeping involved in working with government - such as the demands of school, domestic labour and work, poverty, insecurity, unstable families and poor parental care.
- Adult difficulties in understanding children and young people's issues and problems
- Children and young people's lack of education and low awareness of their rights
- Lack of easy-to-find information in 'child friendly' language that children and young people can understand.
- Failure of adults to follow up on consultations with children, to let them know what happened next and what progress is being made
- Age discrimination and a tendency to underestimate the potential of children and young people
- Lack of contact and exchange between children in different parts of the country and at the local, national and international level
- Discrimination against particular groups of children

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

The children and young people involved in the consultations also recognised that, if they wanted to be taken seriously by government, they had to make an effort too. They reflected on the need for children and young people themselves to:

- be responsible, disciplined and well-organised
- show respect for government officials and other people working with them
- make sure that children who speak other languages or who have different interests, tribal or religious backgrounds, etc are fully included.
- be properly prepared and use the right approaches)
- present practical, realistic suggestions and solutions
- make sure that you are well informed
- find out what you need to know about government - who are the right people to talk to and how do you go about doing it?

HOW CAN YOUNG PEOPLE GET INVOLVED?

The involvement of children and young people in the development of National Plans of Action is at a relatively early stage and there is limited experience of it among governments, civil society and children and young people. However, children and young people have been actively involved in other kinds of work to influence government decision-making for some time. Children and young people in the consultation were asked about methods and approaches they already used in order to communicate their ideas to government and increase the chances that governments would listen to them. Their responses included:

- Invite representatives of central and local government to meet with groups of children to discuss how they might be involved in the NPA process and how communication between children and government can be improved.
- Write letters and organise petitions requesting the involvement of children in the NPA process
- Prepare a realistic and concrete 'alternative' NPA to show what children and young people think should happen.
- Make sure that children's committees, children's parliaments and other networks of children and young people are involved in pressing for children and young people to be actively involved in the NPA process

- Public education - raise awareness of parents, communities and the general public about the development of NPAs and the importance of children and young people's involvement
- Involving the media - explain to them what is happening and try to make sure children and young people's perspectives are heard
- Campaigning - organise public campaigns to raise awareness and press for action on the most important issues
- Ask national and international NGOs to request governments to listen to children and young people as they develop their NPAs.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION IS DEVELOPED?

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 told us they 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 youth 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
- Children and young people would need regular feedback on the progress of implementation
- 'Monitoring days' could be organised to review if what was agreed in the National Plan of Action was being implemented.

OTHER THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

It is important to remember that not all children have equal access to participation opportunities. Children and young people who are often left out include girls, children with disabilities, children under the age of 12, rural children, children in armed conflict, orphans and marginalized young people.

Everyone involved in children's participation, including governments, civil society and young people themselves, should do what they can to ensure the voices of **ALL** young people are heard.

NEED HELP?

If you would like information on the Special Session please go to www.savethechildren.net. Here you will find the following information;

- 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.
- Background information on the Special Session e.g. What was the Special Session and why did it take place?
- The full version of the report, "Shaping a Country's Future", which includes advice to governments and civil society on the involvement of young people in the National Plan of Action processes.
- Do not forget to get in touch with children's rights organisations in your own community. They may be working on the same issues and you may therefore be able to work together in partnership to claim your rights.

You can also try contacting Sarah Stevenson by email (NPA@savethechildren.ca). If at all possible she will put you in touch with people in your region that are doing important work with child participation.

GOOD LUCK!

P.S. Please be sure to share your experiences (good or bad) with us. That way we can make sure other young people are able to learn from your work. Please send information to:

Sarah Stevenson

Save the Children

Suite 300, 4141 Yonge Street

Toronto, Ontario

M2P 2A8

Email: NPA@savethechildren.ca