

# CLAIMING CITIZENSHIP

Case Studies of Adolescents Participating in  
Governance in South Asia



THE CONCERNED FOR  
*Working Children*

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# CLAIMING CITIZENSHIP

Case Studies of Adolescents Participating in  
Governance in South Asia

UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia  
in partnership with the Concerned for Working Children



यसलाई बाँध्नु  
छात्राङ्गी  
वातावरण प्रदूषण नगरौं

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# Acronyms

<b>ACE</b>	Action for Children's Environment
<b>ADAP</b>	Adolescent Development and Participation
<b>ASHA</b>	accredited social health activist
<b>BCMD</b>	Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy
<b>CBO</b>	community based organization
<b>CEO</b>	chief executive officer
<b>CFLG</b>	child-friendly local governance
<b>CRC</b>	Committee on the Rights of the Child
<b>CSO</b>	civil society organization
<b>CWC</b>	Concerned for Working Children
<b>CWIN</b>	Child Workers in Nepal
<b>DNT</b>	de-notified tribe
<b>DWCD</b>	Department of Women and Child Development
<b>DYS</b>	Department of Youth and Sports
<b>FGD</b>	focus group discussion
<b>GNH</b>	Gross National Happiness
<b>GPDP</b>	Gram Panchayat Development Plan
<b>LGBTQI</b>	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex
<b>LGCDP</b>	Local Government and Community Development Programme
<b>NCWC</b>	National Commission for Women and Children (Bhutan)
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>NYAP</b>	National Youth Action Plan
<b>NYP</b>	National Youth Policy
<b>RENEW</b>	Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women
<b>ROSA</b>	Regional Office for South Asia
<b>SCI</b>	Safe City Initiative
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCRC</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>VDC</b>	village development committee
<b>VMIS</b>	Volunteer Management Information System
<b>WASH</b>	water, sanitation and hygiene
<b>WCD</b>	women and child development
<b>YASHADA</b>	Yashwantrao Chavan Academy of Development Administration

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We would also like to thank the many state officials, administrators and elected representatives in the four case study jurisdictions, who provided us with contextual details and rich reflections and patiently answered all our queries. Thanks to the officials from the Bhopal Municipal Corporation of Madhya Pradesh, the child-friendly *panchayats*, elected representatives, local government officials, and the Yashwantrao Chavan

Academy of Development Administration (YASHADA) in Maharashtra, the elected local government members in Nepal, and the Department of Youth and Sports (DYS) in Bhutan.

We thank Dharshini Seneviratne at UNICEF ROSA, who conceptualized the original project, for coordinating every step of this process and always being there to provide clarifications, encouragement, views, analysis and edits, as required.

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# Message from the Regional Director



There is only one way for UNICEF to deliver services for children, including adolescents, that truly fulfils their rights – and that is through decision-making that enables them to be heard, to participate, and to be partners and influencers in creating a better world for themselves and their communities. As the leading child rights agency committed to realizing the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), child participation is an indispensable part of UNICEF’s mandate, as evident in its new Strategic Plan for 2022–2025.

Participation is a basic child right. It is also a savvy pragmatic strategy for meaningfully realizing children’s right to education, skilling and employment, health, protection, social protection, clean water and sanitation, and a sustainable environment. Nearly 50 per cent of South Asia’s 1.8 billion people are under the age of 24. The cost of working on solutions that impact them without involving them is too high. Engaging children, including adolescents, is even more critical now, when they are facing intensified social, political and economic vulnerabilities due to COVID-19.

*Claiming Citizenship: Case Studies of Adolescents Participating in Governance in South Asia* is an important qualitative research report that brings together successful examples of engaging adolescents and partnering with state and civil society organizations on participatory planning. We commend the UNICEF country offices in Bhutan, India and Nepal for their admirable work in this area, which we can all learn from. We also wish to thank Concerned for Working Children (CWC) for their contribution to this compendium through their decades of regional and global experience in policy and programming on child participation.

May this document provide tangible technical and strategic insights as we seek to make the significant participation of children, including adolescents, a reality, in partnership with state, civil society and private organizations.

**George Laryea-Adjei**  
Regional Director  
UNICEF South Asia



# Executive Summary

In 1989, global leaders made an historic commitment to the world's children with the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, recognizing children's fundamental right to be heard, influence decisions, and participate in issues that affect their lives. This right also entails a right to agency and protagonism; to be informed of policy and programme decisions that affect them and their communities; and to engage and participate in making those decisions.

As part of the new mandates set for adolescent programming in its 2022–2025 strategy, UNICEF will be mainstreaming meaningful adolescent engagement and participation as a principle and a process across the five goal areas of education, health, child protection, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and climate change, and social protection, and in its priority thematic strategies on mental health, employability, skills, digital education and climate change. UNICEF's commitment to reimagine programming with and for children provides exciting opportunities for adolescent participation in all its sectors.

UNICEF's Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) provides technical and advocacy input to develop capacities and promote adolescent participation across sectors within UNICEF and in governments through its Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) section. The partnership with the Concerned for

Working Children (CWC) for the present study was created in order to strengthen regional understanding of intentional adolescent participation in governance practices, including understanding the complex and nuanced factors that govern policy- and systems-supported participation practices, including implications for evidence-based policy formulation.

The **components** of this study can be summarized as follows:

- A scoping study for the selected countries and case studies
- Secondary analysis of government policies, structures and mechanisms for adolescent participation
- Documentation of case studies with a substantive analysis of adolescent participation
- Recommendations for operationalizing and mainstreaming adolescent participation

The **methodology** that was agreed on between UNICEF and CWC consisted of:

- Analysis of the legal and policy frameworks that guide decisions in the selected countries
- Preparation of a brief scoping study, in consultation with regional advisors and country offices
- Confirmation of four diverse initiatives selected in three countries for documentation

As part of the new mandates set for adolescent programming in its 2022–2025 strategy, UNICEF will be mainstreaming meaningful adolescent engagement and participation.

- Online consultations with governments and civil society organizations
- Online consultations with active adolescent groups and adolescents
- Online consultations with other concerned stakeholders
- Consolidation of recommendations for different constituencies

**Four initiatives** were selected for in-depth documentation:

- **Safe City Initiative in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India:** This initiative is embedded in child protection interventions and is undertaken in conjunction with urban local self-governance structures, administrative systems and local CSOs, while being rooted in an urban governance framework.
- **Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) Initiative, Maharashtra, India:** This project is embedded in social policy interventions and set in a rural governance framework. It is the main component of UNICEF Maharashtra's partnership with the Government of Maharashtra in establishing and implementing child-friendly *panchayats*.<sup>1</sup>
- **Child-Friendly Local Governance Initiative (CFLG), Nepal:** This national initiative, formerly a flagship programme of UNICEF, has close to two decades of history and is presently poised for nationwide coverage.
- **Review of the National Youth Policy, Bhutan:** As a new democracy and a constitutional monarchy, the participation of its adolescents and young people in framing a new

National Youth Policy 2020 through the report *Youth Voices: Youth Matters* is a harbinger of opportunities for the enhanced participation of adolescents and youth in Bhutan.

The **findings** from the literature review and the online consultations were arranged around five themes – agency, state, participation, inclusion, and resolutions (ASPIRE) – which provide the framework in which the findings of the case study are presented:

- **Agency** – the evolving capacity and confidence of adolescents to engage with decision makers and structures and their autonomy in expressing opinions and taking action
- **State** – the role of the state in integrating and sustaining adolescent participation in governance and ensuring subsidiarity in planning, with the devolution of decision-making power
- **Participation** – the interface between the agency of children and governance structures that enable the meaningful engagement of adolescents with adult institutions
- **Inclusion** – the involvement of the already marginalized in participation process by those who are socially, culturally and economically stronger
- **Resolutions** – the structures that determine the nature of adolescents and young people's ability to exercise agency and influence decisions and resolutions

The **analysis** was structured around eight dimensions, the results of which are briefly presented below.

<sup>1</sup> A *panchayat* is a council in the Indian government administrative system. A *gram panchayat* is a village council.

### Existing structures and processes for adolescent participation

In Bhopal, **Madhya Pradesh**, the community-based children's groups and child protection committees created by the Safe City Initiative (SCI) to strengthen the agency of children and build an environment for their participation have served their purpose well. Adolescents have largely worked with officials and elected representatives at local and state levels. Stronger provisions for devolution and child-friendly governance can enhance the impact of the SCI in terms of sustained adolescent interactions with local governance. In **Maharashtra**, exemplary factors that have strengthened the sustenance of the child-friendly *panchayats* include the existence of legal and policy frameworks for empowering adolescents and a pool of experiences from earlier initiatives, like the adolescent empowerment initiative Deepshikha. In **Nepal**, the history of child clubs and *bal bheelas* has provided a strong base for launching the Child-Friendly Local Governance programme. However, there is a need for continued investment in the capacities of the State as well as the local institutions and agencies involved in implementation at various levels of governance and across sectors. In **Bhutan**, a contained process of engagement with diverse youth groups, including marginalized groups, was undertaken by UNICEF in partnership with the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy. There has been a history of Democracy Clubs and a Children's Parliament in Bhutan, although these have now largely been suspended. The re-invigoration and sustenance of these and similar structures, and the involvement of adolescent and youth collectives in policy processes, are vital for their broader representation and for ensuring that they have a voice in

national policy cycles. The Young Bhutan Network and the youth networks listed in UNICEF's recently launched Volunteer Management Information System (VMIS) have the potential to occupy the space of participatory policy and planning.

### State buy-in and accountability

For the SCI in **Madhya Pradesh**, sustained advocacy by UNICEF at the city level in Bhopal has resulted in support to expand the initiative to other cities in the state. This will require strategic thinking to ensure that the SCI's core principles are upheld in the face of the current centralized schemes of urban development, which requires more of a focus on serving the most marginalized. In **Maharashtra**, the State Policy for Children highlights the need to invest in building the capacity of *gram panchayats* to facilitate the participation of adolescents and young people. However, the use of the mandatory 35% of the budget for social development and women and child development is yet to be realized. In **Nepal**, the Child-Friendly Local Governance system runs parallel with Nepal's continually evolving federal system. However, federalization, and the subsequent changes in governance structures, has affected the implementation of CFLG, requiring the National Strategy 2011 to be reviewed with a renewed focus. Child protection is the focal point of state policy in **Bhutan**. The participation of young people, as provided for in legislative and policy mandates, has vast potential for further translation to effective action.

### Adolescent representation

The SCI in Bhopal, **Madhya Pradesh**, has proved, once again, that collectivization through children's clubs and their federation is crucial for children from

In Nepal, the history of child clubs and *bal bheelas* has provided a strong base for launching the Child-Friendly Local Governance programme. However, there is a need for continued investment in the capacities of the State as well as the local institutions and agencies involved in implementation at various levels of governance and across sectors.

A strategy for expansion, therefore, has to put in place structures that strengthen participatory mechanisms and engage with dissenting opinions, along with more training and capacity building.

marginalized communities to access their entitlements, with the more articulate among them taking leading roles. It is promising that observers are noting the gradual emergence of wider representation. This model also highlights the importance of anchoring adolescent participation in local governance structures. In **Maharashtra**, the long history of adolescent participation in rural areas underscores this lesson, where graduates from Deepshikha and the *bal panchayats* are now playing a major role in the ongoing democratization of representation. In **Nepal**, there is considerable experience with child clubs making collective decisions. However, more clarity is required in relation to the systems in place for decision makers to be accountable to the child club members. This is critical for the planned national coverage of CFLG, which will involve thousands of children in over 700 local government constituencies. In **Bhutan**, the relatively recent transition from a hereditary monarchy to a democratic constitutional monarchy has impacted on the representation of young people. There is an emerging shift in focus from young people being viewed as 'beneficiaries' to being considered 'rights holders', which needs to be further enhanced.

### Strategies for expansion

The Government of **Madhya Pradesh** is expanding the SCI to five more cities in the state. Its success will depend on the government's commitment to guarantee investment and devolve control over finances and other responsibilities to the lowest tiers of urban governance, as well as the extent

to which UNICEF's engagement remains as intensive as earlier. Although the policies of **Maharashtra** are aligned with the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment (1993) to the Constitution of India, which made the Panchayati Raj system a part of the Indian Constitution,<sup>2</sup> the state has yet to devolve rights and responsibilities to the *panchayats* in full measure, as has been done in other states. A strategy for expansion, therefore, has to put in place structures that strengthen participatory mechanisms and engage with dissenting opinions, along with more training and capacity building. The participation of adolescents and young people in **Nepal** is the strongest among the four case studies, with legal and administrative sanctions in place and such participation being valued by decision makers for its relevance. Child club graduates have been active in campaigning for the rights of children at multiple levels. However, there is a residual overreach of the central government in Nepal. In **Bhutan**, there is significant potential for including the participation of adolescents and young people in the expansion of local governance. However, the lack of a legislative or policy mandate to ensure that this is followed is likely to result in over-reliance on individual sympathetic government functionaries.

### Exclusion and inequity

Most of the stakeholders in Bhopal, **Madhya Pradesh** did not mention exclusion and inequity as issues of concern, except for reference to the de-notified tribes. However, it was clear that adolescents and young people who have pressing economic needs or have been historically discriminated against, such

2 This amendment recognises *panchayats* as units of rural local self-government in India. It gives them a constitutional basis and position. It provides them with certain functional mandates and gives them a significant degree of autonomy for self-reliance and self-sufficiency through fiscal transfers, taxation powers and tax assignments.

as slum-dwellers, de-notified groups, girls, children from minority groups, and working children, found it challenging to participate in decision-making processes. In **Maharashtra**, there have been reports of violence against those belonging to so-called 'lower castes' and tribal children in schools in the form of corporal punishment, bullying and verbal abuse.<sup>3</sup> The same is true for children with disabilities and special needs. In **Nepal**, the most vulnerable children are supported by CSOs in several locations. However, their presence in the CFLG process needs to be strengthened. Most marginalized children from migrant communities, children affected by disasters, children belonging to gender and sexual minorities, and refugee children face difficulties in forming a constituency to be addressed. In **Bhutan**, there are reports of physical, emotional, and sexual violence against children and discrimination against young people with disabilities and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI), with mental health as a cross-cutting issue. However, these issues were not widely discussed, because of their sensitivity and the stigma associated with speaking openly on these issues.

### Role of civil society organizations

Across all case studies, CSOs have played a major role in encouraging the formation of children's groups strengthening capacities, and advocating for spaces for the participation of adolescents and young people. There was clear evolution from former approaches of 'doing something for children' to advancing children's protagonism and their participation in governance. CSOs have

supported children and their communities to make good use of the opportunities that opened up in each programme, especially in India and Nepal, where there has been a long history of their engagement. This has resulted in the vibrant response of adolescents to child-friendly initiatives. However, in some cases, their role appears to diminish by design after the pilot phase, and this seems to have adversely affected adolescent participation, especially as the plans for expansion are being developed. In most cases, there is a further limitation that CSOs have not been able to fully apply child rights-based participation to traditional child protection roles.

### Role of UNICEF

UNICEF **Madhya Pradesh**, India has paid close attention to the voices of children, including those in informal settlements in Bhopal, creating opportunities for adolescents and young people to speak directly to decision makers, integrating participation into addressing protection and civic issues, providing key training inputs, and leveraging state support at all levels of governance through consistent advocacy. In **Maharashtra**, the provision of technical support and policy development for the child-friendly *panchayats* by UNICEF Maharashtra's Social Policy division has been equally important. In **Nepal**, the role of UNICEF in conceptualizing, piloting and mainstreaming child-friendly local governance has been acknowledged as outstanding. In **Bhutan**, the National Youth Policy review process, led by the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, has received significant support from UNICEF. However, UNICEF recognizes that funding challenges have slowed

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3 Singh, Chandrika, and Anuradha Nair, *Child Responsive Budgeting for Maharashtra – A Way Forward*, June 2021 (unpublished submission to the Government of Maharashtra).

Although financial inputs from UNICEF, which were critical at inception, may not be essential now due to increased state buy-in, UNICEF's presence is still seen as crucial for maintaining rigorous processes, capacity building, and networking and advocacy purposes.

the logical progression of the various initiatives. Although financial inputs from UNICEF, which were critical at inception, may not be essential now due to increased state buy-in, UNICEF's presence is still seen as crucial for maintaining rigorous processes, capacity building, and networking and advocacy purposes.

### Enhancing participation

In Bhopal, **Madhya Pradesh**, adolescents felt that their participation had improved the work of the SCI by leveraging their organized strength to assist state agencies to deliver services. The adolescents involved in the initiative have been able to exert influence and claim their rights, both through local governance and bureaucratic structures. The **Maharashtra** Child-Friendly Local Governance initiative demonstrates that the greater the opportunities provided to adolescents to participate, the more their capacity has developed to organize and contribute to development planning. As the initiative spreads to the whole of Maharashtra, the opportunities will be even greater. In **Nepal**, UNICEF proposes to further support adolescents and young people to engage with governments and civil society and empower them to develop and advocate for policies in the unfolding Child-Friendly Local Governance programme. In **Bhutan**, while UNICEF has attempted to enhance youth participation through the review of the National Youth Policy 2011, the scale can be multiplied through structures such as the formerly active Democracy Clubs. In all cases, it is evident that the initiatives taken to enhance participation have achieved remarkable success, however, scaling them up will require significant financial and technical support.

The **key lessons** that have emerged from this study are:

- **Lesson 1.** Wherever opportunities have been offered to adolescents to participate in the processes of governance, the expression of their agency and protagonism has been remarkable, their engagement with governance invigorating, and, in some cases, the development outcomes transformative.
- **Lesson 2.** This adolescent energy has been greatly facilitated by efforts to inform, train, build capacity, and organize by CSOs, trainers, frontline workers and local governments, supported by UNICEF.
- **Lesson 3.** Advocacy, policy guidance and capacity building by UNICEF at all levels of government has paved the way for adolescents to collectively present their views and ask for accountability.
- **Lesson 4.** The enthusiastic participation by adolescents has also had positive impacts on their families, elders, communities, CSO workers, government functionaries and elected representatives, at personal and inter-personal levels.

**Good practices** for structures and processes that may be emulated for scaling-up are:

- **Practice 1.** The integration of adolescent participation into child protection, social protection and governance efforts through mapping, research, campaigns, and policy reviews, as well as by building community awareness and alliances in all available spaces by adolescents organized at multiple levels of governance, strengthens their empowerment.
- **Practice 2.** Accessible and simple modules for sharing information,



principles, and good practices, when they are widely disseminated through training of trainers and peer learning, serve to build capacities, organize groups, and provide pathways for participation and engagement by adolescent groups.

- **Practice 3.** A holistic approach that connects children’s well-being and development to the concerns of their families and communities about issues of livelihood, shelter, citizenship, safety, welfare, education, health, transport, and all other social and civic services empowers all sections of society.
- **Practice 4.** Engaging with all levels of government to persuade officials, functionaries and agencies of the importance of adolescent participation and to build their capacities to uphold children’s rights provides opportunities for decision makers to engage with children and to be accountable to them.
- **Practice 5.** As highlighted in the ADAP ROSA model for participatory institutions, building the capacities of institutions in the processes and elements specified equips them and makes them conducive to community and adolescent-engaged planning and provision.
- **Practice 6.** It is important to capitalize, strengthen and leverage the role of local governance structures (rural and urban) in promoting and advancing adolescent participation, through training, exposure visits and model building.

Detailed **recommendations** have been offered for each case study and are summarized broadly for the different stakeholders as follows:

- **Recommendation 1. Adolescent groups** must inform themselves; organize democratically within;

build linkages; include members of vulnerable and marginalized communities as agents and partners; carve out structures for debate and advocacy; and learn to use disasters as an opportunity to influence policy and governance.

- **Recommendation 2. Civil society organizations** should support adolescent groups to construct processes for greater participation; help them to build capacities and alliances; and share and nurture collective learning, visioning and action. They also need to democratize digital technology for participation, as this is creating another inequity in relation to participation and voice in governance.
- **Recommendation 3. Central/federal governments** must uphold international and national commitments to adolescent participation; ensure policy commitments to realizing participation rights; provide public institutions with support for wider inclusion and monitoring; implement legal instruments for the devolution of governance to local levels and uphold the principle of subsidiarity; and ensure that disaster mitigation measures are securely in place at the national level. In addition, adequate resources must be allocated at the appropriate levels to realize these agendas.
- **Recommendation 4. Provincial governments** and their partner institutions have to strengthen the understanding, empathy and capacity of their functionaries to assist child-friendly participation processes and structures; suitably recognize and reward their frontline workers; evolve laws, guidelines and safeguards for promoting adolescent participation in governance; provide for devolution to the lowest tiers of governance; and

**Central/federal governments must uphold international and national commitments to adolescent participation; ensure policy commitments to realizing participation rights; provide public institutions with support for wider inclusion and monitoring; implement legal instruments for the devolution of governance to local levels and uphold the principle of subsidiarity.**

UNICEF should celebrate what has been achieved and continue to strengthen the ability of its thematic sectors to embed informed adolescent participation in policies, programming, technical assistance and policy advocacy by strengthening the capacities of governments and stakeholders, including communities, for enhancing adolescent participation in decision making.

sustain a continuous process of evaluation and review.

- **Recommendation 5. Local governments** need to demand the devolution of power and finances; build more structures in which adolescents can participate; and build convergence in their procedures and policies so that the participatory expression of the needs of adolescents and their communities can be met in the shortest time possible. In addition, local governments should develop indicators and processes for social/children's monitoring and the continued participation of adolescents and young people in creating communities that are inclusive.
- **Recommendation 6. UNICEF** should celebrate what has been achieved and continue to strengthen the ability of its thematic sectors to embed informed adolescent participation in policies, programming, technical assistance and policy advocacy by strengthening the capacities of governments and stakeholders,

including communities, for enhancing adolescent participation in decision making.

- **Recommendation 7. UNICEF** must embed adolescent participation as a critical strategy across all programme sectors, and plan systematic staff capacity building regimes for integrating adolescent participation across sectors.
- **Recommendation 8. UNICEF** must also develop operational guidelines, and support their implementation, for strengthening institutional capacities, with specific guidance on adolescent participation in policy processes, planning, implementation, information provision, budgeting, review and evaluation, institutional governance, and capacity building regimes based on ADAP ROSA's regional framework for institutional strengthening for participation. The 'Claiming Citizenship' ASPIRE framework (agency, state, participation, inclusion and resolutions) may be included as the lens that governs the implementation of the operational guidelines.



- **Recommendation 9. UNICEF** must invest in strengthening local governance, both urban and rural, and through these structures develop models for adolescent and youth participation.
- **Recommendation 10. UNICEF** must create platforms for adolescent and youth participation, including policy making and monitoring, and invest in developing resources for building the capacities of adolescent and youth groups.
- **Recommendation 11. UNICEF** should strengthen the capacities of social workers, health workers, community workers, frontline workers, and decision makers in health, education, child protection, water and sanitation, climate change and social protection to enable adolescent participation. Investing in enhancing the potential of youth service officers, youth workers (a professional category involved in youth empowerment), and ministries holding portfolios and liaising for youth, children and women's issues will ensure valuable and long-term impact.

- **Recommendation 12. UNICEF** must continue to invest in systematic and intentional initiatives to build the agency of adolescents to be informed and capacitated participants in governance processes. The four UNICEF supported initiatives here, which need to be sustained, also provide examples of policies and practices to be adopted after suitable modification.

This is a historic moment for UNICEF to strengthen the participation pillar across sectoral areas. UNICEF must construct a long-term strategy to financially and technically support initiatives by adolescent groups to learn, mobilize, include, ally, and become active agents for change. We hope that the findings of this study and the recommendations emerging from this report will help other countries and initiatives in ROSA's jurisdiction to further rationalize investment in participatory structures for adolescents, including attendant capacity building, systems strengthening, and policy formulation.

**This is a historic moment for UNICEF to strengthen the participation pillar across sectoral areas. UNICEF must construct a long-term strategy to financially and technically support initiatives by adolescent groups to learn, mobilize, include, ally, and become active agents for change.**



सवालहरू

समूह-६

- म श्रम (६) →
- न दुव्यवहार (१)
- (जातिय, लैङ्गिक) (२)
- खेवाह (२) → II
- स्थ सेवामा पहुँचमा कमी (३) → III
- बालबालिकाहरू समुदायमा जाह्रो (१)
- मा उचित बातावरण (३) → III

- हिमेकि मुलुकमा विदेशीने प्रवृत्ति मौसमि वसाइ (२)
- हाउ प्रथा x
- कमलरी प्रथा (२)
- गेलु हिंसा (१) →
- वि (२)
- शिक्षक
- बाल

समूह-१-६

- १- पुर्गीरन्द
- २- हिमा वि
- ३- अग्र ल



# 1

# Institutionalizing Adolescent Participation in Governance

## Background

Adolescence is an extraordinary developmental stage in the lives of young people.<sup>4</sup> As they navigate the world of children as well as adults, they begin to interact with the world in new ways – taking chances, learning skills and experiencing unfamiliar emotions. It is a critical period of identity formation, during which they venture beyond their families to form powerful connections with their peers. They search for ways to stand out and belong, to find their place in society and make a difference in their world.

The adolescents of South Asia – which make up nearly 350 million people<sup>5</sup> – face the brunt of social, political and economic disparities. Poverty and deprivation, gender-based oppression and other forms of discrimination intersect with climate change, economic upheaval, conflict and displacement to threaten their well-being. Adolescents are economically and socially vulnerable with, for example, youth unemployment rates consistently higher than general unemployment rates and as a unique cohort among whom AIDS-related deaths are not decreasing.

In 1989, global leaders made an historic commitment to the world's children with the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This gave children the fundamental right to be heard, to influence decisions, and to participate in issues that affect their lives. These rights mean the right to 'agency' and to be 'protagonists'; to be informed of policy and programme decisions that affect them and their communities; and to engage and participate in making those decisions. Recognition of these rights entails recognizing their views and identity and also strengthens the accountability of all duty bearers mandated to provide care and protection to adolescents.

Participation is a powerful democratic right, and it also ensures more responsive planning. As young people's capacity for empathy, self-confidence, connection and critical thinking increases, so does their perception of citizenship and sense of being an actor in governance, as they receive services as well as contribute to society. However, this right – the right to participate in governance – is the least respected of their rights the world over.<sup>6</sup>



4 This study refers to the age group 10–19 as adolescents and 20–24 as youth.

5 UNICEF, 'Adolescents Overview', UNICEF, October 2019, <<https://data.unicef.org/topic/adolescents/overview/>>, accessed 2 November 2021.

6 UNICEF, 'Adolescent Development and Participation', UNICEF, undated, <[www.unicef.org/adolescence](http://www.unicef.org/adolescence)>, accessed 8 October 2021.

While good practices for children's and adolescent's participation do exist, they are far from being the norm: "Despite constituting a large young demographic, adolescents in South Asia are still largely invisible and voiceless. They have limited or no access to information and little say in decisions affecting their lives."

While good practices for children's and adolescent's participation do exist, they are far from being the norm: "Despite constituting a large young demographic, adolescents in South Asia are still largely invisible and voiceless. They have limited or no access to information and little say in decisions affecting their lives!"<sup>7</sup> A large proportion of adolescents and youth are left out of major decisions, especially in the hierarchical societies typical of many cultures in South Asia. Cultures of obedience, conformity and an overall intolerance of dissent-based participation are prevalent, limiting adolescent participation in all arenas. This culture of exclusion, especially in governance, affects marginalized groups the most, who are the least buffered from unresponsive policy decisions.

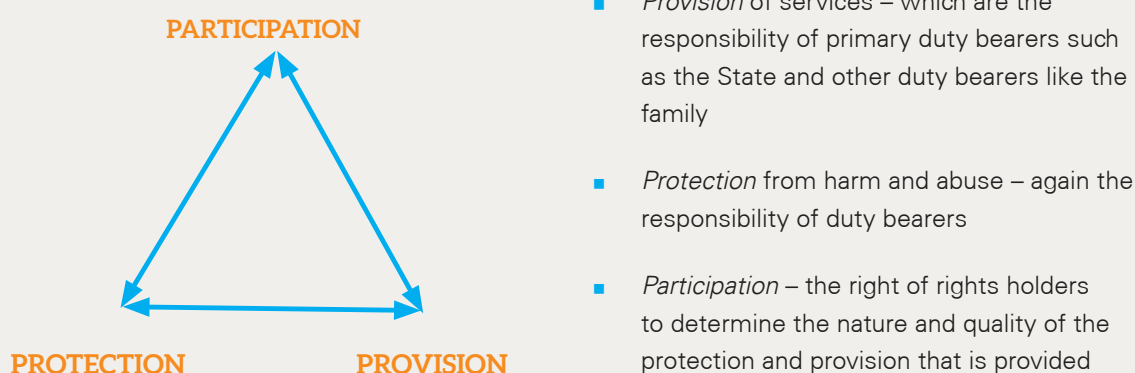
### Principles of participation by children

Eglantine Jebb, founder of Save the Children, drafted the historic Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which was adopted by the League of Nations in

1924. This declaration affirmed, for the first time, the rights specific to children. Twenty-two years later, in 1946, the United Nations (UN) created an expanded version, which was eventually adopted in 1959 as the Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

In addition to this declaration, over the years, several principles rooted in international law have influenced child and adolescent participation in governance. The International Bill of Human Rights emerged out of the horrors of World War II, which led to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and, later, the Covenant on Economic and Social Rights and the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both in 1966. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the backbone of all of UNICEF's work, was adopted 33 years later in 1989. UNICEF is guided by the various interpretations of the Articles in the UNCRC provided in the General Comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) beginning from 2001.

Figure 1: Three 'Ps' of rights: Provision, protection and participation



7 UNICEF, 'Adolescents in South Asia', UNICEF ROSA, undated, <[www.unicef.org/rosa/what-we-do/adolescents](http://www.unicef.org/rosa/what-we-do/adolescents)>, accessed 8 October 2021.

Articles 12–17 of the UNCRC enshrine the right of all children, including adolescents, to participate in decisions that affect their lives, to have access to relevant information, and to a conscience and religion. Article 15 recognizes the rights of the child to freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly. Article 3 mandates that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration and Article 6 speaks of a child’s inherent right to life.

There are three main aspects to the concept of rights:<sup>8</sup>

These three aspects – or three P’s, as they are sometimes called – are inseparable and indivisible. However, *provision* and *protection*, which are what most programmes related to children are focused on, cannot be said to fulfil children’s rights if their right to *participation* in determining the quality and nature of provision and protection have not been given due respect. Hence, the right to participation or self-determination is the core principle in the rights discourse. It is through this rights-based programming that civil society strives to realize all other rights.<sup>9</sup> According to Richard Farson, “The issue of self-determination is at the heart of children’s liberation. It is, in fact, the only issue, a definition of the entire concept.”<sup>10</sup>

The UNICEF guidance document *Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement*<sup>11</sup> forms a framework for the Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP)

section’s work. It contains several of the key principles guiding this study. These Guidelines clarify in detail a theory of change and principles for adolescent participation in governance, including modes of participation. While it has scope for modification and enhancement, it is a comprehensive document that lays down the principles and methods, including strategies, interventions, and tools, for adolescent participation, including in governance.

The main sources for the **foundations** of the principles (detailed in **Annexure C**) are:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989
- General Comment 12 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, on the right of the child to be heard, 2009
- General Comment 20 of the Committee of the Rights of the Child, on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence, 2016
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006
- United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966
- International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights, 1966
- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2015 (SDGs)

However, *provision and protection*, which are what most programmes related to children are focused on, cannot be said to fulfil children’s rights if their right to *participation* in determining the quality and nature of provision and protection have not been given due respect.

8 UNICEF refers to four categories: right to survival, right to protection, right to development and right to participation.

9 Reddy, Nandana, and Kavita Ratna, *Introduction to Child Rights Programming*, Dhruva, The Concerned for Working Children, Bangalore, India, 2019.

10 Farson, Richard, ‘Birthrights’, in Archard, David, *Children: Rights and Childhood*, Routledge, London, 1974.

11 UNICEF, *Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement*, UNICEF, July 2020, <[www.unicef.org/documents/engaged-and-heard-guidelines-adolescent-participation-and-civic-engagement](http://www.unicef.org/documents/engaged-and-heard-guidelines-adolescent-participation-and-civic-engagement)>, accessed 8 October 2021.

- UNICEF Programme Guidance for the Second Decade, 2018
- UNICEF Strategy Document 2018–2021
- UNICEF guidance document *Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement*, 2020

Programmes that facilitate adolescent capacities of engagement and critical thinking are fundamental and a precursor to adolescent participation and engagement in governance. The key **principles** underlying adolescent participation in governance and civic engagement that are sourced from these documents, and the commitments made by the international community over several decades, are listed in Box 1.

### Box 1: Key principles underlying adolescent participation in governance

- Best interests of the child
- Non-discrimination
- Protection and care within participation
- Right to participate in decisions that affect their lives
- Right to life
- Right to freedom of expression
- Right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly
- Right to development and respect for evolving capacities
- Right to be heard, express views freely and to participate in matters of concern to adolescents
- Right to representation
- Principle of subsidiarity – social and political issues should be dealt with at the most immediate (or local) level that is consistent with their resolution.





## UNICEF initiatives for adolescent participation

UNICEF's Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) covers eight countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Its ADAP section provides technical and advocacy input to develop capacities and promote adolescent participation across sectors within UNICEF and in governments. ADAP ROSA notes the need to recognize adolescents' "evolving needs and developing capacities for autonomy and expression"<sup>12</sup> and for "strategies to be designed, and opportunities to be provided for their full engagement in their communities and nations, including in decisions at all levels and in all spheres that affect their lives."<sup>13</sup>

ADAP ROSA's learning about adolescent engagement and participation in the 2015–2020 period was rooted in the IKEA-funded project 'Improving Adolescent Lives' in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. Critical lessons learnt at the time include the importance of placing adolescent empowerment and participation at the centre of cross-sectoral programming, while strengthening adolescent agency and protagonism, especially of girls, considering prevailing gender inequities within communities. Also important is the linking of adolescent groups to local government planning processes, as well as linking local processes to national planning in health, education, child protection, social protection and other sectors.

UNICEF intends to mainstream meaningful adolescent engagement and participation as a principle and a process across the five goal areas of education, health, child protection, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and climate change, and social protection, with key thematic strategies, including on mental health, employability, skills, digital education and climate change, in its new 2022–2025 strategic plan. UNICEF's commitment to reimagining programming *with* and *for* children provides exciting opportunities for adolescent participation in all of its sectors. Evidence and data sit at the centre of this reimagining, but there is a paucity of documentation reflecting adolescents' aspirations, particularly the aspirations of the most marginalized, that focuses on the critical link between policy and adolescent well-being and that puts adolescents at the centre of enquiry and planning.<sup>14</sup> ADAP ROSA took note of the fact that learning from country initiatives linking adolescent empowerment processes to governance at all levels was required to create a better understanding of the nuances and complexities of such initiatives. Accordingly, UNICEF ROSA partnered with Concerned for Working Children (CWC)<sup>15</sup> for the present study to strengthen regional understanding of intentional adolescent participation in governance practices, including understanding the complex and nuanced factors that govern policy- and systems-supported participation practices including implications for evidence-based policy formulation.

**UNICEF intends to mainstream meaningful adolescent engagement and participation as a principle and a process across the five goal areas of education, health, child protection, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and climate change, and social protection.**

12 UNICEF ROSA, *South Asia Approach Paper for Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) Section: Adolescent-Centric Programming and ADAP*, Draft Paper, UNICEF, 30 November 2020.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 CWC is a not-for-profit, secular, democratic development organization based in India with four decades of experience working directly with children, youth, women, frontline workers, community members and policymakers and with a focus on adolescent-centric and adolescent-engaged planning. It is a global actor in the arena of children's rights (see more at [www.concernedforworkingchildren.org](http://www.concernedforworkingchildren.org)).

## Study components

This study consisted of the following components:

- A scoping study for the selected countries and case studies, based on the initial information provided by countries
- Secondary analysis of government policies, structures and mechanisms in selected countries for anchoring adolescent participation in governance
- Documentation of case studies with in-depth analysis of the quality and level of adolescent participation, including engagement with government as well as sustainability and replicability
- Recommendations for operationalizing and mainstreaming adolescent participation in UNICEF's programmes, in collaboration with civil society organizations (CSOs) and governments

This report presents the case studies and recommendations, drawing on the scoping study and secondary analysis. It contains the systematic documentation and analysis of four initiatives on mainstreaming adolescent participation in governance in different national and sub-national contexts, with a focus on the most marginalized adolescents, socially, economically, politically and ecologically. It includes recommendations for sustaining investment in systems that strengthen adolescent participation in governance, including adolescent networks and public sector mechanisms.

These components are detailed in the following sub-sections.

### Scoping study

For the scoping study, we reviewed both global and regional literature

related to UNICEF's commitment to, and programmes on, adolescent participation in governance, with a particular focus on the ADAP programme in UNICEF ROSA (see **Annexure D**). The tools used by UNICEF to design and implement measurable, evidence-based, equity-oriented and gender-responsive cross-sectoral adolescent programmes, aligned with global and regional commitments, were examined. Knowledge management reports on the concluded UNICEF-IKEA Foundation programme 'Improving Adolescent lives in South Asia', which supported adolescent empowerment programmes in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, as well as country-led initiatives in Nepal and Bangladesh, were of special relevance.

The scoping study was greatly aided by the preliminary information received by UNICEF on existing adolescent participation in governance mechanisms in the four selected case study locations and the information received from UNICEF country offices in response to the form sent out by UNICEF ROSA for the preliminary top-line mapping of the ecosystem of adolescent participation in governance in countries covered by ROSA. Specific definitions (see **Annexure E**) were finalized, as were the assumptions (see **Box 2**).

In the scoping study, a keen understanding emerged of the constituency, the context unique to each local governance system, the practice of participatory democracy, and the role of CSOs and their relationship with UNICEF. For discussions with adolescents, specially designed tools were used (**Annexure F**). Discussions with other stakeholders were based on semi-structured open-ended questionnaires (**Annexure G**). Follow-up discussions were conducted when needed.

It contains the systematic documentation and analysis of four initiatives on mainstreaming adolescent participation in governance in different national and sub-national contexts, with a focus on the most marginalized adolescents, socially, economically, politically and ecologically.



## Secondary analysis of policies, structures and mechanisms for adolescent participation

To set the framework for the scoping study, intensive discussions were held with the ADAP team at ROSA and UNICEF's national teams in the India, Bhutan and Nepal country offices. This helped the CWC study team to familiarize itself with the legal and policy landscape related to the selected programmes, their evolution and their present status. The nature of local government, status of democracy and devolution, and engagement of stakeholders with the principles of adolescent participation in governance at each location were also discussed.

Secondary research was also undertaken on the government policies, laws and mechanisms in the selected countries that anchor adolescent participation in governance, as well as desk-based research and a document review of significant historical processes related to adolescent participation in governance. This included a scan of relevant international conventions and instruments and preliminary research on the political, economic, socio-cultural, and geographical environment in which the selected case studies are located, as well as if there is potential to expand their scope and reach.

## Documentation of the four case studies

Informed by the preliminary mapping conducted by ADAP and the

recommended case studies provided, with due consideration of geographical diversity, the nature of adolescent participation, structures of governance and the scale of the programmes, the following four examples, as suggested by UNICEF ROSA, were selected for in-depth documentation.

- **Safe City Initiative (SCI) in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India:** This initiative is embedded in child protection interventions and is undertaken in conjunction with local CSOs, while being rooted in an urban governance framework.
- **Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG Initiative), Maharashtra, India:** This project is embedded in social policy interventions and set in a rural governance framework. It is the main component of UNICEF Maharashtra's partnership with the Government of Maharashtra for establishing and implementing child-friendly *panchayats*.<sup>16</sup>
- **Child-Friendly Local Governance Initiative (CFLG), Nepal:** This national initiative, formerly a flagship programme of UNICEF, has close to two decades of history and is presently poised for nationwide coverage.
- **Review of the National Youth Policy, Bhutan:** As a new democracy and a constitutional monarchy, the participation of Bhutan's youth and adolescents in framing a new National Youth Policy 2020 through the report *Youth Voices: Youth Matters*<sup>17</sup> is a harbinger of opportunities for the enhanced participation of adolescents and youth.

Secondary research was also undertaken on the government policies, laws and mechanisms in the selected countries that anchor adolescent participation in governance, as well as desk-based research and a document review of significant historical processes related to adolescent participation in governance.

<sup>16</sup> A *panchayat* is a village-level elected body for governance in India.

<sup>17</sup> BCMD, *Youth Voices: Youth Matters Report*, Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, Thimphu, 30 December 2020, <[www.bcnd.bt/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Youth-Voices\\_-Youth-matters-BCMD-Final-Design-layout.pdf](http://www.bcnd.bt/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Youth-Voices_-Youth-matters-BCMD-Final-Design-layout.pdf)>, accessed 8 October 2021.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the case study, and drawing on the scoping study and literature review, detailed recommendations are made for each case study.

## Approach

### Guiding principles

This study adheres to all of the principles enunciated by ADAP ROSA, including those in *Engaged and Heard! Programme Guidance for the Second Decade*<sup>18</sup>, and other documents. The following sets of **principles**, among others, are reflected in UNICEF's commitment to the realization of adolescent rights, as articulated in its strategic documents, guidelines, and guiding documents:

- Rights-based approach to ensure participation (Article 12 of UNCRC)
- Norm-setting to enhance and support participation of adolescents
- Respect and support from adults
- Transparency and access to information
- Accountability and feedback
- Voluntariness
- Adolescent decision-making based on confidence, self-worth and self-esteem

Equitable and inclusive participation across different axes of marginalization.<sup>19</sup>

The principles and the practices in relation to each of these have been reviewed in the documentation of the case studies, both in terms of the principles of children's participation, as well as UNICEF's commitment to the meaningful participation of children.

### Critical aspects to be examined

During the consultations and literature review, some critical aspects of building capacities and structures for adolescent participation in governance, which are both formal as well as informal, were identified to be examined. These include:

- Specific focus on vulnerable adolescents and those requiring attention, including their empowerment and agency
- Interaction between the rights of adolescents and responsibilities and duties of adults
- Laws and policies enabling or disabling adolescent participation in governance
- Accountability of local, national and federal structures in enabling participation
- (Continuing) role of UNICEF

Effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on projects, issues, functions, and structures etc.

18 UNICEF, *Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement*, 2020.

19 The ADAP section focuses on axes of marginalization such as disability, gender, and age, ethnicity and religion, and social status, as well as other vulnerabilities.

## Box 2: Key assumptions related to this study

- UNICEF ROSA is committed to the principles of participation and to enhancing adolescent participation in governance in a sustainable manner with required technical as well as resource inputs.
- UNICEF ROSA and ADAP are committed to implementing, across UNICEF's programming in the five goal areas, the five strategies for adolescent participation and civic engagement, as laid out in the *Engaged and Heard!* guidance document.
- UNICEF ROSA and ADAP are committed to building the structures of support for adolescents wishing to exercise their agency and impact on governance, and to supporting and facilitating CSOs working with adolescents.
- UNICEF's country and state teams, including all sectoral platforms in health, education, child protection, social protection, WASH, climate change and so forth, are ready to acknowledge and engage with adolescent participation in governance in their contexts, so as to build capacities for adolescent participation, as relevant to each sector.
- The countries and states identified for this study are prepared to take part in this project and to give serious consideration to its outcomes.

### ASPIRE framework

Five themes emerged while conducting the preliminary review of the secondary literature – agency, state, participation, inclusion, and resolutions (ASPIRE) – which provide the framework in which the findings of the case study are presented:

- **Agency:** Agency is defined as the evolving capacity and confidence of adolescents to engage with decision makers and structures and their autonomy in expressing opinions and taking action: Did they drive, initiate or manage projects? Did they make choices? What was the impact of other actors on their agency?
- **State:** The mandated role of the state is to integrate and sustain adolescent participation in governance and ensure subsidiarity in planning, with the devolution of decision-making power to the lowest possible tier of government: How are States able and willing to integrate adolescent participation in governance? How are current economic forces that transfer welfare functions from state to non-state actors influencing the ability and willingness of States to invest in their mandate for meaningful adolescent and community participation in governance structures?
- **Participation:** Participation is the interface between the agency of children and governance structures: What are the factors that enable meaningful engagement between adult institutions and adolescents and adolescent groups? What are the boundaries and limits imposed on adolescent participation (direct and indirect; individual and collective; local and national) by state actors, adults, and hierarchical structures? What are the opportunities for adolescents to represent themselves in order to question and change those boundaries?
- **Inclusion:** Within adolescent groups there are those individuals who are socially, culturally and economically stronger and likely to be more articulate, thereby excluding the already marginalized from participation processes: What actions were taken to promote inclusion, particularly in relation to viewing and working with the most marginalized groups as agents and partners?

**Resolutions:** Organizational structures determine the nature of adolescents and young people's ability to exercise agency and influence resolutions and decisions. At the same time, those charged with promoting agency are also those who set limits and make the rules on translating the exercise of agency to enact resolutions and decisions: In such a context how are adolescents able to influence resolutions and decisions?

### Areas of enquiry

After the preliminary conversations and interviews conducted for the scoping study, an exhaustive list of areas of enquiry was developed to assess the existing policies and mechanisms for participation, as relevant to each of the case studies identified. These are listed in **Annexure A**. To link these areas of enquiry with the terms of reference and deliverables, while recognizing the ground realities, the following methodology was agreed upon between CWC and UNICEF:

Confirmation of UNICEF ROSA's selection of case studies in the three countries for documentation through the initial mapping exercise. The selection process involved a review of the mapping outcomes by ADAP ROSA and CWC.

- Preparation of a brief indicative scoping study, in close consultation with advisors and the country offices in the four study areas in the three countries, covering the method of enquiry, secondary review of policies, practices and knowledge management documents, and development of tools of engagement.
- Analysis of the international and national legal and policy frameworks that guide decisions and the implementation of programmes related to adolescent participation in governance.

- Online consultations with relevant ministries/departments, UNICEF sectors, partners and CSOs, and relevant frontline workers on key areas of enquiry (see **Annexure B**).
- Online consultations with active adolescent groups and adolescents engaged in the initiatives studied (see **Annexure B**).
- Online consultations with representatives of all concerned stakeholders such as service providers, members of child protection mechanisms, and members of national/sub-national decision-making structures (see **Annexure B**).

Consolidation of the recommendations for different constituencies, including UNICEF country and state teams and ADAP ROSA.

The risks implicit in this effort were that: (1) perspectives would be restricted to the secondary literature and the limited number of selected respondents available online; (2) expectations would be raised about adolescent participation in governance; (3) the study would be dealing with governance structures already under stress due to COVID-19; (4) the differing perceptions of governance and devolution; (5) conflicting ideologies, priorities and interests within adolescent groups; and (6) differences in perception about adolescent participation among stakeholders.

## Methodology for case studies

### Interviews and online discussions

The CWC team, together with UNICEF staff, identified the key groups and individuals for online discussions (including staff from UNICEF ROSA, UNICEF country offices, CSOs, government officials, state agencies, and adolescents and youth). A structured

questionnaire was developed, as well as a checklist for focus group discussions (FGDs), along the lines of the ASPIRE framework set out above for the adolescent group discussions. Questionnaires were provided to participants in advance when required. The discussions with adolescent groups, CSOs and state officials were conducted online in groups or individually, depending on their availability and the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. These followed a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire method, based on the areas of enquiry developed previously. The tools were modified depending on the context of

the adolescent groups that were part of the exercise (including how many were available to attend the discussions online, the availability of internet services etc.). The broad questions that guided the development of the tool and the ensuing discussions can be found in **Annexure G**.

### Balloon tool

A visual tool ('balloon tool') was also provided to the CSOs for use with adolescent groups (see **Box 3**).

The balloon tool was used for online discussions with two groups of

### Box 3: The balloon tool

A balloon (representing participation) is illustrated with a basket under it carrying children who are included in processes, with other children who are excluded from processes standing on the ground. The basket is tied with pegs to the ground (barriers to participation); there is a fire under the balloon (which improves participation); there are clouds above the balloon (risks faced when participating); and the sun (reason why adolescents are participating) shines above the clouds.

Different groups of adolescents are shown the illustration and asked for their views on the different elements of the illustration. The facilitator from the CSO is present to guide them when necessary to understand the elements and what they signify; how the two groups of children in the illustration were formed; what kinds of difficulties they are facing; and what factors and individuals help them.



adolescents in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. An open-ended, semi-structured online FGD method was used with adolescents in Maharashtra, Nepal and Bhutan, because the recurrence of COVID made it impossible to use the planned tools. These are outlined in **Annexures F and G**.

### Case studies

In the case studies, in-depth reviews of the unique historical, legal and policy ecosystems are included (drawn from the secondary analysis and the interviews and discussions), especially with respect to democracy, government structures and local governance. The

nature and scope of issues taken up by adolescents were of specific interest. We also tried to understand how adolescent constituencies are empowered to know, analyse, and demand their rights and entitlements, for themselves and their communities. The study team explored: How do they work? What are their internal dynamics? How do they address marginalization and representation? The axes of marginalization (gender, class, ethnicity, caste, disability and age) and the involvement of vulnerable and marginalized groups of adolescents in each model were also investigated, as far as possible, given the limitations.



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The impact of dissent and push-backs from the State in environments where there are increasing threats to democracy, and their effect on adolescent participation and their security, were also of concern in this study. Our inquiries included a review of the opportunities for the agency and empowerment of adolescents from marginalized communities in these initiatives. The role of UNICEF and

sustainability of its programmes; their cross-sectoral transactions; and the degree to which they are embedded in government structures/sectoral initiatives were all analysed. COVID-19 and its immediate and long-term impacts on the case studies, particularly in relation to adolescent participation, were also explored.

**The impact of dissent and push-backs from the State in environments where there are increasing threats to democracy, and their effect on adolescent participation and their security, were also of concern in this study.**

#### Box 4: Context for India case studies

Two of the case studies are set in India, one in Madhya Pradesh and the other in Maharashtra. India has a population of almost 1.39 billion, with a median age of 28.4 years; 9.6% of the population are in the stage of early adolescence (10 to 14 years of age) and 10.1% are in late adolescence (14 to 19 years of age). Males marginally outnumber females in this age group – 20.2% compared to 19.3%.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to all of the international commitments applicable to India, the National Child Policy<sup>21</sup> and the National Youth Policy have a direct bearing on both case studies. The first National Youth Policy<sup>22</sup> was announced in 1988 for the age group 15 to 35 years. It sought to socialize youth by instilling in them an awareness and respect for constitutional principles. This was revised in 2003 to change the age group to 13 to 35 years and focused on the need for developing future leaders who would lead the fight against all manner of inequalities. In 2013, the government announced its commitment to safeguard, inform, include, support and empower all children below the age of 18 years in the National Policy for Children. This policy recognizes the right of children to express their views in matters affecting them. The National Youth Policy was revised<sup>23</sup> again in 2014 to define youth as a group between 15 to 29 years and the vision is to empower youth to achieve their full economic and social potential.

20 Worldometer, 'India Population', undated, <[www.worldometers.info/world-population/india-population](http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/india-population)>, accessed 18 August 2021.

21 Ministry of Women and Child Development, *The National Policy for Children, 2013*, Gazette of India, Part I-Sec.1, New Delhi, 2013, <[www.wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/npcenglish08072013\\_0.pdf](http://www.wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/npcenglish08072013_0.pdf)>, accessed 18 August 2021.

22 Mukherjee, Jhumpa, and Shoma Choudhury, 'Revisiting the National Youth Policy', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 45, Issue No. 26–27, Mumbai, 2010, <[www.epw.in/journal/2010/26-27/commentary/revisiting-national-youth-policy.html](http://www.epw.in/journal/2010/26-27/commentary/revisiting-national-youth-policy.html)>, accessed 18 August 2021.

23 Press Information Bureau, *Introduction of National Youth Policy – 2014*, Government of India, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, New Delhi, 2014, <[www.pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=102398](http://www.pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=102398)>, accessed 18 August 2021.



# 2

## Safe City Initiative, Madhya Pradesh, India

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“They [the children] have a clear understanding of the Bhopal Municipal Corporation [...]. For a common citizen it is difficult to understand where to approach. The Safe City Initiative helped children to associate and understand the organization structure, who to interact with and so on; for example, there were no streetlights and there was street harassment due to that - they got in touch with our team, and interacted with the local parshad [councillor], and got a street light installed.”

**KVS Choudhary, IAS**

*Commissioner, Bhopal Municipal Corporation, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021*

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“Many suggestions have been given by you related to infrastructure, related to lack of drinking water in schools, separate toilets for girls and boys, electricity, liquor shops near the school... Do identify these concerns and inform us, and we will definitely take appropriate action.”

**Mallika Nigam,**

*Additional Commissioner, Bhopal Municipal Corporation*

*(in response to children who raised various issues during Bal Samvad [Child Dialogue] 2017)<sup>24</sup>*

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### Introduction

The Safe City Initiative (SCI) is a unique urban example of children’s participation

in governance in India. This initiative, which is based in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, has been active since 2014 and embodies a strategic approach to



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<sup>24</sup> UNICEF Madhya Pradesh, *Bal Samvad*, Video, 2017.

The initiative started with a community-led participatory mapping exercise involving children and youth in eight electoral wards of Bhopal, with the results informing the design of the programme, focusing on systems strengthening and empowering children, adolescents and community members to develop a protective and safe environment for children.

upholding children's right to protection within a rights framework. Children's right to participation has been embedded – intentionally and strategically – in this framework since its inception.

Working in close conjunction with the Government of Madhya Pradesh and CSOs, UNICEF Madhya Pradesh began the SCI as an urban slum-focused initiative aimed at building safe communities for children in response to the high levels of violence against children in the state. It was also an attempt to operationalize child protection services in urban areas, especially given that these services are mostly designed for rural communities. In addition, the initiative emphasized robust community-based protection mechanisms.

The initiative started with a community-led participatory mapping exercise involving children and youth in eight electoral wards of Bhopal, with the results informing the design of the programme, focusing on systems strengthening and empowering children, adolescents and community members to develop a protective and safe environment for children.<sup>25</sup> The programme is now gearing up for expansion into more cities of Madhya Pradesh, steered by the Government of Madhya Pradesh, with technical support from UNICEF Madhya Pradesh. The SCI has tremendous potential to inform and stimulate a 'safe city concept' that is grounded in children's participation in the region.

## Issues faced by children in Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh is the second largest state in India by area and is also home to the largest tribal population (21.1%).<sup>26</sup> The indigenous tribes are generally considered to be the most economically marginalized and deprived groups in the region, especially as they inhabit the forested and hilly areas. Madhya Pradesh has committed to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. However, the data related to the SDG indicators shows there are significant challenges that need to be overcome to meet this commitment. Published in 2020, the 2018 *Sample Registration System Statistical Report*<sup>27</sup> records that the state has the highest infant mortality rate, at 54 per 1000, with 31,586 deaths in 2018; and, in 2019–2020, Bhopal had the highest number of infant deaths out of all districts, with 1,431 deaths.<sup>28</sup> Gender inequity is a major concern, as reflected in the high under-five mortality rate for girls; it is also reflected in fewer female newborns being admitted to the special newborn care unit than boys. The 2015–2016 *National Family Health Survey*<sup>29</sup> shows that Madhya Pradesh has a high stunting rate of 42%. In addition, in the under-five age group, 3.3 million children are stunted and 2.7 million are wasted.<sup>30</sup>

Although the enrolment rates for elementary school are high in Madhya Pradesh, the learning achievement surveys show that learning levels in

25 UNICEF Madhya Pradesh and Action for Children's Environments (ACE), *A Safe City for Children in Bhopal – Infographic*, UNICEF and ACE, New Delhi and Bhopal, December 2018.

26 Seven Scheduled Tribes have been recognized as 'Primitive Tribal Groups' in Madhya Pradesh: Pahari Korwa, Baiga, Avujhmariya, Bhariya, Kamar, Sahariya and Birhor.

27 Government of India, *Sample Registration System Statistical Report 2018, Figures at a Glance*, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi, June 2020.

28 Saxena, Deshdeep, 'Madhya Pradesh Tops National Chart with Highest Infant Deaths in 2019–20', *The Times of India*, 17 July 2020, <[www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/77007337.cms](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/77007337.cms)>, accessed 13 September 2021.

29 International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Inner City Fund (ICF), *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015–16: India*, IIPS, Mumbai 2017.

30 Ibid.

the early grades are poor. In addition, it is estimated that 450,952 children are out of school, the majority of whom are from marginalized families.<sup>31</sup> The annual average dropout rate at the upper primary level is 7.6%, which is higher than the national average of 5.6%.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the 2011 Census estimates that there are approximately 700,000 child workers aged 5–14 years in the state. According to UNICEF India, the state “faces challenges in ensuring inclusive equity and sustainable quality in its service delivery mechanisms.”<sup>33</sup>

In 2020, the National Crime Records Bureau reported<sup>34</sup> that Madhya Pradesh had the highest number of crimes against children in the country, with 17,008 cases,<sup>35</sup> mainly of kidnaping, abduction and rape. It also has the highest number of juveniles in conflict with the law (4,819) and the second highest number of children registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.<sup>36</sup> According to the same report, Bhopal city ranked highest among 34 metropolitan cities in 2020 for kidnaping and abduction cases (Table 2D.1) and crimes committed by juveniles

(Table 5B.1).<sup>37</sup> This is an increase from 2014, when the National Crime Records Bureau ranked Bhopal 15th out of 53 mega cities for kidnaping and abduction (Table 2.2) and there was not a single case under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act (Table 2.4).<sup>38</sup>

## About the project

### Genesis of the initiative

The Safe Cities Initiative<sup>39</sup> was conceived by UNICEF India in its 2012–2017 plan to develop a ‘safe community’ model for children in three cities: Bhopal (tier-2<sup>40</sup> city), Mumbai and Kolkata (tier-1 cities), with the intention that such models could be replicated in similar cities in India. According to Lolichen Pullempavil, UNICEF Child Protection Specialist, the SCI was initially anchored around a child protection framework in urban spaces, not as an issue-based, but as a system-based, initiative.<sup>41</sup> The initiative is not just about addressing child labour or child marriage or the issue of children on the streets in programmatic silos, but trying to make the entire city safe for children through a systems approach.

**The Safe Cities Initiative was conceived by UNICEF India in its 2012–2017 plan to develop a ‘safe community’ model for children in three cities: Bhopal (tier-2 city), Mumbai and Kolkata (tier-1 cities), with the intention that such models could be replicated in similar cities in India.**

31 UNICEF, ‘Children in Madhya Pradesh’, UNICEF India, undated, <[www.unicef.org/india/where-we-work/madhya-pradesh](http://www.unicef.org/india/where-we-work/madhya-pradesh)>, accessed 13 September 2021.

32 Department of School, Education & Literacy, ‘District Information System for Education 2016–2017’, UDISE+, Ministry of Education, Government of India, undated, <<https://udiseplus.gov.in/>>, accessed 10 January 2022.

33 UNICEF, ‘Children in Madhya Pradesh’, undated, <[www.unicef.org/india/where-we-work/madhya-pradesh](http://www.unicef.org/india/where-we-work/madhya-pradesh)>.

34 National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India 2020, Statistics – Volume-1*, National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2020.

35 Total number of cases registered under the Indian Penal Code, 1860 and under Special and Local Laws (SLL).

36 Ibid., note 30.

37 Ibid.

38 National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India 2014*, Tables, National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2014.

39 Josantony, Joseph, Roshni Nuggehalli, and Santosh Shinde, *Review and Upscaling of Strategies that Emerged from “Safe City Initiative”*, UNICEF, Bhopal, 2018.

40 Indian cities are classified as X (tier-1), Y (tier-2) and Z (tier-3) by the government based on the population density. There are eight metropolitan tier-1 cities (Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Ahmedabad and Pune), 104 tier-2 cities, and the remaining fall into the tier-3 category.

41 Interview (online) with CWC, August 2021.

## Box 5: Adolescent participation

“We used to fight among ourselves with people abusing each other saying you have filled more water than others. So we decided to make a group and started discussing the problems we faced – water, illness, beating of children, etc. We had a meeting of our Azad Jugnu Club and discussed the water problem. Together we went to Geeta Tomar, the Councillor for our Ward, and submitted an application to her – we visited her office two or three times, but to no avail – so we put more pressure... and finally ensured that a tanker came...”

**Source:** Azad Jugnu Club members of Gautam Nagar, Ward no. 58, in ‘Bringing Water Home’ (short film)<sup>42</sup>

**UNICEF’s strategy was to render children visible, enhance their role in designing the process of participation and enable child-led research to identify their protection needs.**

### UNICEF’s strategy

While the SCI fell broadly under UNICEF’s child protection mandate, UNICEF Madhya Pradesh recognized the importance of child participation and chose to integrate participation into the protection agenda in a systematic manner. This meant including the most marginalized in the initiative as agents of change, instead of seeing them merely as beneficiaries. UNICEF’s strategy was to render children visible, enhance their role in designing the process of participation and enable child-led research to identify their protection needs. This would inform child-led advocacy on protection needs in the community, and children would then be linked to government systems and schemes to meet their needs. Quality engagement was ensured through the periodic review of participation modalities and outcomes.

UNICEF India’s 2013–2017 Country Programme Document<sup>43</sup> highlighted urbanization as one of the three lenses for programming, along with social inclusion and gender. The SCI evolved in close conjunction with the Government of Madhya Pradesh and UNICEF Madhya Pradesh, which identified government spaces where children received services regularly and could be further engaged in the initiative, such as *anganwadis* (childcare centres), schools, primary health centres, and police stations. The idea was to facilitate children to influence these institutions through their participation. UNICEF Madhya Pradesh worked closely with government officials and departments to sensitize them to listening to and acting on suggestions made by the children.

## Box 6: Participatory mapping

The participatory mapping<sup>44</sup> was carried out by children and youth in *bastis* (slum settlements) in six wards of the city, supported by adults and with technical support from the CSO, Action for Children’s Environment (ACE). The seven themes they explored were safety and security, protection, environment, education, health, recreation, and participation. The methods used were household surveys, observation checklists, focus group discussions, risk mapping through transit walks, and interviews. Both physical and social vulnerabilities were identified, and the children were able to locate safe and unsafe places in their part of the city.

**Source:** *A Safe City for Children in Bhopal: Mapping with Children*<sup>45</sup>

42 UNICEF Madhya Pradesh and Muskaan, *Bringing Water Home*, Short Film, UNICEF, 2017.

43 Internal document.

44 UNICEF Madhya Pradesh and ACE, *A Safe City for Children in Bhopal – Infographic*, 2018.

45 UNICEF Madhya Pradesh and ACE, *A Safe City for Children in Bhopal: Mapping with Children*, UNICEF and ACE, New Delhi and Bhopal, 2017.

Some programme factors that enriched the participation processes in the SCI included:

- The **continuous engagement** of, and advocacy with, government functionaries on integrating child participation across the planning process so that plans prepared by the children at the *basti* (slum settlement) level could be integrated into government initiatives and schemes.
- The **capacity building** of government functionaries for child participation to enable a systemic approach. To actualize this, UNICEF conducted several workshops to introduce the concept of children's participation to government functionaries and elected members of local government.
- **Appropriate civil society partners** with youth engagement experience were selected to enhance the quality of the process and embed the community engagement processes they had developed in participatory planning, with guidance, review and mentorship provided by UNICEF.
- **Field observation visits** were also arranged by UNICEF for its partners to obtain first-hand exposure to ideas and practices from evolved child

participation processes in other locations.

### Children of the Safe City Initiative

In the last 2011 Census, Bhopal had a population of 1.8 million. There were 380 registered slums in the city with over 183,989 households containing more than half of the city's population. In addition, a further 120 to 150 unregistered slum pockets were reported. It is also estimated that 9% of all children in Bhopal city between 5 and 19 years are engaged in some form of labour such as employment at *dhabas* (roadside eateries), tea stalls and restaurants, meat stalls, garages, domestic labour (particularly of girls), rag picking, construction, and various forms of vending (e.g., newspapers, vegetables, scrap, etc.). Children are also involved in street-based activities, especially at traffic signals, including begging and selling knick-knacks.<sup>46</sup> The migration of children, with families or by themselves, is also a serious concern, as this is a major reason for children coming into the city. Bhopal is a railway junction and there are a number of children either on the move through the railways or who fend for themselves on the railway platforms.

Field observation visits were also arranged by UNICEF for its partners to obtain first-hand exposure to ideas and practices from evolved child participation processes in other locations.

#### Box 7: Slums of Bhopal

Most slums in Bhopal are located in the heart of the city, as opposed to on the outskirts, which is the case in many urbanizing cities. At least four of the six slums in the study are in areas considered untenable due to geographical constraints, such as hilly terrain or lakes. Such locational characteristics put them at risk, with frequent episodes of flooding, waterlogging, and disease outbreak. Children living in settlements are exposed to environmental hazards and experience frequent bouts of illness.

**Source:** *A Safe City for Children in Bhopal: Mapping with Children*, Key findings and impacts of hazards on children<sup>47</sup>

46 UNICEF Madhya Pradesh and ACE, *A Safe City for Children in Bhopal – Infographic*, 2018.

47 UNICEF Madhya Pradesh and ACE, *A Safe City for Children in Bhopal: Mapping with Children*, 2017.

The transformation of this cohort from a set of beneficiaries into a group that claims and realizes their rights was UNICEF Madhya Pradesh's focus in this initiative.

The focus of the SCI has been on the marginalized children of Bhopal, who are at greatest risk and in need of protection. The marginalized include poor migrants who belong to tribal groups, Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Communities (OBCs) and religious minority communities, as well as street children, working children and orphaned children, all of whom have little access to services and are discriminated against by virtue of their sometimes multiple marginalizing identities. The transformation of this cohort from a set of beneficiaries into a group that claims and realizes their rights was UNICEF Madhya Pradesh's focus in this initiative.

### Partners

UNICEF Madhya Pradesh in collaboration with the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD), Madhya Pradesh Government, Madhya Pradesh Police and Bhopal Municipal Corporation, worked with three CSOs – Aarambh,<sup>48</sup> Eka Communicators' Collective<sup>49</sup> and Muskaan<sup>50</sup> – to pilot an initiative to create child safe environments in Bhopal. This was initially a three-year programme (from 2014 to 2017) and the focus was on all the children in over 2,700 households in 12 selected *bastis* (slums) in the city. From early 2018, the SCI was re-strategized, both in terms of its programming approach and partnerships, and scaled up to cover the entire city of Bhopal. From 2018, the initiative prioritized system strengthening across the city, while community-based interventions were deepened

in 15 wards. Other partners that have contributed to the programme include the Uday Social Development Society,<sup>51</sup> the National Institute of Women, Child and Youth Development (NIWCYD) Bachpan,<sup>52</sup> Aide Et Action,<sup>53</sup> Debate Lok Nyas,<sup>54</sup> and Action for Children's Environment,<sup>55</sup> among others.

Most of these partners began working with children in their respective constituencies, but have learnt from their experiences to take up other issues. Muskaan, for instance, tried to get tribal children admitted into formal schools, but the children felt alienated by the language and the textbooks and faced prejudice from teachers. The organization realized that issues of malnutrition, gender and ethnic violence had to be addressed, together with school enrolment. Similarly, Aarambh began capacity building for the self-employment of street children, while training them on their legal rights as child labourers. At the same time, they took up community issues of inadequate water and sanitation. Eka began working with the minority community in the old city, which led to a focus on working children. Uday, which joined SCI after the pilot, set up coaching centres for slow learners and dropouts from the slums, then mobilized women self-help groups for community-based programmes for health and waste management, and linked them to government schemes. Hence, these CSOs have all found that the rights of marginalized children are linked to their community issues, and that education plays a role in empowering children and their families.

48 [www.aarambhpl.org/about-us.html](http://www.aarambhpl.org/about-us.html)>.

49 [www.ekabhupal.com](http://www.ekabhupal.com)>

50 [www.muskaan.org/about/history](http://www.muskaan.org/about/history)>

51 [www.udaysocietybhupal.org](http://www.udaysocietybhupal.org)>

52 [www.niwcyd.org](http://www.niwcyd.org)>

53 [www.aea-southasia.org](http://www.aea-southasia.org)>

54 [www.debateloknyas.com](http://www.debateloknyas.com)>

55 [www.acetrust.net](http://www.acetrust.net)>



## Implementation of pilot

This sub-section describes the process of implementing the SCI pilot. The steps were progressive as well as simultaneous and included participatory mapping and collectivization, support and engagement with governance, and review and replication.

of marginalized groups from beneficiaries into agents.

The mapping exercise revealed vital indicators about the children's vulnerabilities on which they could build advocacy: 74% were affected by water-borne diseases; 32% of boys and 31%

### Box 8: Safe City Initiative pilot

"The pilot focused on developing a strengthened and functional system that delivers preventive and responsive services for children, nurtures the agency of children and empowers communities for the protection of children. Influencing urban development planning to integrate safety and protection of children was central to this model. Child-led participatory mapping helped children understand their own vulnerabilities and their rights... they took the lead in finding solutions to their problems."

Source: *The Bhopal Model – Safe City for Children (Short Film)*<sup>56</sup>

### Participatory mapping and collectivization of children

The pilot phase of the Safe City Initiative began in 2014. UNICEF identified and engaged with CSOs as implementing partners, building on their existing child participation experience and expertise in order to create a holistic and inclusive participation model for governance. UNICEF organized meetings with its partners to "organically build a cohesive participation agenda that linked young people and their voices on safety to systemic local government responses."<sup>57</sup> The partners began by prioritizing children in the selected 12 *bastis* (slums), and *basti*-specific children's groups were invited to participate in designing and implementing the tools for mapping their vulnerabilities, interpreting the data that emerged, and making decisions about how to raise their concerns with the authorities. This was a critical element in conceptually transforming the children

girls dropped out of primary school; and although 69% felt that the police were accessible, only 15% said they were responsive. The children felt unsafe at police stations, cinema halls, liquor shops, busy roads, and under bridges. There was fear of gamblers and drunkards at play sites, of sexual harassment and bullying, and of restrictions by adults. More than 85% felt that the authorities were not responsive to their problems.<sup>58</sup>

The outcomes of the child-led mapping brought out the nuances of children's realities, which emerged from processes in which they were proactive and affirmative. Such processes go beyond conventional research, which may not capture the full picture of children's realities. Equally important is the fact that, in child-led mapping, children also own their information and are more likely to use their findings for their own analysis and advocacy, which is necessary for the meaningful participation of children.

UNICEF identified and engaged with CSOs as implementing partners, building on their existing child participation experience and expertise in order to create a holistic and inclusive participation model for governance.

56 UNICEF Madhya Pradesh, *The Bhopal Model – Safe City for Children*, Short Film, UNICEF 2017.

57 Lolichen Pullemplavil, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Madhya Pradesh, interview (online) with CWC, August 2021.

58 Ibid.

## Box 9: Ethical protocols for participation

Mapping with children needs to be anchored in strong ethical protocols that range from maintaining confidentiality on sensitive issues to ensuring that children are safe and not exposed to different forms of abuse. Researchers anonymized the data to protect the identities of the children and community members participating. Due consideration was given to involving different groups of children or individual children, taking into account age, gender, disability and other aspects of identity and inclusion.

Considering the sensitivity of issues relating to children's experiences of growing up in slums, each local mapping team included staff trained in listening and providing psychosocial support to children. The local teams were also aware of referral services in the area, in case of the disclosure of abuse or other significant concerns during the mapping.

Data, especially visual data, generated by any method that takes time for the children to create, should clearly be owned by the children themselves. Researchers in the mapping ensured that the data was recorded, leaving the original outputs in the custody of UNICEF's partners at the Child Resource Centres, where the children can easily access their work (this was necessary to protect the children from any kind of risk if they took these materials home or to other community settings).

**Source:** *A Safe City for Children in Bhopal: Mapping with Children*<sup>59</sup> and *Infographic*<sup>60</sup>

### Support and engagement with governance

As these patterns emerged from the mapping, a three-day participatory workshop was organized by UNICEF Madhya Pradesh, at which non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in both urban and rural areas

shared experiences on child and youth participation and UNICEF provided key inputs to develop the conceptual perspective – which was then woven into the project design. Resource centres and *basti*-level child protection committees were set up to support the children's groups, as well as promote the formation of federations and alliances.

## Box 10: Collective strength: Federating children's groups under the Safe City Initiative

Under the Safe City Initiative, children's groups were formed in 15 out of 85 wards in Bhopal city, Madhya Pradesh. In 2018/19, when the children's groups had evolved and strengthened their capacities, the groups federated at the programming cluster level (at the level of each partner) and at the Bhopal city level. The key objectives of federating the children's group included:

- To develop a sense of solidarity, collective strength, and representation among various children's groups at the community level, for stronger advocacy and actions on child rights
- To enhance coherence for action and advocacy

The process of forming the federations was supported by the CSO Muskaan, which also played a key role in advocating for the identity and acceptance of the federated structures, in collaboration with UNICEF Madhya Pradesh.<sup>61</sup>

59 UNICEF Madhya Pradesh and ACE, *A Safe City for Children in Bhopal: Mapping with Children*, 2017.

60 UNICEF Madhya Pradesh and ACE, *A Safe City for Children in Bhopal – Infographic*, 2018, pp. 23–24

61 Seema Deshmukh, Programme Coordinator, Safe City Initiative, Muskaan, interview (online) with ADAP, UNICEF ROSA, November 2021.

The formation of cluster-level federations by children was consolidated into the Bhopal city-level Federation under the Safe City Initiative. The criteria for the selection of children included ability to represent and collaborate; a demonstrated understanding of child rights; and inter- and intra-group communication, advocacy and delivery skills. The formation of federated structures also ensured gender and community diversity.

Federation has been very effective in strengthening the voices of children in their advocacy with the government system. It created an enabling environment for listening to children, and addressing their issues.<sup>62</sup> According to Seema Deshmukh of Muskaan, the federated children's clubs allowed for the consolidation of children's issues, and gave the children a collective voice and identity. Children were also able to understand the issues of other children's groups, such as those faced by de-notified tribes (DNTs) and children in settlements. They were also able to collectively understand the laws and policies that affected their lives, such as those affecting children in detention, which enabled them to challenge institutions that did not uphold these laws. The involvement of marginalized groups, such as girls from DNTs and boys from settlements, in policy discussions has also been enabled through this structure.<sup>63</sup>

Through the federated structure, children were able to carry out collective multiple-cluster actions as part of the *Aagaz: Voices for Child Protection* (Aagaz meaning 'the beginning') campaign, enabling city-wide visibility. Members of the federation played an active role in the study *Ripple Effects of the Pandemic: Evidencing Violence Against Children in the Context of COVID 19 in Urban Areas of Bhopal – A Participatory Study with Children*;<sup>64</sup> their contribution included identifying representative children from across the city through clusters for participating in the study, and collecting data through group discussion and one-to-one peer interviews. They used the findings from the study to advocate with stakeholders at their local, district and state level.

While continuing the good work has been a challenge during COVID, at the time of this report, the meetings and engagements have restarted.<sup>65</sup> Under the Aagaz initiative, some of the federation members have received an Aagaz internship, and they intend to use to strengthen the federation initiatives. As a part of this revival, during annual Child Rights Week, they have coordinated many activities, including child rights webinars, *bal melas* (children's cultural, sports and arts events), and so on.

UNICEF, jointly with its CSO partners and children, has organized extensive and sustained advocacy addressing municipal corporation functionaries, commissioners, senior police officers, and senior bureaucrats in different departments (such as for education,

labour and the DWCD), secretaries to the Government of Madhya Pradesh, ministers, elected representatives including members of parliament, and High Court judges. This has enabled children's groups and federations of groups to place their concerns before

62 For example, see: Patrika, 'Expectations of Children from New Government on Occasion of Child Rights Day', *Patrika*, 14 December 2018, <<https://epaper.patrika.com/nationaledition/madhyapradesh-chhattisgarh/2021-12-27/199/page-1.html>>, accessed 10 January 2022; and Muskaan, *Impact of COVID-19 on Children's Education, 2020–2021*, A Mini-Study by Youth Groups and the Children's Federation, in collaboration with Muskaan, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, 2021.

63 Seema Deshmukh, Programme Coordinator, Safe City Initiative, Muskaan, interview (online) with ADAP, UNICEF ROSA, November 2021.

64 UNICEF, *The Ripple Effects of Pandemic: Evidencing Impacts of COVID 19 on Violence Against Children in Urban Slums of Bhopal*, UNICEF Madhya Pradesh, 2021.

65 Rashtriya Hindi Mail, 'Making Bhopal the Safest City in the Country for Children', *Rashtriya Hindi Mail*, 14 February 2021, <<http://epaper.rashtriyahindimail.in/epaper.php?city=bhopal&date=271221>>, accessed 23 December 2021; People's Samachar, 'Puppet Show Performed to Convey Child Marriage is Wrong', *People's Samachar*, 14 December 2021, <<https://epapers.peoplesamachar.in/epaper/edition/6530/bhopal-city>>, accessed 23 December 2021.

authorities and obtain their responses and assurances for follow up. The key element in this exercise was that children had to be organized. As Shivani Tarneja of Muskaan said, “We have been able to build a positive equation with WCD [women and child development], but we find change happens only when there is pressure from the community.”<sup>66</sup>

“Many children’s groups have been able to make a dent in informal governance spaces for children and women [...] the outcomes we see [...] which has also sustained [has been] a kind of acceptance of the visibility of children as influencers, having opinions.”

Source: UNICEF Madhya Pradesh, interview (online) with CWC, 4 September 2020

### Review and replication

The programme implementation included quarterly review meetings conducted by UNICEF with its partners, in which issues and challenges related to the participation of children were discussed. This facilitated peer learning, critical review, and strategic planning, with a focus on children’s agency and building the capacities of CSOs, as well as the UNICEF team, to facilitate children’s participation.

At the end of the pilot period in 2018, a comprehensive review<sup>67</sup> was commissioned by UNICEF, in consultation with children, community members, CSOs and all other stakeholders to assess the merits and scope of the strategies, including participation strategies, employed in the pilot. Their potential for replication, possible ways forward in terms of opportunities and

potential partners, and scale were gauged. The review also made valuable recommendations, and those found relevant by UNICEF and the CSOs were integrated into partnership plans, based on the situation of children in the programme areas and their external environments.

### Methodology

This case study was documented mainly through online interviews conducted with adolescents, CSOs, *anganwadi* (child care) workers, police personal and government officials. Special tools were developed for the discussions with adolescents including: (1) a simple Q&A based on the ‘areas of enquiry’; (2) guided focus group discussions regarding children’s own organization and their engagement with the initiative; and (3) administration of the balloon tool to learn about children’s collectivization (see **Annexure F** for tools of engagement). Unfortunately, due to restrictions imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19, not all online consultations with adolescent groups (informal and unorganized) could be carried out.

Online interviews were conducted with 15 adolescents selected by Muskaan and 6 by Uday from among their children’s groups. Seven adolescents from Aarambh’s programme areas were supposed to join, but could not do so, because of COVID-19 safety protocols; instead, we received a description of their activities from Aarambh. The tool for assessing the knowledge and experiences of the adolescent groups was used only in this case study and only with one group from the DNT community, which was facilitated by Muskaan, as COVID restrictions

66 Shivani Tarneja of Muskaan, interview (online) with CWC, 20 January 2021.

67 Josantony, Joseph, et al., *Review and Upscaling of Strategies that Emerged from “Safe City Initiative”* 2018.

prevented its application in the other three case studies. Twenty-two adolescents participated in the balloon tool exercise conducted by Muskaan and another set of tribal children who were not part of any group were also asked to participate in the balloon tool exercise. In addition, two Muskaan facilitators who conducted the exercise filled in forms to share their perceptions. The three CSOs that took part in the online discussions on two occasions were Muskaan, Aarambh, and Uday. We were unable to interact with Eka and NIWCYD Bachpan.

Six *anganwadi* (child care) workers selected by UNICEF took part in one online group discussion and individual online interviews were held with the Commissioner of the Bhopal Municipal Corporation, the Additional Director General (Training) of Madhya Pradesh Police, the accountant at the Zonal Office of the Bhopal Municipal Corporation, a ward officer, the Zonal Officer for Zone 5, an Assistant Director and Joint Director of the DWCD Bhopal District, a labour inspector, the District Education Officer from the Bhopal Education Department, and two ex-councillors for Bhopal Municipal Corporation from different wards. Interviews were also conducted online with the Child Protection Specialist and Child Protection Officer at UNICEF Madhya Pradesh and UNICEF's Regional Advisor for South Asia for ADAP. Many conversations took place during this time with three members of UNICEF ROSA, both online as a group as well as separately over the phone.

## Findings

The findings of the case study are presented according to the ASPIRE framework set out in Chapter 1.

## Agency

*Agency is defined as the evolving capacity and confidence of adolescents to engage with decision makers and structures and their autonomy in expressing opinions and taking action: Did they drive, initiate or manage projects? Did they make choices? What was the impact of other actors on their agency?*

### Evolving adolescent capacity to engage

The adolescents we interviewed had participated in the mapping exercise in their localities and mobilized around adolescent issues such as child marriage, abuse of and violence against children, child labour, school admission, 'eve-teasing' (street harassment), playgrounds, and police atrocities, among other things. They had expressed their agency by interacting with officials and decision makers. The UNICEF office for Madhya Pradesh reported that the participation capabilities of adolescents have been greatly enhanced by the SCI.<sup>68</sup>

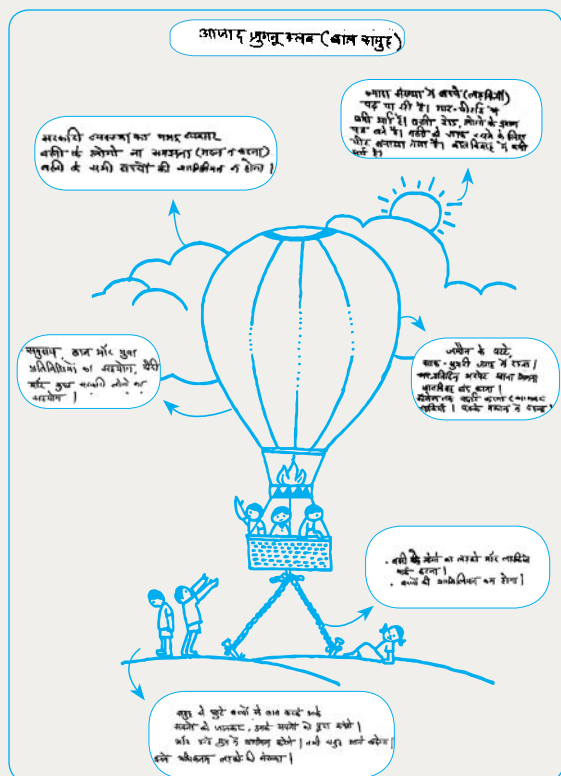
Our exercises with adolescents revealed many facets of their evolved understanding of participation in local governance. The balloon tool (see 'Methodology', Chapter 1 and **Annexure F**) exercise was conducted with two groups of adolescents in Barkhedi – one group that was included in the SCI and another that was excluded – and it showed the different ways in which the included and excluded adolescents thought of different issues, their aims and goals for the future, and the factors holding them back. Figure 1 shows how much more agency was expressed by the included group than the group excluded from the initiative.

They had expressed their agency by interacting with officials and decision makers. The UNICEF office for Madhya Pradesh reported that the participation capabilities of adolescents have been greatly enhanced by the SCI.

68 UNICEF, 'Children in Madhya Pradesh', undated, <[www.unicef.org/india/where-we-work/madhya-pradesh](http://www.unicef.org/india/where-we-work/madhya-pradesh)>.

Figure 2: Expression of agency by adolescents included in and excluded from the SCI

### Organized adolescents included in SCI



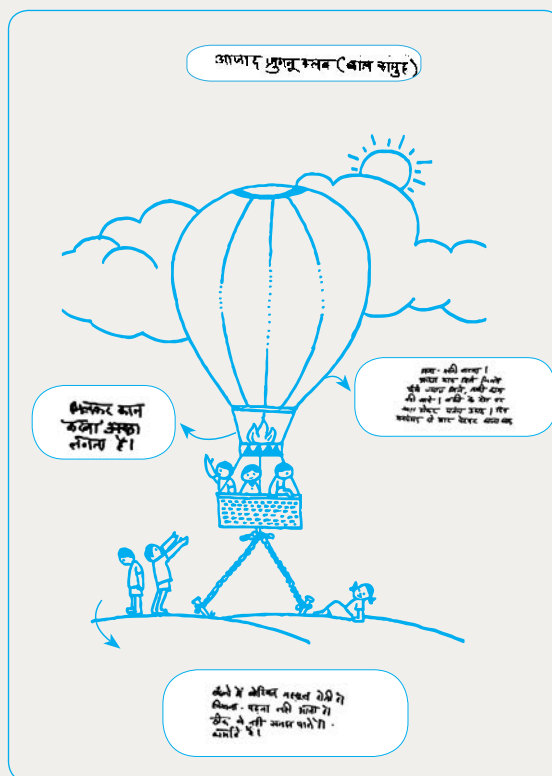
**Aims:** Get land titles; live in a clean place in a *pucca* house; eat two square meals a day; stop child marriage; study up to college level (especially girls)

**Achievements:** More children (especially girls) can read; violence reduced; *basti* (slum) road built; identity papers received; waste bins constructed; child marriage decreased

**Weaknesses:** Rude behaviour in government offices; **not all children organized\***; community discrimination against girls

**Strengths:** Community support; elected representatives; CSO workers; some officials; **need to converse with and organize the excluded around their\*** dreams

### Unorganized adolescents excluded from SCI



**Aims:** Enjoy ourselves; get good work; earn more; fly kites on the *basti* road; get two good meals a day

NA

**Weaknesses:** **It must be good to work together\*** (referring to the children in the basket); feel bored in meetings; cannot read and write; unable to understand; feel shy

NA

\* The statements in bold relate to the expression of agency and organization by excluded/included groups.

What stood out clearly is the sense of entitlement of the organized adolescents, their clarity about the accountability of duty bearers to them, and their own commitment to raising issues. In addition, they seem to grasp that the sense of agency they have acquired needs to be communicated to those adolescents who are excluded and whose dreams and aspirations may be different, because their priorities are based primarily on earning a living.

### Adolescent autonomy to express and act

The adolescents spoke of how they had conducted rallies and performed street theatre, designed posters and newsletters to express their views, and organized child helpdesks on their own. They had demanded plots as compensation when their families were evicted from the slums, rejecting the allocation of flats in multi-storied buildings as inappropriate. They had also pressed decision makers for livelihood opportunities, water supply, drains, streetlights, roads, sewage disposal, and the establishment of police posts and police patrols. Adolescents reported intervening on behalf of adolescents as well as communities demanding their entitlements.

### Impact of other actors on agency

Adolescents commented on adult support and willingness to listen, but also on adult resistance to action on issues such as domestic violence. This is supported by the 2018 review of the SCI, which notes that the community cohesively fights violations against their children.<sup>69</sup> Adolescents acknowledged the significant support of CSO workers in training to articulate, mobilize and advocate. Both staff of CSOs and *anganwadi* (child care) workers agreed that training played a critical role in helping adolescents to mobilize. The ex-councillors were witness to the fact that the children raised their issues, but said that, as representatives, they could only act within the limits of their power.

The documents, videos and discussions with UNICEF also contain examples of how local governments, district administrations and other agencies of the government have listened to children and, on several occasions, responded to their requests. Decision makers were more inclined to listen to them because UNICEF worked closely with state, district and local-level officials and functionaries, and elected representatives to strengthen child rights and the implementation of child protection policies.

Adolescents commented on adult support and willingness to listen, but also on adult resistance to action on issues such as domestic violence.



69 Josantony, Joseph, et al., *Review and Upscaling of Strategies That Emerged From "Safe City Initiative,"* 2018.

## Box 11: Films showcasing outcomes of children's agency

In 2017, UNICEF produced six short films to recreate the achievements of SCI:

- *The Bhopal Model – Safe City for Children*: This film introduces the SCI and its underpinnings, along with what it hopes to achieve.
- *Bringing Water Home*: Explores the efforts of members of the Azad Jugnu Club to ensure regular water supply in Gautam Nagar.
- *Girls Back to School*: Highlights the struggle of young Muslim girls in Aishbagh in accessing education and how education nurtures agency and protagonism.
- *Information is Power*: Looks at how adolescent groups in Shankaracharya Nagar used the Right to Information Act to press for construction of a drain.
- *Negotiating Custodial Violence*: Documents how a children's group submitted their report on police violence faced by Pardhi children to the authorities.
- *Police by our Side*: Presents events leading to the formation of a Child Resource Team in Bajariya to tackle the issue of the street harassment.

These films are powerful renditions of the importance of the SCI and its potential to inspire the agency of children in other locations.

**In another basti (slum), police extortion, arbitrary arrest, and violence topped the list of issues, so the Children's Club submitted a report to the Additional Superintendent of Police and, after following up regularly, "in some of these communities where youth collectives have been successfully formed, there has been a perceptible lessening in the oppressive actions of the police".**

### State

*The mandated role of the state is to integrate and sustain adolescent participation in governance and ensure subsidiarity in planning, with the devolution of decision-making power to the lowest possible tier of government: How are States able and willing to integrate adolescent participation in governance? How are current economic forces that transfer welfare functions from state to non-state actors influencing the ability and willingness of States to invest in their mandate for meaningful adolescent and community participation in governance structures?*

### Integrating adolescent participation in governance

The perceptions of different stakeholders regarding the state's response to issues raised by adolescents in the SCI vary significantly. The examples mentioned in the 2018 review of the SCI<sup>70</sup> include how the children's group had gone to the Ward Councillor to talk about a dirty drain, and he announced that the drain would be cleaned; later the drain was cleaned. In another *basti* (slum), police extortion, arbitrary arrest, and violence topped the list of issues, so the Children's Club submitted a report to the Additional Superintendent of Police and, after following up regularly, "in some of these communities where youth collectives have been successfully formed, there has been a perceptible lessening in the oppressive actions of the police" (emphasis added).<sup>71</sup>

70 Josantony, Joseph, et al., *Review and Upscaling of Strategies that Emerged from "Safe City Initiative"*, 2018.

71 Ibid., p. 13.



## Box 12: UNICEF's advocacy

"Overall the SCI has had a great connect with the district system, with quarterly coordination meeting of the District Child Protection Committee (DCPC) [...] Separately, we have had coordination meetings with police, continued as regular meetings helping us in the expansion and deepening of the programme [...]. The local administration has become sensitised through the different interventions and processes led by children and adolescents to become open to children's participation and their views [...]. The endorsement of the Ward plans by the local government indicates buy-in by the State. UNICEF recognises that continuous advocacy and influencing at the senior level and mid-level, along with demonstration of praxis at the ground has to be continued as children's participation is yet to be fully integrated into the system's policies and implementation in Madhya Pradesh."

**Source:** *Review and Upscaling of Strategies That Emerged From "Safe City Initiative," 2018*<sup>72</sup>

Some *anganwadi* (child care) workers, who are the first interface between the state and the community, felt that state officials were very helpful, while others argued that it took a lot of collective effort to make the administration responsive. One tellingly observed, "The administration and the police did not listen earlier, but the intervention of the *didis* [literally translated as elder sisters, but referring to CSO workers], and the pressure of the organized adolescent groups has had a lot of impact, with the administration now becoming openly supportive."<sup>73</sup>

A senior official, the Commissioner of the Bhopal Municipal Corporation, although new to the SCI, acknowledged the importance of children's participation and gave the example of how during COVID-19 children had supported relief work in communities and ensured that they received their entitlements. He felt that their participation could enhance the delivery of services by corporation officials. Reviewing some of the documents and based on discussions with UNICEF Madhya Pradesh, we learnt that several mid-level and senior representatives of the government, both administrative and elected, have

become increasingly attentive to children and have even integrated some of their concerns into their actions. The key to integration appears to be the mobilization of adolescents into organized groups and their acceptance in governance structures.

### **Willingness to invest in meaningful participation**

During our own interviews with the adolescent groups, three years after the SCI began expanding from the pilot phase to all wards in Bhopal, most of the adolescents felt that their participation had enhanced the effectiveness of the initiative through their interventions to stop child marriage and child labour, as well as to obtain things like drainage, water, and electricity in their communities. However, they said that government officials did not pay due attention and, even when decisions were announced, there was no investment in implementation by the concerned authorities. Lack of commitment by officials is one problem, but actual implementation may be under the jurisdiction of another department, and it is often unclear who the appropriate decision maker is. At the same time the resources to provide services are also

**Lack of commitment by officials is one problem, but actual implementation may be under the jurisdiction of another department, and it is often unclear who the appropriate decision maker is.**

<sup>72</sup> Josantony, Joseph, et al., *Review and Upscaling of Strategies That Emerged From "Safe City Initiative,"* 2018.

<sup>73</sup> *Anganwadi* (child care) workers, focus group discussion (online) with CWC, August 2021.

A labour inspector told us about how he is restricted to departmental targets and guidelines related to child welfare. This includes the coercive re-enrolment of out-of-school children without any attempt to ascertain why they dropped out in the first place.

limited because of the government's cutbacks to welfare services.

A labour inspector told us about how he is restricted to departmental targets and guidelines related to child welfare. This includes the coercive re-enrolment of out-of-school children without any attempt to ascertain why they dropped out in the first place. He argued that it is not practical to fully implement the Juvenile Justice Act,<sup>74</sup> so it is better to make people aware that there should be no child labour. A few mid-level officers we spoke to also seemed to see their role as being confined to their job descriptions, which do not necessarily include being receptive to children's concerns. The Municipal Zonal Accountant saw his role as only responding to right to information (RTI) requests and giving information on issues asked for by children, and the Ward Officer regarded the collection of property tax as his main work.

The Additional Director General of Police acknowledged that there is discrimination within the police against those from tribal groups and slum dwellers, and sensitization can only take place through systematic inputs into training. She argued that hierarchies exist within their official systems, so there is a need to convince the senior person, who can then relay orders down the line to ensure that children's rights are upheld. She agreed that accountability has to be introduced in the system and that we should not be dependent on individual officers to champion this cause.

The two former elected representatives were aware of the SCI processes, had engaged with children personally, and spoke of how they had been personally enriched by children's views. However, their concern was that their own scope of work as members of the local government was limited, as were their resources available to address any concerns raised by children.

## Participation

*Participation is the interface between the agency of children and governance structures: What are the factors that enable meaningful engagement between adult institutions and adolescents and adolescent groups? What are the boundaries and limits imposed on adolescent participation (direct and indirect; individual and collective; local and national) by state actors, adults, and hierarchical structures? What are the opportunities for adolescents to represent themselves in order to question and change those boundaries?*

## Opportunities for adolescent participation

In an interview, the Assistant Director of the DWCD identified departmental meetings as where participation took place. In these meetings, children engaged with officials around issues such as begging and issues were taken up for resolution. The Assistant Director also pointed to the District Child Protection Committee meeting, in which

74 The Juvenile Justice Act was passed in 2015 to replace the earlier Juvenile Delinquency Law and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children Act) 2000, and amended again in 2021. It has two parts: (1) Children in Need of Care and (2) Children in Conflict with Law. Child Welfare Committees, Juvenile Justice Boards, District Child Protection Units and Special Juvenile Protection Units are entrusted with administration of the Act. The 2021 amendment was triggered by the Delhi rape case and formulated on the basis of a report filed by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights in 2018–2019, in which over 7,000 child care Institutions were surveyed and it was found that 1.5% do not conform to the rules and regulations of the Act. However, the amended 2021 Act has been hotly contested by child rights groups, because it gives increased powers and responsibilities to district magistrates (see: Roy, Esha, 'Explained: What Changes in JJ Act for Juvenile Offenders and District Magistrates?', Indian Express, 5 August 2021, <[www.indianexpress.com/article/explained/juvenile-justice-amendment-bill-2021-explained-7429971](http://www.indianexpress.com/article/explained/juvenile-justice-amendment-bill-2021-explained-7429971)>, accessed 23 August 2021).

all departments were included under the SCI and some selected children were heard. However, there was no separate budget to respond to issues raised by children. The Zonal Officer identified the Parent Teachers Association as another interface where he could take the problems that children brought to him and then motivate the Association to take up other activities as part of their social work. These examples point to the structural barriers facing the SCI, as it cannot be delinked from other government initiatives for protection. The SCI is located in a larger environment in which some of the state programmes meant to protect children may, by design or otherwise, violate the rights of children.

Most of the officials we spoke with accepted that children were enabled to participate in decisions when they were organized; a few of them were individually more receptive; and most continued to see their own responses within the confines of their routine departmental work. As the initial focus of the Safe City Initiative was to enable children's own agency, UNICEF subsequently decided to create an environment favourable to children's participation and facilitated a training of trainers for personnel from concerned departments and provided capacity building for other stakeholders in governance.

### **Boundaries and limits on participation**

While their work in the community has been noted and adolescents have received some support from their communities, the adolescents we spoke to reported that one of the barriers to participation they experienced was the

lack of sustained support from women's groups and other senior community leaders in relation to accountability for funds spent on community welfare. They were also very clear that in order to be heard they needed to be organized, have adequate information, mobilize community support, and be persistent.

The CSOs interviewed agreed that the community and youth are beginning to understand the government system and are learning to advocate in a way that yields positive results, at least occasionally. However, it was not yet common for government agencies to be receptive to, or invite, children's views. There were also variations in the approach of CSOs and their ability to build rapport with state agencies, depending on their recognized association with officials or quasi-official mechanisms. Archana, from Aarambh, reflected, "We are a partner in setting up of ChildLine, and can access the Child Welfare Committees constituted under the JJ [Juvenile Justice] Act; yet we experienced a lot of bureaucratic hurdles, and it took time to convince every new official about the initiative."<sup>75</sup>

UNICEF has shared that a critical part of participation has been the dialogues and discussions that children and adolescents have had with a range of systemic stakeholders from district authorities, state authorities and the Bhopal Municipal Corporation. They feel that specific capacities that were developed with the CSO staff have contributed to this. In the recent past, however, funding constraints have contributed to short-term partnerships, the slowing of processes and lack of continuity in planning, affecting the depth and scope of children's participation and the expansion of the programme on the ground.

**The CSOs interviewed agreed that the community and youth are beginning to understand the government system and are learning to advocate in a way that yields positive results, at least occasionally.**

<sup>75</sup> Archana Sahay, Aarambh, interview (online) with CWC, January 2021.

The SCI was initiated with a clear focus on girls, marginalized adolescents and their communities (including ethnic minorities) in Bhopal. Despite this focus, many still remain outside the reach of the initiative on account of socio-cultural constraints and other pressures.

## Inclusion

*Within adolescent groups there are those individuals who are socially, culturally and economically stronger and likely to be more articulate, thereby excluding the already marginalized from participation processes: What actions were taken to promote inclusion, particularly in relation to viewing and working with the most marginalized groups as agents and partners?*

### Exclusion of marginalized adolescents

The SCI was initiated with a clear focus on girls, marginalized adolescents and their communities (including ethnic minorities) in Bhopal. Despite this focus, many still remain outside the reach of the initiative on account of socio-cultural constraints and other pressures. According to adolescents, those who are yet to participate include: younger children, working children (as they are away at work during meetings and activities), and children who are married or are studying. They also mentioned that there are several girls who are not allowed by their families to participate. According to them, the main children who are not interested in joining are those using drugs.

From reading and discussions, we learnt how marginalization was prevalent: girls faced challenges to being part of their collectives, as did members of DNTs, who are highly discriminated against in the city, such that children from DNTs would not even cross the path of members of other communities. There was a pronounced bias among the police and teachers against children from DNTs. The police treated them as criminals, while the teachers would beat them, make them sit in the dirtiest part of the classroom, or make them do the

cleaning. The group from Uday related how Valmiki, a youth from a Scheduled Caste, dropped out of the group when he saw that they were not receiving any benefit. In one area where there were many school dropouts and working children, eve-teasing, harassment and alcoholism were not initially considered issues of immediate concern by the children involved in the SCI initiative.

### Actions for inclusion as agents

During the interviews and discussions, we learnt about efforts to bring together children from across religions, age groups and gender groups. The young people we spoke with were predominantly outspoken girls, who had taken leadership roles and been part of the programme for a longer time than some of the boys we spoke to. The group from Uday had learnt that in order to encourage more participation they had to engage in activities that were meaningful to other adolescents and youth. They had a lot of discussions and training with excluded children to explore the reasons why they could not go to school or had to work, after which links could be made to lack of education, liquor shops on the way to school, lack of streetlights, domestic violence, child marriage, and drug abuse (often to reduce fatigue at work).

During the lockdown, the active adolescents were confined to their *bastis* (slums), which helped them to better understand the issues faced by excluded children and their communities, including issues of harassment. In addition, their association with NGOs prompted other children and their families to raise issues and obtain help. While these issues have become part of their advocacy agenda and changes are visible, the children's groups have recognized that their strength lies in the greater mobilization of

excluded children and their engagement in meaningful participation.

Many complaints about police violence, particularly against members of DNT communities, were filed by children's groups and reported in the media or through CSO partners. The SCI, especially with the reach and thrust that Muskaan brought in, started to focus on specific police stations in terms of interventions, training and sensitization, with the backing of senior officials and advocacy by UNICEF. This has put pressure on the police to respond and be more vigilant. Consequently, over a period of time, particularly in the last two years, reports of police violence against children have decreased, as corroborated both by UNICEF Madhya Pradesh and Muskaan.<sup>76</sup>

## Resolutions

*Organizational structures determine the nature of adolescents and young people's ability to exercise agency and influence resolutions and decisions. At the same time, those charged with promoting agency are also those who set limits and make the rules on translating the exercise of agency to enact resolutions and decisions: In such a context how are adolescents able to influence resolutions and decisions?*

### **Structures that determine the nature of agency**

The adolescents who participated in this study narrated that resolutions and decisions related to their functioning were taken by the group only after taking into consideration everyone's views. If there were differences of opinion, they followed up by building consensus or through voting. The mapping exercise they had carried out (see previous sub-

section on 'Evolving adolescent capacity to engage', under 'Agency', Chapter 2), in particular, had given them an understanding of the realities in their communities. This understanding was the basis for them to prioritize those problems that were of interest to the whole community, such as sanitation, streetlights, eve-teasing, and lack of education. Even when an individual problem emerged, like a child fell into a pit in a dark locality and fractured their arm, or a girl was being forced to marry against her wishes, they said they would assess whether or not there was community support and then take up the matter for collective action. If the issue did not have support, then they would review the matter and modify their resolutions and decisions within the group.

The CSOs supported them in this process by organizing training programmes, which enabled them to identify the problems through surveys, group discussions and observations; analyse the issues through reflective questions; and prioritize issues on the basis of how many people were affected. They were also supported by CSOs to approach appropriate authorities, sometimes repeatedly, to ensure resolution of the problems raised. The adolescents said that once their identity as a group was established they could decide on issues/ action independently of the CSOs. Those adolescents whom we interviewed acknowledged that they were leaders in their groups, but, according to them, the whole group was free to make collective or consensual decisions. The Additional Director General of Police also observed that adolescents who were more articulate became leaders, but later group participation seemed to overcome the leader's position.

Consequently, over a period of time, particularly in the last two years, reports of police violence against children have decreased, as corroborated both by UNICEF Madhya Pradesh and Muskaan.

<sup>76</sup> Corroborated by UNICEF Madhya Pradesh in a personal communication (WhatsApp message), 3 November 2021.

## How adolescents influence resolutions

The adolescents interviewed mentioned that most families were initially reluctant to let them (especially girls) make their own resolutions and decisions, but the strength of the group enabled them to persuade their parents to let them participate. The children had access to several decision-making spaces, most often at the local level and occasionally at the state level or departmental/judicial level. However, in relation to raising issues with elected members of the government, they said they did not receive any systemic/official responses. When this was mentioned to the (now former) elected representatives of the local government, they expressed their helplessness and complained that the Municipal Corporation made resolutions and decisions on its own and did not even invite them to participate in ward-level planning processes.

Some issues raised by children that are yet to be responded to include the appropriate timing for midday meals; the availability of food grains, roads, chamber pits and community halls; and the need for police patrols, as well as stopping the sale of liquor near schools and controlling street harassment ('eve-teasing').

"There was a child marriage in the Valmiki community, and we came to know that the girl did not want to get married so we went as a group and spoke to the parents, but they didn't agree, so we spoke to ChildLine, and the parents had to stop the marriage."

UDAY adolescent group,  
focus group discussion (online) with CWC,  
12 April 2021

At the same time, the Assistant Director of the DWCD made the following observations in relation to adolescents and young people influencing resolutions and decisions at departmental meetings (the statement was made with reference to an initiative of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme which involved multi-sectoral efforts):

At the DCPC [District Child Protection Committee] meeting, the issue of begging came up, so ten departments constituted a task force and identified the hot spots. The children were rescued, counselling was done, and parents were also counselled. Some parents did not have identity cards; there were problems of income; they had come from outside and taken up beggary as an occupation, so we assisted them. Some children were sent for rehabilitation; even then, a few disappeared, so we had to recapture them.

Assistant Director of the DWCD,  
interview (online) with CWC, August 2021

Some issues raised by children that are yet to be responded to include the appropriate timing for midday meals; the availability of food grains, roads, chamber pits and community halls; and the need for police patrols, as well as stopping the sale of liquor near schools and controlling street harassment ('eve-teasing'). The unresolved concerns shared by children from DNT communities include their repeated arrest by police, the lack of streetlights, flooded drains, and harassment by local thugs. Adolescents pointed out that while earlier they had to visit the same office as many as seven to eight times to be heard, now it takes only two to three visits, as they are recognized as a *yuva samooch* (youth group) by some officials.

## Analysis

Based on the findings above, the potential areas and opportunities for the enhancement of adolescent participation in governance and challenges are highlighted in the following sub-sections.

## Existing structures and processes for adolescent participation

The existing structures and processes<sup>77</sup> that we have been able to document under the Safe City Initiative that provide an opportunity for adolescent participation are:

- **Structures and processes related to the strengthening of children's agency and to creating an environment for their participation:** These include the participatory mapping exercise, formation of child groups, setting up of resource centres and community child protection committees, the federation of children's groups, and building networks within the Safe City Initiative including the CSO Alliance for advocacy.
- **Structures and processes related to devolution and child-friendly governance:** These include the existence of *mohalla samitis* (neighbourhood committees) and ward committees, in line with the 74th Constitutional Amendment, which legally provides for public (including adolescent) participation, and the endorsement of ward plans prepared by the government with the participation of adolescents, which will provide a precedent for accepting participatory planning by adolescents during scaling up.

The first set of structures has served its purpose well, most of all in relation to the empowerment of children and

mobilizing them to exercise their agency. It was impressive to listen to the children's groups and sense their confidence and courage. It was also evident that once mobilized in their own groups, the solidarity among them and community support received by them are organically linked. These groups have also tried to take up systemic challenges like police violence. The support from CSOs had been sustained and helped children to preserve the organizational memory of child clubs, even when children have aged out, but continued to support new group members to sustain their advocacy.

This is at a time when the data from the National Crime Records Bureau for the three years 2018 to 2020 puts Madhya Pradesh among the top three states (along with Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh) for crime against children.<sup>78</sup> While crime against children saw a decline in all the three states in the year 2020, it is still greater in Madhya Pradesh at 59.1 per 100,000 people, compared to 39.8 per 100,000 in Maharashtra and 17.9 per 100,000 in Uttar Pradesh. Challenges remain in ensuring the participation of the acutely marginalized, which are aggravated by deepening inequity, distress, and poverty due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has placed thousands of children in precarious situations.

These facts seriously underscore both the need to consolidate the SCI in Bhopal, as well as to expand it beyond Bhopal, while enhancing its scope, quality and reach. The initiative cannot be dependent on the sympathy or sensitivity

It was impressive to listen to the children's groups and sense their confidence and courage. It was also evident that once mobilized in their own groups, the solidarity among them and community support received by them are organically linked.

77 There are, of course, many other structures and platforms for the participation of children and adolescent that have been set up under different state schemes – Student Police Cadets, Girls' Groups under Shaurya Dal (Courage Team), Bharat Scouts and Guides, National Cadet Corps, the National Social Service scheme, child protection committees, district child protection committees, Kishori Samooh (Girls' Groups) under the Scheme for Adolescent Girls, School Cabinets, Saathiya (Peer Educator) under Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (National Youth Health Scheme), among others – but these are outside the scope of this study.

78 Times of India, 'Madhya Pradesh in Top Three in Crime Against Children: NCRB', *The Times of India*, 18 September 2021, <[www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/madhya-pradesh-in-top-three-in-crime-against-children-ncrb/articleshow/86312002.cms](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/madhya-pradesh-in-top-three-in-crime-against-children-ncrb/articleshow/86312002.cms)>, accessed 4 November 2021.

Constituting and devolving power to the *mohalla samitis* (neighbourhood committees) and ward committees in all cities, along with mobilizing children into recognized groups that ensure continuity, is essential to ensure that the participatory plans are accepted, funded and implemented and that governments are held accountable.

of individual officials, but adolescent participation has to be integrated into the system. This is where the second set of structures, related to devolution and child-friendly governance, is critical. Constituting and devolving power to the *mohalla samitis* (neighbourhood committees) and ward committees in all cities, along with mobilizing children into recognized groups that ensure continuity, is essential to ensure that the participatory plans are accepted, funded and implemented and that governments are held accountable.

### State buy-in and accountability

At the city level, sustained advocacy by UNICEF has resulted in several government officials from departments like the DWCD, as well as departments for education, police and health, and elected local government members in the community supporting the SCI. As the programme is located in the state capital, CSOs and UNICEF have also been able to engage with state level officials and elected representatives. Yet, as we have seen from the responses of the few officials we interviewed, the inclusion of children's views and thinking outside the dominant protectionist view has not spread widely within the system, which still fails to respect the agency and dignity of children.

The state has a long history of commitment to support children's protection initiatives; for instance, early acceptance of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme and adoption of several state schemes by the DWCD (such as Ladli Laxmi Yojana,<sup>79</sup> Atal Bal Mission,<sup>80</sup> Lado Abhiyan,<sup>81</sup> Shaurya Dal,

and Mukhya Mantri Samudayik Netritva Kshamata Vikas Karyakram<sup>82</sup>). The state has also supported non-government innovations in child protection and education, leading to informed participation and empowerment. While high and mid-level officials are aware that these schemes exist, the quality of their implementation on the ground has been dependent on the political will of the party in power.

In relation to political decentralization, state buy-in is demonstrated by the support for devolution under the 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Indian Constitution. However, centrally promoted urban schemes like the National Urban Renewal Mission and Smart City Mission have been adopted in 'mission' mode, meaning that centralized corporate institutions have been set up to facilitate private investment and plan for rapid infrastructure development. As seen in most of the urban capitals, as well as in Madhya Pradesh, earlier state buy-in to welfare, social security and devolution policies is now being weakened by the state's focus on a market-led economy, which is transforming public services like education, health, sanitation, water, and housing into profit-making enterprises.

Therefore, ensuring that the SCI's core principles are upheld in the face of these schemes will require strategic planning, sustained advocacy and dedicated resources. There is an implicit danger that if SCI initiatives focus on working with government departments more than with elected local governments and community and children's groups, they are likely to strengthen bureaucracy and undermine participatory and democratic

79 Translated as 'Protection of Girl Child', this scheme provide financial support on the birth of a girl child and for her education.

80 This scheme by the Atala Behari Vajpayee Mission was for child health and nutrition.

81 The Beloved Campaign gives awards for stopping child marriage.

82 The Chief Minister's Community Leadership Development Scheme is for youth wishing to initiate decisive actions for the development of their areas.



governance. These forces are already at work within centralized schemes for urban development. Weakened elected municipal bodies and unaccountable special purpose vehicles are not going to serve the most marginalized.

“The Councillors from six wards said that they would discuss with schools about the condition of playgrounds and explore whether children received water and to ensure that they were not beaten up. They also said that they could talk about alcohol not being permitted to be sold to children, and about not employing children in such shops. They were also confident that they could speak about this to the public.”

Source: *Review and Upscaling of Strategies that Emerged from “Safe City Initiative”*<sup>83</sup>

### Adolescent representation

The key strategies<sup>84</sup> that have been followed in the SCI in Bhopal have enabled adolescents and children to organize themselves into groups and raise the issues that concern them, as well as those of the community. For instance, adolescent groups have frequently flagged the issue of school enrolment and successfully taken it up with education officials. Tribal and working children and adolescent groups have intervened to stop child marriage and child labour, reported anti-social activities in their locality (at the risk of being treated as informers), and protested against police harassment and violence, especially against children from DNTs.

During the COVID lockdowns, some of these groups took the initiative to coach and organize vocational courses for younger students; promoted social distancing through campaigns; and raised the issue of the increased consumption of drugs and liquor during lockdown, which has adversely affected the ability of some families to fulfil other needs. Based on their earlier experience with participatory mapping, these groups have participated as both key informants and joint researchers with adults to understand the prevalence of violence against children during the period 2020 to 2021. The information from the study about their lived experiences, gathered through discussions and interviews, has strengthened their ability to represent themselves and their communities. These experiences show that collectivization is crucial for children from marginalized communities, as they can jointly present their views on protection and safety to government agencies in consulted and agreed ways and their organized strength has strong advocacy impacts.

Within the adolescent groups, the more articulate members have taken on lead roles, but observers have noted the gradual emergence of wider representation. There was no specific mention of any systems in place for the leaders reporting back to their own groups – although this seems to be done informally during group meetings. This process of the democratization of representation needs to be strengthened, while mainstreaming the SCI to all 85 wards in Bhopal, mobilizing many more youth and communities and building alliances (even with other children’s

Based on their earlier experience with participatory mapping, these groups have participated as both key informants and joint researchers with adults to understand the prevalence of violence against children during the period 2020 to 2021.

83 Josantony, Joseph, et al., *Review and Upscaling of Strategies that Emerged from “Safe City Initiative”*, 2018.

84 These strategies include the participatory mapping of child protection issues and needs, collectivization and organized participation of children, mobilization and strengthening of youth, resource centres as safe and empowering spaces, linking children with educational and vocational skill building, creating safe spaces for children, setting up of community child protection committees, strengthening child protection systems and allied systems, advocacy with key government stakeholders, using the law for change, communication as a strategy, and building networks.

organizations outside the ambit of the initiative), otherwise there will not be significant representation at the city or higher levels.

### Strategies for expansion

The Government of Madhya Pradesh is expanding the Safe City Initiative to five more cities in the state, integrating the key strategies of the SCI in Bhopal. Whether or not the institutional learning from adolescent participation in the Bhopal initiative will form the basis for expansion will depend on the extent to which its process integrity is ensured and the capacity of the various stakeholders is built. It may be recalled that UNICEF paid great attention to training, capacity building, and advocacy during the early phases of piloting, and that this has been the foundation of the SCI's effectiveness. Whether or not the intensity of training and advocacy will be retained as expansion takes place, and whether or not there will be enough focus on enhancing the agency of adolescents and children, are critical factors.

The success of the expansion will depend on the government's commitment to guarantee investment, devolve finances and responsibilities to the lowest tiers of urban governance, build structures to promote and accept participatory plans, provide strong departmental support for implementation, and link up with able partners who can mobilize children, youth and communities. The nature of UNICEF's engagement and its technical support at such expanded levels will also impact on the quality of the expansion. UNICEF and the CSOs implementing the SCI will need to reflect on whether all parastatal and governmental bodies (such as government schoolteachers, *anganwadis* and accredited social health activists [ASHA]) will function under and report to state and city governments,

or if should they be strengthened and be accountable to local governments and communities, as mandated by the 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment and its Schedules.

“The project is expanding to all 85 wards, but there has to be absolute replication, including participation and decision making by the adolescents. Vociferous and numerically large groups get more attention, as they have the vote; but children will not have the vote until 18 and the family structure also disempowers them. The idea of children as the property of parents has to be discarded.”

**Anuradha Shankar,**  
*Indian Police Service, Additional Director General (TRG), Madhya Pradesh Police, interview (online) with CWC, 9 June 2021*

### Exclusion and inequity

The adolescents and most of the other stakeholders did not mention exclusion and inequity as issues of concern, and we were unable to enquire further into this in the online format. However, those adolescents who are unable to participate clearly have pressing economic needs or have been historically discriminated against as 'slum-dwellers' or 'criminals', children from DNTs, girls, children from minority groups, and working children. Instances of child marriage, although decreasing, are also of concern to adolescents, as they highlight significant gender inequalities. Once they are mobilized into groups and engaged in participatory processes, adolescent groups undoubtedly try to challenge the status quo and access their entitlements.

The two main challenges to inclusion that have been highlighted are: family and community resistance as adolescents, especially girls, attempt

Whether or not the institutional learning from adolescent participation in the Bhopal initiative will form the basis for expansion will depend on the extent to which its process integrity is ensured and the capacity of the various stakeholders is built.

to make decisions about their own lives; and bureaucratic inertia, which dissuades officials from recognizing and responding to adolescent agency. Frontline government workers and elected community representatives do seem to respond much better, because, of necessity, they have to be close to the community base. But economic inequality is an outcome of the larger development paradigm being followed by the state. Unless that paradigm is questioned, along with the decline of democratic devolution, exclusion and inequity are likely to remain.

### Role of CSOs

CSOs have played a major role in encouraging the formation of children's groups, enabling them to share across wards, collaborating with each other, and sensitizing officials. They have implemented the basic strategy for the participation of adolescents through organizing, training, mapping and prioritizing needs, mobilizing other adolescents and adults, and consistently engaging in evidence-based advocacy with the relevant authorities. CSOs have also played a major role in the capacity-building of children and youth groups, with technical support provided by UNICEF, and in strengthening the linkages with the community organizations that existed prior to the SCI.

During the course of SCI implementation, CSOs have learnt that doing something for children is quite different from children leading the way – especially when the children are organized. One of the CSOs claimed that even UNICEF has learnt how to better integrate collaboration among multiple internal sectors from the issues raised by children. Access to authorities is not the same for all CSOs, as they have different constituencies and

approaches, but the SCI has brought some level of integration between CSO and state initiatives. CSOs have made optimal use of UNICEF's leveraging ability for advocacy at the state level in favour of children's rights. The role of CSOs in creating a mutual synergy between them and UNICEF on behalf of the children is appreciable.

The CSOs that were part of developing the project framework prior to the commencement of the project, and the members of the CSO Alliance, have the potential to develop into a very strong advocacy group to bring about state-level policy changes that may directly and indirectly strengthen the SCI in urban areas and its counterpart rural initiatives in Madhya Pradesh. The members of the CSO Alliance could also be engaged in implementing the SCI in other cities and providing technical support on the ground in partnership with UNICEF.

“At the level of participation of children and adolescents, the past six years have been a learning experience for all of us. We have all believed children, we respect them – the sense of participation was new to us, we understood what it meant and what we were not doing – doing something for children versus children leading the way is very different.”

**Shivani Taneja,**

*Muskaan (SCI partner CSO), interview (online) with CWC, 21 January 2021*

“That participation should be top priority in the Safe City Initiative was very much there from the beginning – that every decision has to be with child participation – along with child protection.”

**Archana Sahay,**

*Aarambh (SCI partner CSO), interview (online) with CWC, 21 January 2021*

**The CSOs that were part of developing the project framework prior to the commencement of the project, and the members of the CSO Alliance, have the potential to develop into a very strong advocacy group to bring about state-level policy changes that may directly and indirectly strengthen the SCI in urban areas and its counterpart rural initiatives in Madhya Pradesh.**

## Role of UNICEF

UNICEF Madhya Pradesh has paid close attention to the voices of children in its project areas and has ensured that they are heard within their own communities – right up to the state level. In partnership with CSOs, it has created platforms and opportunities for children to speak directly to decision makers at various levels and provided support for children’s meaningful participation. UNICEF has made a significant attempt to integrate participation into protection by initiating, guiding and expanding the SCI, while building the capacities of partner CSOs to facilitate children’s participation. It has provided the key training inputs that have developed the strategy for promoting adolescent participation in governance in the initiative.

**UNICEF has made a significant attempt to integrate participation into protection by initiating, guiding and expanding the SCI, while building the capacities of partner CSOs to facilitate children’s participation.**

At the same time, UNICEF Madhya Pradesh has provided information and opportunities for community level government representatives, such as *anganwadi* (child care) workers, to raise issues related to children’s participation in higher official settings, which they were not previously able to do with the same rigour. It has also strategically leveraged state support at all levels of governance through consistent advocacy. In the process, UNICEF has enunciated and popularized the key principles of children’s participation, in line with international agreements ratified by the Government of India. It has, thus, been able to build consensus on the rights that underlie the SCI. Its periodic participatory review of progress with partners and communities has helped retain the focus on rights.

In the future, CSOs feel that UNICEF could play a stronger role in making all policy developments more participatory, including those related to the expansion of the Safe City Initiative. The

convergence that UNICEF was building across different departments, adolescent groups and CSOs brought out concerns related to multiple issues, beyond those traditionally linked to care and protection, such as distress migration and skills development. To address these, there is a need for increased support for the SCI programme. UNICEF also recognizes that its funding challenges have slowed down the work of the SCI through partnerships and led to diminished coordination among state agencies. In such a context, all stakeholders feel a need for UNICEF to increase its capacity building, promotion of innovations, training, and advocacy.

UNICEF Madhya Pradesh has been trying to expand participation with a ‘light touch approach’. However, although this approach may report big numbers, it does not have quality, depth and sustainability in terms of the participation of children and adolescents. Community-based engagement is critical to build the capacity of children, and their consequent participation, to influence decision making. The SCI has not reached a stage where the government’s capacity strengthening will lead to the meaningful and rights-based participation of children in governance processes. For such quality engagement, the community level engagement of UNICEF through its partners is critical. In order to make this happen, investment is needed.

## Enhancing participation

The adolescents that took part in this study felt that their participation had improved the work of the SCI by leveraging their organized strength to assist state agencies to deliver services. Key to their understanding was the fact that they had come together to form groups, which gave them the strength

to participate, and that they needed to expanded these groups and form networks of groups. They also thought that their participation could be further enhanced if women's groups and other senior leaders in the community were to provide more support, and if they were able to ask for accountability for the funds being spent for community and child welfare.

The CSOs supported the idea of enhancing adolescent participation through the strategy of mobilizing, mapping, and advocacy, detailed in the current phase of the SCI. Other stakeholders emphasized that the training they received made child participation acceptable and possible for them. However, they pointed out that this alone would not have been enough to facilitate children, or to advocate along with children, if the continuous support that they required to understand children's rights and the necessity of their participation in governance had faltered. The participatory evaluation of these case studies by the adolescent groups could be another step forward in the enhancement of their participation. They

could also be drawn into commenting on, and helping formulate, UNICEF's future strategy for training and advocacy.

"Before UNICEF, our ways of working were very different... Now it is much better, children speak much more openly about their issues. Earlier we only gave importance to what we had to say, but now we listen to the kids. Uday Society training helped us to better understand about children. CSOs offer a lot of support... we ask them for support when there are problems, and without the support from UNICEF and CSOs it would be difficult to do this work, they trust us a lot. We give a lot of support to kids and families, even if there is a problem in the middle of the night we go and help, for example, when there is a fight between a couple, we try to make them understand."

*Anganwadi (child care) workers from different parts of Bhopal, focus group discussion (online) with CWC, 3 July 2021*

However, they pointed out that this alone would not have been enough to facilitate children, or to advocate along with children, if the continuous support that they required to understand children's rights and the necessity of their participation in governance had faltered.



## Recommendations

Based on our findings and analysis, we make the following recommendations to enhance the participation of adolescent and young people in governance.

### Adolescent groups

Use community resource centres, city-wide alliances and federations to build friendships and solidarity; seek out adolescents and young people from marginalized and vulnerable groups and encourage their participation.

**Recommendation 1. Strengthen adolescent groups:** Organize more adolescents and young people; continually identify your agenda for action and advocacy; practise collective leadership and informed decision making; be 'your own first line of defence'; and take part in capacity building with a direct bearing on your advocacy issues (participatory mapping, priority ranking, collective leadership, child budgeting, presentation skills, para-legal training, skill development, and recording organizational memory to pass on the learning to the next set of adolescents).

**Recommendation 2. Be heard:** Ask for the establishment of oversight institutions to which you (supported by CSOs) can appeal when your views

are not heard and acted upon by the authorities; use child protection and ward committee meetings to present your views and experiences and ask that they be conducted regularly in your community; and suggest a framework (social audits and participatory evaluations of the Safe City Initiative, UNICEF, CSOs, CWC, etc.) to ensure the accountability of state and non-state agencies and to make them more effective.

**Recommendation 3. Build alliances:** Use community resource centres, city-wide alliances and federations to build friendships and solidarity; seek out adolescents and young people from marginalized and vulnerable groups and encourage their participation; identify common spaces (*anganwadis* [child care centres], parks, schools etc.) to discuss developments that impact on adolescents; debate changing realities (pandemic, communal and linguistic disharmony, online education, abuse of digital and social media, privatization of services) to bring them into the framework of child protection; and invite government authorities, department



officials, *anganwadi* (child care) workers, people's representatives, and CSO officials to participate in these discussions.

## CSOs

### Partner CSOs

**Recommendation 1. Strengthen participation:** Ensure the meaningful participation of adolescents and young people, especially in emergency situations when intensified protection concerns require an extra focus on safeguarded participation. Produce and disseminate capacity building modules for developing attitudes, knowledge and skills in participation with adolescents and young people; enlarge the CSO Alliance in partnership with UNICEF to facilitate, mobilize, and provide support to adolescent groups; assist in federating children's groups with other organizations on common issues; and conduct internal monitoring of the goals of the Safe City Initiative.

**Recommendation 2. Share experiences:** Create a platform for the regular sharing of experiences to build a vision of how to enhance adolescent participation in governance; promote child-led documentation, mapping, audits, and evaluations of all care and protection activities at regular intervals; integrate community organization and city-wide actions into child protection; and conduct peer sharing and training to ensure continuity in participation and to build organizational memory.

**Recommendation 3. Nurture understanding:** Closely track the emerging challenges in relation to children's protection in various urban renewal programmes; develop the required political, ideological and ethical grounding to facilitate the meaningful

empowered participation of adolescents and young people; and revisit the prioritization of agendas, in conjunction with adolescents and young people, so that their own capacities for self-protection can be increased.

### Other CSOs

**Recommendation 4. Expand participation:** Engage with other CSOs working with allied human and children's rights (whether in the same *bastis* [slums], other parts of Bhopal, or in other cities as the Safe City Initiative expands); mainstream adolescents' and young people's agency and their right to participation with all stakeholders in all urban programmes; and embed a participation agenda in all existing work, through micro-level initiatives that can be gradually expanded in scope.

**Recommendation 5. Build state-level alliances:** Sustain efforts by other CSOs in support of a safe city concept for all sections of society; and integrate children's organization and participation in all matters affecting them and their community rights – both directly and indirectly.

## State

### Central government

**Recommendation 1. Integrate adolescent participation across all schemes:** Gather lessons from the Safe City Initiative in Bhopal to embed the participation of adolescents and young people in all urban schemes by providing spaces for adolescents and young people to organize and assert their agency.

**Recommendation 2. Uphold national and international commitments:** Actively support children's rights through legislation and policy, as stated in the

Ensure the meaningful participation of adolescents and young people, especially in emergency situations when intensified protection concerns require an extra focus on safeguarded participation.

National Child Policy, UNCRC and other national and international legal instruments.

**Recommendation 3. Allocate financial resources:** Allocate financial and other resources to strengthen mechanisms for the participation of adolescents and young people.

#### State government

**Recommendation 4. Democratize and devolve power and finances, according to legal provisions:** Accept as a government mandate the full implementation of the 74th Constitutional Amendment, including the principle of subsidiarity and devolution of power and finances, with defined budgetary allocation for adolescent participation and the capacity building of state government functionaries. Review programmes like the government's Safe City Project and Smart City Mission to ensure that they do not undermine the democratic principles, intent and practice of the Safe City Initiative and the 74th Amendment with respect to the participation of adolescents and young people.

**Recommendation 5. Involve adolescents and young people in policy consultations and evaluations:** Provide adolescents with the opportunity to conduct a social audit of the Safe City Initiative to build their capacities and agency. Implement the Madhya Pradesh Child Protection Policy in consultation with adolescents and young people and commit to the principles that guide the Safe City Initiative. Use the learnings of the Safe City Initiative to involve more adolescents and young people in training for state government functionaries, with adolescents and young people leading the sessions on certain modules.

**Recommendation 6. Build the capacity of all agencies in participatory governance:** Facilitate all existing government and non-government agencies in the state to promote participatory governance at the ward, municipal and state levels. Embed the agenda of adolescent participation, including their right to frame policy, and denounce violence against marginalized communities in all training and capacity building programmes for state government functionaries, especially the police, so as to continually sensitize them about these issues.

**Recommendation 7. Strengthen frontline workers to be more effective:** Provide *anganwadi* (child care) workers who, unlike CSOs, are present in every community, with better working conditions and by recognizing their work; provide them with the support they require to be an effective first line of contact for children in need of protection; and enable them to embed the participation of adolescents and young people in their work.

**Recommendation 8. Allocate financial resources:** Allocate financial and other resources to strengthen mechanisms for the participation of adolescents and young people.

#### Local government

**Recommendation 9. Democratize and devolve power and finances to the lowest tiers:** Ask for devolution of power and finances, with defined budgetary allocation for adolescent participation and the capacity building of local government functionaries; ensure the participation of adolescents and young people in policy making at the local level by conducting social audits and evaluations of the Safe City Initiative; and ensure that children's

Provide *anganwadi* (child care) workers who, unlike CSOs, are present in every community, with better working conditions and by recognizing their work; provide them with the support they require to be an effective first line of contact for children in need of protection; and enable them to embed the participation of adolescents and young people in their work.



voices are sought, heard and acted upon by elected representatives and administrative officials.

**Recommendation 10. Build the capacity of all government functionaries:** Establish spaces for adolescents and young people to gather, discuss and debate issues of concern to them with local government functionaries; embed the agenda of participation of adolescents and young people and the non-discrimination of marginalized communities in all training and capacity building programmes for local government functionaries, especially the police; and involve more adolescents and young people in training for local government functionaries, with adolescents and young people leading the instruction on certain modules.

**Recommendation 11. Provide protection to adolescents and young people and workers participating in governance:** Strengthen *anganwadi* (child care) workers, who, unlike CSOs, are present in every community, by providing better working conditions and by build mechanisms to recognize and appreciate the support they extend for children's protection. Ensure that adolescents and young people, as well as their communities, have safe spaces in which to participate and express their views. In the event of their suppression (especially by power-holders), include mechanisms for adolescents and young people to raise their issues with trusted adults or through structures like child-friendly post-boxes and ensure their confidentiality.

**Recommendation 12. Allocate financial resources:** Allocate financial and other resources to strengthen mechanisms for the participation of adolescents and young people.

## UNICEF

### **Recommendation 1. Evolve the strategy for the integration and expansion of the Safe City Initiative:**

Integrate critical lessons from the Safe City Initiative on how adolescents and young people are enabled to participate in governance, around both protection and community issues, into an evolving strategy at the regional and national levels. Design the expansion strategy considering its impact on democratic devolution as well as state accountability to children. Include advocacy at the highest levels of governance, capacity building, developing knowledge products, building and strengthening partnerships, and mobilizing resources.

### **Recommendation 2. Internalize participation across sectors within UNICEF:**

Highlight UNICEF's contribution in design and implementation so that it can provide a roadmap for continued institutional engagement with multi-sectoral convergence. Adopt planning that is influenced by the nuances of participation highlighted in this report including reinforcing in UNICEF planning the fact that adolescents and community needs are often related to each other. Include competence in adolescents' and young people's participation as part of the job description of professionals in all sectors of UNICEF as part of children's rights. While rights-based participation should be integrated into all sectors in UNICEF, a lead sector should be identified and designated with clear deliverables around strengthening the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments and integrating the participation of adolescents and young people as part of devolution.

**Recommendation 3. Institutionalize participation across all programmes:** Ensure that the participation of

Adopt planning that is influenced by the nuances of participation highlighted in this report including reinforcing in UNICEF planning the fact that adolescents and community needs are often related to each other.

Ensure that the participation of adolescent and young people is embedded within systems across all programmes, rather than being incumbent on individual functionaries and their willingness.

adolescent and young people is embedded within systems across all programmes, rather than being incumbent on individual functionaries and their willingness. Conduct extensive consultations with sectoral departments, both within and outside UNICEF. Insert generic and institutional protocols with indicators, advocacy tools and resource allocations for mainstreaming adolescent participation into project design to ensure the transparency and accountability of all stakeholders. Capacities should be built internally among UNICEF programme teams in the area of rights-based participation of adolescents and young people and integrated into programming. Also provide adolescents and young people with the opportunity to conduct a social audit of the Safe City Initiative.

**Recommendation 4. Build the capacity of CSOs and government functionaries:** Continue the capacity building of CSOs and government functionaries (with special attention to advocacy for improving of the working conditions of anganwadi [child care] and health

workers) at all levels and expand them to the middle tiers of both government and CSO structures where it is most required. While engaging with large cadre-based programmes like the National Service Scheme (NSS) and Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) to support the Safe City Initiative, keep in mind that the participation and agency of adolescents and young people may not be the focus of these groups and, therefore, they may requiring further capacity building in this area.

**Recommendation 5.** Enable adolescent groups to build federations and alliances with other groups, even outside the ambit of the Safe City Initiative, on common issues to empower their united agency.

## Conclusion

The Safe City initiative in Bhopal is a novel attempt by UNICEF to take up urban issues, especially with respect to empowering the agency of adolescents from vulnerable communities. Hence, there is a need to learn from it before



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expanding it, as well as an opportunity to place it in the context of other centralized urban development schemes and draw lessons from them about their impact (positive or adverse) on participatory democracy. It is clear from this case study that when structures are put in place for adolescent participation, adolescents respond remarkably well, especially when they are mobilized and given information on their rights and responsibilities. The other actors that have been facilitated by UNICEF to promote adolescent participation include government agencies at the local, municipal, district and state levels. CSOs have been strong partners, organizing groups, transferring skills and enabling processes at the ground level. *Anganwadi* (child care) workers, the police and local government functionaries, who already have roots in vulnerable communities,

can become effective agents of change if they are enabled (with necessary support and skills) to respond to the demands of the organized adolescents.

A pioneering initiative, the SCI has the potential to impact on adolescents and young people, communities and governance in several ways, including by reducing violence and increasing the acceptance of marginalized communities. The scaling up of the SCI through the government is crucial to achieve this and, as the SCI is rolled out to other cities, the lessons from Bhopal must inform the programme design. To sustain this programme, UNICEF's financial and technical backing, as well as the incorporation of programme indicators for monitoring the meaningful rights-based participation of children, will be crucial.

**A pioneering initiative, the SCI has the potential to impact on adolescents and young people, communities and governance in several ways, including by reducing violence and increasing the acceptance of marginalized communities.**



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# 3

## Children's Participation in Child-Friendly Local Governance, Maharashtra, India

“We, the Bal Panchayat [children’s council] members conduct meetings (Bal Sabhas) [children’s collectives] of children in the age group 11–18 years. In these we discuss child rights and other issues and take them up with Gram Panchayats. Now our Gram Panchayat members and community do listen to us and are aware of our rights. Earlier they used to think ‘what do children know?’ Now our Gram Panchayat and people create platforms for us to speak, they respect our views and opinions and act on them. Our Gram Panchayat has included our suggestions and demands into Gram Panchayat plans. For example, water filters for communities and CCTV cameras on school roads. We not only stand up for our own rights, but for those of the community as well. We actively initiate and contribute to social development activities in the village. We have started campaigns like ‘plastic free village’, ‘open defecation free village’, etc. to raise awareness. We want such platforms for children’s participation at the district and state levels too.”

**Kajal,**<sup>85</sup> member of Bal Panchayat, at the UNICEF South Asia Engaged and Heard Participation Guidance Launch, 5 November 2020

### Introduction

The Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) initiative in Maharashtra was visualized and led by the Social Policy division of UNICEF Maharashtra, in partnership with the state government.

This case study looks at the specific focus of the CFLG on child participation. It includes the overall evolution of child participation in governance at the local *gram panchayat* level, as well as its transformative impact on inclusive and responsive planning, both upstream at



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<sup>85</sup> Kajal is a 17-year-old member of the *Bal Panchayat*, the committee elected by the children’s assembly of the village.

The Child-Friendly Panchayat programme is embedded in this devolution of rural governance, as are the guidelines issued by the 14<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission for implementation of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP).

the state level and downstream at the community level.

India has a long tradition of local governance by village *panchayats*,<sup>86</sup> but it was only through the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment of 1992 that the system of Panchayati Raj (meaning rule through *panchayats*) was formally introduced into the legal framework, thereby mandating the existence of *gram panchayats* in India at the local government level, with the *gram sabha*<sup>87</sup> being the smallest and only permanent unit of the system.<sup>88</sup> The Amendment also introduced the 11<sup>th</sup> Schedule into the Constitution of India, which covers 29 matters to be devolved to local governments. The Child-Friendly Panchayat programme is embedded in this devolution of rural governance, as

are the guidelines issued by the 14<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission for implementation of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP).

## Issues faced by children in Maharashtra

Maharashtra is located in the west-central region of India and is the third largest state in India by area and the second largest by population. The capital of Maharashtra is Mumbai, a bustling metropolis and the financial capital of the country. The 2011 Census of India reported a rural population of almost 55%, a literacy rate of 82.9% (77% literacy in rural areas; almost 90% in urban areas).<sup>89</sup> Maharashtra has been a pioneer in institutionalizing local self-governance, with the Maharashtra Village Panchayats Act coming into force in 1959, amended and modified over the years. The state has 34 district *panchayats* with 27,891 village *panchayats* covering a total of 44,345 villages.<sup>90</sup> Children (below 18 years) constitute 32.1% of the population of the state, and 16% of its total budgetary expenditure in 2020/21 was on children (about 2.2% of its GDP). However, only 0.05% of the budget was spent on the health needs of children and 0.81% of the budget was allocated to addressing malnutrition, while child protection had the lowest provision at 0.1% of the children's budget.<sup>91</sup>



- 86 The word comes from *panch* (or five), meaning five elders selected to preside over village meetings and decide on the issues raised at the meeting. The selection of the elders was often mediated by the dominant caste/class and family hierarchies.
- 87 A *gram sabha* consists of all persons registered in the electoral rolls in the area of the villages, and the *gram panchayat* is the elected village council.
- 88 Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), 'Panchayat, a Knowledge Hub: What is a Panchayat', undated, <[www.pria.org/panchayathub/panchayat\\_text\\_view.php](http://www.pria.org/panchayathub/panchayat_text_view.php)>, 26 August 2021.
- 89 Government of India, *Census of India 2011: Primary Census Abstract 2011 Slum-India (Bhārata ki janaganānā 2011: prāthamika janaganānā sārā)*, Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi, 2011.
- 90 Government of India, 'Local Government Directory', Ministry of Panchayati Raj, undated, <[www.lgdirectory.gov.in/](http://www.lgdirectory.gov.in/)>, accessed 26 August 2021.
- 91 Singh and Nair, *Child Responsive Budgeting for Maharashtra – A Way Forward*, June 2021.

### Box 13. Children's participation in the Maharashtra State Policy for Children

Maharashtra has a State Policy for Children,<sup>92</sup> which is in line with the principles of the UNCRC and India's National Policy for Children. The policy, while promising to uphold the rights of children through various programmes and schemes, also recognizes the "consultation and participation of children, in an age-appropriate manner, in all matters affecting them" as an inalienable right. It advocates for the establishment of *bal panchayats* at the state, district, *taluka*<sup>93</sup> and *gram panchayat* level to ensure children's participation in issues related to them. It also states that "the state shall pilot and institutionalise successful models of child participation in accordance with its obligations under UNCRC". In addition, children's organizations/clubs shall be created in all schools, villages, institutions and housing societies to enable children to voice their concerns and desires. Every department shall be equipped with the facilities enabling children to express their opinions.<sup>94</sup> UNICEF is leading the revision of the Child Policy and has submitted a draft to the relevant department for approval. Suggestions include extending child participation to local bodies like *ashram shalas*<sup>95</sup> and care homes; developing the capacities of both adults for facilitating participation in safe spaces and adolescents for meaningful participation; federating platforms for adolescent participation; making resources (financial, knowledge) available to promote participation; and establishing monitoring mechanisms and protocols for participation.

In 2018/19, the school drop-out rate in Maharashtra was 2.2% in upper primary school and 13.3% in secondary school. The crimes against children in Maharashtra increased from 18,892 in 2018 to 19,592 in 2019, dropping to 14,371 in 2020.<sup>96</sup> In Chandrapur district, where the pilot was conducted from 2016, child marriage and teenage pregnancy decreased between 2015/16 and 2019/20.<sup>97</sup> There are regional disparities in the state that leave a large number of children stunted, underweight and wasted. Furthermore, the infant mortality rate is high at 19 per 1,000 live births.<sup>98</sup> Of the total child population, 3.5% are labourers and one-third of married

women in the state were married before completing 18 years of age.<sup>99</sup>

The gender budget for the state of Maharashtra in 2020/21 was just 1.8% of the total state budget.<sup>100</sup> Within the gender budget, education, an enabling environment and economy accounted for nearly 81%, while only 3% was allocated to ending gender-based violence. Out of this 3% allocation, the bulk was spent on installing CCTV cameras and not on direct interventions against gender-based violence. The total allocation for gender responsive health and nutrition accounted for about 0.2% of the state's total budget. Nearly 77% of this was

Out of this 3% allocation, the bulk was spent on installing CCTV cameras and not on direct interventions against gender-based violence.

92 Government of Maharashtra, *Child Policy 2014: A Commitment on Child Development in Maharashtra through Holistic, Integrated and Planned Approach*, Women and Child Development Department, Government of Maharashtra, 2014, <<https://womenchild.maharashtra.gov.in/upload/579d811619e34Maharashtra%20State%20Child%20Policy.pdf>>, accessed 22 November 2021.

93 A *taluka* is part of a district.

94 Government of Maharashtra, *Child Policy 2014*.

95 An *ashram shala* is a rural residential school.

96 Table 4A.1, Crime against Children (IPC+SLL) – 2018–2020, National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India 2020, Statistics – Volume-1*, National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2020, p. 301.

97 UNICEF, *Child Policy 2021: Situation Analysis in View of 2014 Policy and Way Forward*, UNICEF Maharashtra, May 2021.

98 Ibid.

99 UNICEF, *Realizing Rights of Every Child Through Local Governments: Maharashtra*, UNICEF Maharashtra, undated.

100 Das, Shoumeli, and Anuradha Nair, 'How Maharashtra Invests for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Gender Budget Analysis', *Review of Market Integration*, vol. 12, issue 3, pp. 139–158, 2020, <[file:///C:/Users/Susan/AppData/Local/Temp/How%20Maharashtra%20Invests%20for%20Gender%20Equality\\_Das%20Nair.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Susan/AppData/Local/Temp/How%20Maharashtra%20Invests%20for%20Gender%20Equality_Das%20Nair.pdf)>, accessed 24 January 2022.

This also encouraged inter-generational solidarity, with women and young people at the centre.

invested in nutrition for pregnant and lactating women and on accredited social health activists (ASHAs).<sup>101</sup> The remaining investment was for antenatal and postnatal care, institutional deliveries, and menstrual hygiene management.

A study of the GPDP<sup>102</sup> in 2019 found that while an average of 34 adolescent girls (in 66.8% *gram panchayats*) and 36 boys (in 53.3% *gram panchayats*) attended *gram panchayat* meetings, the main activity had been purchasing sanitary pads for adolescent girls. The monitoring framework for the GPDP focused on elementary education, child marriage, child labour, outdoor sports, and the number of meetings of *bal sabhas* (children's collectives).<sup>103</sup> Some issues, such as school drop-out, crime against children, and infant mortality, do not appear to have been addressed.

## About the project

### UNICEF's early interventions

UNICEF's experience in promoting adolescent participation in Maharashtra first started in 2006 in three districts with the training of local government officials on child rights, and then extended to micro-planning pilots based on an appreciative enquiry approach, whereby communities and authorities were encouraged to recognize their collective strength, reaffirm their sense of responsibility, and take ownership of the health, education and protection of their children, while committing to achieving a set of aspirational goals within a mutually defined timeframe.

This also encouraged inter-generational solidarity, with women and young people at the centre.

In 2008, at the request of the Government of Maharashtra, UNICEF also initiated the Deepshikha project, as part of UNICEF's Building Young Futures programme.<sup>104</sup> This project aimed to empower young women and adolescent girls aged 12–18 years to come together to protect their rights and build their futures, while actively participating in the development of their communities. Phase 1 (2008–2012) covered 70,000 adolescent girls in the rural blocks of Chandrapur, Latur and Nandurbar and in the urban slums of three wards in Mumbai. In Phase 2 (2012–2015), the Government of Maharashtra replicated the model in the 125 most disadvantaged community development blocks in 25 districts, benefiting more than 300,000 girls.

Sumedh Gurjar, Director of the Research and Documentation Cell at the Yashwantrao Chavan Academy of Development Administration (YASHADA), stated:

The UNICEF-initiated Deepshikha programme is one of the most powerful social programmes I have come across where girls brought in a lot of change in traditional processes by taking on power structures. The programme has created a strong networking of social capital through the youth and trainers.

**Sumedh Gurjar**, Director of Research and Documentation Cell, YASHADA, interview (online) with CWC, August 2021

101 An ASHA is an adult, literate woman who is a resident of the village, selected by the *gram panchayat* under India's National Rural Health Mission to provide primary medical care for minor ailments such as diarrhoea, fever, and first aid for minor injuries, as well as report on births, deaths and any unusual health problems/disease outbreaks in the village. She is not a government employee with proper benefits.

102 SIGMA Foundation, *Maharashtra GPDP Study Key Findings and Recommendations*, UNICEF, 2019.

103 Government of Maharashtra, *Monitoring Framework for Gram Panchayat Development Plan*, Rural Development and Panchayat Department (RD&PR), Government of Maharashtra, 2020.

104 UN Women, *Making Women Count: An Annual Publication on Gender and Evaluation* by UN Women Multi Country Office for India, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka, Multi Country Office (MCO) for India, Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka, November 2015.



## Box 14. UNICEF's pilot interventions

The pilots started with education, then moved to health, WASH, and nutrition, with child protection as a recent addition. The focus was on community managed programming, young people's participation, and volunteerism, among other things. The pilots asked: How do we mobilize the community? How do we improve planning? How do we build an ecosystem for child responsive governance? The lessons from these pilots created a comprehensive model that influenced the *gram panchayat*-based planning in Maharashtra. Half the trainers came from the state machinery, and half came from the resource pool created earlier through community-based models, creating foot soldiers for the state. The social capital generated by these initiatives was instrumental in the capacity building and implementation of many state-led programmes like the Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MSRLM) and the GPDP.

*Anuradha Nair, Social Policy Specialist, UNICEF Maharashtra, interview (online) with CWC, September 2020*

### Gram Panchayat Development Plan and Child-Friendly Local Governance initiative

Influenced by the community-centric participatory planning pilots carried out with UNICEF and CSOs, the Government of Maharashtra adopted the GPDP in 2015. UNICEF began working with YASHADA, the administrative training institute of the government, to identify entry points for influencing participatory planning under the Backward Region Grants Fund (BRGF) and the Human Development Mission. The earlier model of collaboration with CSOs was replaced with partnerships with *gram panchayats* established through YASHADA's Centre for Community Managed Programming (CCMP), which acted as the key training facilitator. State institutions became responsible for transforming training into implementation.

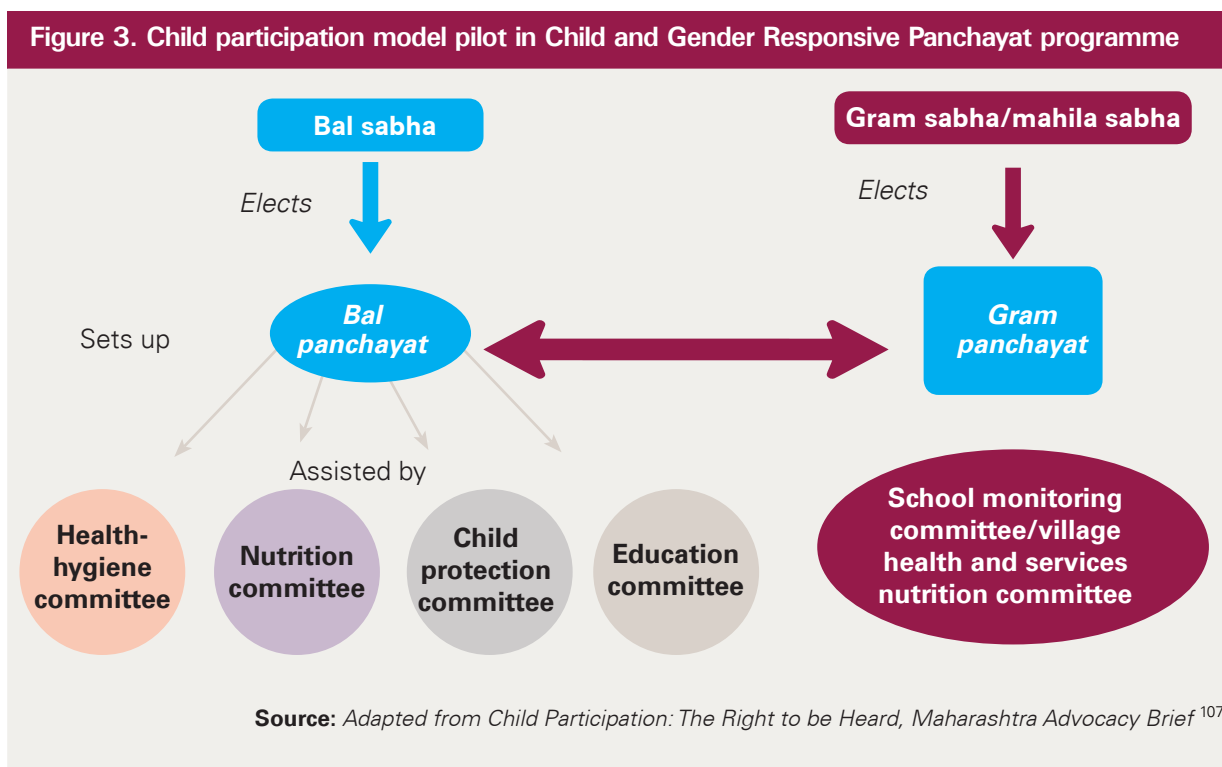
This success led UNICEF to focus on the meaningful participation of children in governance by building the capacities of local governments to create child-friendly *panchayats*. The CFLG was piloted by UNICEF in partnership with the Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (RD&PR), supported by YASHADA and the Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (MSCPCR),<sup>105</sup> to promote child sensitive governance with the meaningful participation of children. The institutions for children's engagement were formalized at the village level to ensure that they had a platform to discuss issues, were heard in community decision-making processes, and could influence the Government of Maharashtra's guidelines on child participation in *gram panchayat* planning.<sup>106</sup> The diagram in Figure 2 explains the links between *bal sabhas*, *bal panchayats*, *gram sabhas*, *gram panchayats* and different committees.

This success led UNICEF to focus on the meaningful participation of children in governance by building the capacities of local governments to create child-friendly *panchayats*.

105 The Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights was set up in July 2007 as a statutory body under Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act 2005 (4 of 2006) to protect, promote and defend child rights in the state.

106 Eka, *We, the Children – The Making of a Child Friendly Panchayat, An Activity Book for Children*, Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights and UNICEF Maharashtra, February 2018.

Figure 3. Child participation model pilot in Child and Gender Responsive Panchayat programme



The underlying principle throughout the programming has been community – and adolescent – led initiatives, volunteerism, and the creation of social capital.

This approach led to state ownership of the programme and eventually to a national level roll out of integrated micro planning, along with YASHADA assisting the Planning Commission of India in drafting a manual on Integrated District Planning for the Country in 2007.<sup>108</sup> The underlying principle throughout the programming has been community – and adolescent – led initiatives, volunteerism, and the creation of social capital. The turning point for UNICEF’s work in Maharashtra came about when it influenced the State Guidelines in line

with the 14<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission’s recommendations and *gram panchayat* plan preparations and budgeting. According to Anuradha Nair, Social Policy Specialist, UNICEF Maharashtra, the specific guidelines for Maharashtra were the “start of the institutionalization process at planning level,”<sup>109</sup> as they made mandatory the investment of 25% for social development and 10% for women and child development, making it a total of 35% investment at the *gram panchayat* level, the highest in all of India.

107 UNICEF Maharashtra, *Child Participation: The Right to be Heard*, Advocacy Brief, UNICEF Maharashtra, undated.

108 Roy, M.N., and SIGMA Foundation, *Strengthening Gram Panchayat Development Plan for Maharashtra*, Government of Maharashtra, August 2019, p. 5.

109 Anuradha Nair, Social Policy Specialist, UNICEF Maharashtra, interview (online) with CWC, September 2020.

## Box 15. Mandate for child-friendly panchayats

The Panchayati Raj system came into existence with the enactment of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of India, giving a constitutional mandate to the *gram panchayats*. As an institution of local governance, the *gram panchayat* is mandated to prepare local plans for economic development and social justice, implement schemes and perform functions for matters listed in the 11<sup>th</sup> Schedule (Article 243G) of the Constitution. Point 25 of the Schedule lists women and child development as a subject within the domain of the *panchayats*. This means that all schemes and programmes of government that deal with women and child development are now the responsibility of the *Panchayati Raj* institutions. A child-friendly panchayat is, thus, a constitutional body that has a legal mandate and responsibility to undertake measures for the development of women and children within the *gram panchayat's* area.

The child-friendly panchayat will only evolve when the *gram panchayat* creates space for children to participate in the governance process. The *gram panchayat* can define strategies to bring children into the focus of all development initiatives and provide them with an environment that is conducive to their participation in those initiatives.

One example is the effort in Maharashtra to promote children's collectives such as the *bal sabha* and the *bal panchayat*. The children in the *bal sabha* elect their *bal panchayat*. Village facilitators assist the *bal sabha* and *bal panchayat*. To synchronize these efforts between the *gram panchayat* and the *bal panchayat*, both *panchayats* share plans with each other on issues concerning children in the village. For this, it is essential that the *gram panchayats* acknowledge facilitators, allocate resources and create inclusive spaces to enable children's participation.

Source: *In the Right Direction: Aiding Child Friendly Panchayats*<sup>110</sup>

### UNICEF's strategy

UNICEF Maharashtra's strategy was to institutionalize the participation of women and children in local governance, through the *mahila sabhas* (women's committees) and *bal sabhas* (children's collectives), and also to qualitatively influence budgeting and examine whether or not there is scope for better investment. Through the facilitation of training and technical support, and continuous capacity building, UNICEF has been instrumental in influencing the evolution of child and adolescent participation in villages in Maharashtra, both directly and indirectly.

The main village-level facilitators nominated by *gram panchayats* to conduct training are the *preraks* or *prerikas* (male and female 'inspirers'), which are posted in every *gram panchayat* to conduct training and help adolescents mobilize into *bal sabhas* and elect *bal panchayats*, which then participate in *gram panchayat* meetings to articulate the viewpoints and suggestions of children. UNICEF played a major role in training these facilitators through YASHADA, which was critical in ensuring the participation of children and sustaining community connections.

**UNICEF Maharashtra's strategy was to institutionalize the participation of women and children in local governance, through the *mahila sabhas* (women's committees) and *bal sabhas* (children's collectives), and also to qualitatively influence budgeting and examine whether or not there is scope for better investment.**

110 Eka, *In the Right Direction: Aiding Child Friendly Panchayats*, Handbook for PRI Functionaries, Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, and UNICEF Maharashtra, Mumbai, February 2018, <[https://rdd.maharashtra.gov.in/sites/default/files/IN%20THE%20RIGHT%20DIRECTION%20PART%201\\_0.pdf](https://rdd.maharashtra.gov.in/sites/default/files/IN%20THE%20RIGHT%20DIRECTION%20PART%201_0.pdf)>, accessed 22 November 2021

## Box 16. Realizing children's right to information and skills

In 2018, the Government of Maharashtra in conjunction with UNICEF Maharashtra published an excellent set of resource materials for children for *bal panchayats* and *gram panchayats*. These detail the various aspects of the child-friendly *panchayats* in a simple and easy to understand way. These materials creatively contribute to the development of the agency of children by providing them with knowledge and awareness, such as on the role of *bal sabhas* and the kinds of issues that *bal sabhas* and *bal panchayats* can work on, with strong real-life examples of how children have effected change. Developed and published jointly by the Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, the Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, and the UNICEF office for Maharashtra, the Resource Kit<sup>111</sup> consists of five booklets:

1. On an Equal Footing – Children as Partners in Governance<sup>112</sup>
2. In the Right Direction – Aiding Child-Friendly Panchayats<sup>113</sup>
3. We the Children – the Making of a Child-Friendly Panchayat<sup>114</sup>
4. In My Defence – Introducing Laws for Children<sup>115</sup>
5. Triggering Change – Handbook for Facilitator in Gram Panchayats<sup>116</sup>

Ranging from explaining 'who is a child' to the needs of children from different vulnerable groups, these booklets touch on the rights of children under the UNCRC and explain them in simple language, outline the laws, policies and systems for the protection of children, and describe the roles and functions of the *gram panchayats*, *bal panchayats* and *bal sabhas*. This resource kit is an example of the implementation of Article 17 of the UNCRC on children's right to information.

**The draft focuses on the induction of all newly elected representatives of the gram panchayat, covering the need for regular capacity building and other provisions to be made available to them for better governance.**

UNICEF also focused on building evidence on the capacities of *gram panchayats* for planning, budgeting, and monitoring for woman and child development, in partnership with select CSOs. For example, with the Resource and Support Centre for Development, UNICEF conducted a perspective study on training needs and the need for an induction policy. The draft focuses on the induction of all newly elected representatives of the *gram panchayat*, covering the need for regular capacity building and other provisions to be made available to them for better

governance. The training needs study brought out issues around training and training content and the requirements, as felt by elected representatives. These trainings were incorporated under the *Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan* (National Village Self-Rule Campaign). UNICEF, in partnership with the SIGMA Foundation, undertook an assessment of the implementation of the GDPD,<sup>117</sup> and the findings of this study influenced state decisions around capacity building, *gram panchayat* planning, monitoring systems and policies for child participation in governance.

111 Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, and UNICEF Maharashtra, *Child-Friendly Panchayat Resource Kit*, Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, and UNICEF Maharashtra, 2018.

112 <[https://rdd.maharashtra.gov.in/sites/default/files/ON%20AN%20EQUAL%20FOOTING\\_1.pdf](https://rdd.maharashtra.gov.in/sites/default/files/ON%20AN%20EQUAL%20FOOTING_1.pdf)>

113 <[https://rdd.maharashtra.gov.in/sites/default/files/IN%20THE%20RIGHT%20DIRECTION%20PART%201\\_0.pdf](https://rdd.maharashtra.gov.in/sites/default/files/IN%20THE%20RIGHT%20DIRECTION%20PART%201_0.pdf)>

114 <[https://rdd.maharashtra.gov.in/sites/default/files/WE%20THE%20CHILDREN\\_0.pdf](https://rdd.maharashtra.gov.in/sites/default/files/WE%20THE%20CHILDREN_0.pdf)>

115 <[https://rdd.maharashtra.gov.in/sites/default/files/IN%20MY%20DEFENSE%20READY%20TO%20PRINT%20OPEN%20FILE%20INDESIGN\\_0.pdf](https://rdd.maharashtra.gov.in/sites/default/files/IN%20MY%20DEFENSE%20READY%20TO%20PRINT%20OPEN%20FILE%20INDESIGN_0.pdf)>

116 [https://rdd.maharashtra.gov.in/sites/default/files/TRIGGERING%20CHANGE\\_0.pdf](https://rdd.maharashtra.gov.in/sites/default/files/TRIGGERING%20CHANGE_0.pdf)

117 SIGMA Foundation, *Maharashtra GDPD Study Key Findings and Recommendations*, UNICEF, 2019.

## Methodology

As a result of the restrictions imposed to control the spread of COVID-19, visits to the programme areas by the study team were not possible. Instead, online interviews and group discussions were conducted, which imposed several limitations in terms of the availability of children and discussants, as well as limiting the rapport that could be established. Extensive preliminary discussions took place with the team members of UNICEF Maharashtra, in particular with Anuradha Nair and Rejani Pavithran.

The study team spoke to seven adolescents, who were *bal panchayat* members<sup>118</sup> from Chandrapur district on a video call from two locations. These adolescents belonged to two different *panchayats*, one was part of the initial pilot programme and the other had been added more recently in the CFLG expansion stage. As they were all from the same district, they were aware of the early years of the initiative, as well as the more recent developments. We were ably supported with translations by Pramod Kalekar, a UNICEF consultant with YASHADA.

The CSOs we had discussions with were senior members of the Resource and Support Centre for Development, a state-level network of CSOs engaged with communities, especially those from the most marginalized communities. We also had discussions with representatives of Sparsh, a key partner of UNICEF in the implementation of the Deepshikha programme. Our discussants included

two facilitators for Child-Friendly Panchayats, from Chandrapur and Latur districts – two of the three districts where child-friendly *panchayats* had been initiated. We required two rounds of discussion with these respondents; during one of these we also spoke to a trainer in Latur associated with village planning, Deepshikha and child-friendly *panchayats*.

The *panchayat* officials interviewed were: an *up-sarpanch* (elected deputy head of the *gram panchayat*) from the pilot *gram panchayat* of Anantwadi in the District of Latur; an *ex-sarpanch* (former elected head of the *gram panchayat*) from the pilot *gram panchayat* of Bhatala in Chandrapur; and a *prerak* (village-level facilitator) in Pizdura *gram panchayat* in Chandrapur. We also spoke to state officials, namely: a block development officer who was earlier posted in Taloda, Nandurbar district; a block development officer who was earlier in Warora (the first child-friendly *panchayat* in Maharashtra) and is now Deputy Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Parbhani; the Deputy CEO of Chandrapur in 2014; an official from the State Project Management Unit (and earlier State Director of Rashtriya Swaraj Gram Abhiyan); and an official from the State Institute of Rural Development.

During the interviews and discussions we discussed in detail the role of YASHADA with the Director of the Research and Documentation Cell, YASHADA; the Coordinator of the Project Monitoring Unit, Research and Documentation Cell, YASHADA; and a consultant with YASHADA.

118 The *bal panchayat* members were Sanket Gaurkar, Ashwini G, Imlata Wankhede, Venkatesh Ralegaokar, Kajal Ralegaokar, Asmita Wakudkar and Bhagyashree Khobre.

## Findings

The findings of the case study are presented according to the ASPIRE framework set out in Chapter 1.

### Agency

*Agency is defined as the evolving capacity and confidence of adolescents to engage with decision makers and structures and their autonomy in expressing opinions and taking action: Did they drive, initiate or manage projects? Did they make choices? What was the impact of other actors on their agency?*

#### **Evolving adolescent capacity to engage**

The adolescents who were interviewed felt that their confidence and strength came from the training and guidance they had received from the *prerak/prerika* who, along with their schoolteachers, guided them on how to leverage the collective strength of their *bal panchayat* and how to approach decision makers on a given issue. They shared that they were often unsuccessful on their first attempts, but had persisted. When they succeeded, it emboldened them to take up the next issue. Subsequently, the authorities also started to respond favourably. The adolescents have now learnt how to engage with the *gram panchayat*, the *sarpanch* (elected head of the *gram panchayat*), the block development officer, and the collector of the district (revenue head for the district).

#### **Adolescent autonomy to express and act**

The adolescents who were part of the CFLG initiative had a range of stories

to tell about how they participated in planning processes and how they managed to influence *gram panchayat* decisions. For example, they identified a flooded rivulet that they had to cross often and analysed how to have it covered, marched through the village to pressure the *gram panchayat*, and succeeded in having action taken. In addition, they conducted advocacy in the *gram panchayat* to fill all teacher vacancies; installed CCTV cameras outside the school for the security of girls; set up a filter for well water; built a playground and a dam; accessed the services of a lawyer for legal advice; and stopped child marriages. On their own initiative they celebrated Savitri Bai Phule<sup>119</sup> and her advocacy on women's rights; persuaded the father of one of the boys to run karate classes for girls; and obtained money from the *Gram Sewak* to provide nutrition to a needy child among them.

“Our new sarpanch is young, he is from our generation and will support even with new ideas and technology. He speaks very politely to us, especially if we are very young [...]. We have some good experiences now and will be happy to work in NGOs, even in UNICEF!”

**Sanket Gaurkar, Kajal Ralegaonkar,**  
*Bal Panchayat member, discussion (online)*  
with CWC, 15 April 2021

Many of the officials we interviewed supported this perception of adolescents, as stated in the box above. A *prerika* recounted how issues such as the abuse of alcohol and drugs, misuse of funeral grounds, and trouble incited by anti-social elements were all taken up by adolescent groups. The master trainer added that children convinced the *gram panchayat*

The adolescents have now learnt how to engage with the *gram panchayat*, the *sarpanch* (elected head of the *gram panchayat*), the block development officer, and the collector of the district (revenue head for the district).

119 Savitri Bai Phule is an Indian reformer and educationist who was a trailblazer in the Indian feminist movement and pioneer in the education of girls.

to hand the keys of the *gram panchayat* library to the *prerika* so that they could access books when convenient. An *up-sarpanch* (deputy head of the *gram panchayat*) recalled that the adolescents raised concerns about toilets, waste and water management. As an *ex-sarpanch* commented, the more the children were mobilized and their strength grew in numbers, the more their self-confidence grew. Subsequently, they demanded even more space to participate.<sup>120</sup>

### Impact of other actors on agency

The ex-block development officer of Taloda recalled that, in the beginning, the children were shy and did not participate in the *gram panchayat* meetings, as they saw them as an adult space and were apprehensive about how the adults would respond to their requests. Initially, there was some resistance from community elders to what they saw as encroachment on their decision-making space and money being diverted for children's interests, like training, midday meals, and health camps. The ex-block development officer said that earlier he had received mainly requests for funding construction work. But after about six months of training, as the adolescents started to articulate their needs, the elders gradually began to find that there was value in the ideas of the children and they supported them to exercise their agency and take up community issues.

Similarly, the ex-block development officer of Warora was appreciative of how the confidence of the members of the *bal panchayat* grew incrementally. When children learnt about their share of the budget, they suggested that teaching aids, sporting material and materials for skill development be purchased. At the *gram panchayat*, most

of these suggestions were accepted, because they were from the children who belonged to the *panchayat*. As the *gram panchayat's* understanding of rights grew, they too started adopting a rights framework for community demands. Such negotiations highlight the power struggles between adults and children, which require constant engagement and resolution.

### State

*The mandated role of the state is to integrate and sustain adolescent participation in governance and ensure subsidiarity in planning, with the devolution of decision-making power to the lowest possible tier of government: How are States able and willing to integrate adolescent participation in governance? How are current economic forces that transfer welfare functions from state to non-state actors influencing the ability and willingness of States to invest in their mandate for meaningful adolescent and community participation in governance structures?*

### Integrating adolescent participation in governance

State involvement with, and buy-in to, this project has had a twofold trajectory. The first is the adoption of democratic devolution in the State of Maharashtra, in tandem with people's rights-based movements. The second has been the active involvement of UNICEF and YASHADA in the state's social policy, linking children's rights, community participation and bottom-up planning – laying the foundations for CFLG and its emphasis on the formation of *bal panchayats*. The implementation of projects like Deepshikha within this trajectory has provided an impetus

Initially, there was some resistance from community elders to what they saw as encroachment on their decision-making space and money being diverted for children's interests, like training, midday meals, and health camps.

120 Various interviews and discussions (online) with CWC, 2021.



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was much more than ‘civil work’ (or construction). It also led to the inclusion of *bal sabhas* and *bal panchayats* in decision-making and suggestions for local task-based training of new officers in adolescent participation.

“When the woman president of the gram panchayat was asked to speak, she was very nervous, but when encouraged over time she became much more expressive. The principle is the same from pilot to scale up: it requires time for exposure in better-performing areas and expansion cannot just be done suddenly.”

**NP Mitragotri**, *State Project Management Unit, interview (online) with CWC, 4 June 2021*

for young people to access enabling information, skills and opportunities for collective bargaining.

One of the significant aspects of the project was the conversion of the oral form of learning for transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next in the villages into formal text-based training modules that could be used by master trainers and others to convey the practices of CFLG.

“We take great pride in the manner in which this programme has developed. Lots of questions were raised; the children were very happy they could express themselves; and persuaded their mothers also to demand their rights.”

**Sushila, prerika**, *interview (online) with CWC, 24 July 2021*

The training by YASHADA added to the officials’ understanding of children’s rights and the CFLG initiative, so they could then guide the adolescents as well as resolve conflicts. A Deputy CEO began to appreciate the tribal adolescents’ understanding of issues like child marriage and the freedom of girls. Officials from the State Project Management Unit and the State Institute of Rural Development began looking forward to the participation of adolescents. The visit to Kerala prompted *perikas* and the ex-block development officers to learn that ‘development’

One of the significant aspects of the project was the conversion of the oral form of learning for transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next in the villages into formal text-based training modules that could be used by master trainers and others to convey the practices of CFLG. The Coordinator of the Centre for Research and Documentation at YASHADA disclosed that it was a dilemma that was met by bringing many practitioners of the oral tradition together to document songs and stories to capture the essence of participation by adolescents in various activities, but keep it open to periodic revision based on evolving practices. These were then offered as a guideline that trainers could contextualize.

### **Willingness to invest in meaningful participation**

During the pilot project, YASHADA was involved in providing training on micro planning, village planning and so forth. When the CFLG was scaled up, UNICEF’s level of engagement in the capacity programmes decreased



and there has been a dilution of the quality and effectiveness of the training programmes, according to some discussants. In relation to this, CSOs and officials have requested that UNICEF be involved in quality assurance. The CSOs also feel that YASHADA needs to respond dynamically to the CFLG capacity building needs.

Going forward, the Director of YASHADA thought that scaling up was possible through the formal administrative training of civil servants and networking with existing trained youth and trainers. He too emphasized the need for UNICEF's continued and deep engagement in all aspects of CFLG as government institutions "need out-of-the-box interventions"<sup>121</sup> from time to time. State processes also ensured adolescent participation in the design of training. *Bal panchayat* members were part of deciding training content and processes in the Child-Friendly Panchayat Resource Kit.<sup>122</sup>

The pilots initiated under UNICEF-YASHADA-Rural Development Department (RDD)/Government of Maharashtra partnership influenced mandates for child participation in the *gram panchayats*, as well as earmarking funds for what the children defined as their needs. GPDP guidelines helped in creating a more enabling environment with funds at the disposal of *gram panchayats* for social development through participatory planning. UNICEF Maharashtra is also in conversation with the Government of Maharashtra to bring in an ecosystem for child- and gender-responsive planning and budgeting in the state.

## Participation

*Participation is the interface between the agency of children and governance structures: What are the factors that enable meaningful engagement between adult institutions and adolescents and adolescent groups? What are the boundaries and limits imposed on adolescent participation (direct and indirect; individual and collective; local and national) by state actors, adults, and hierarchical structures? What are the opportunities for adolescents to represent themselves in order to question and change those boundaries?*

### Opportunities for adolescent participation

Several mechanisms have been used at the community level to strengthen adolescent participation. Earlier the CSOs had translated the concept into specific activities, like placing a suggestion box in a public place; disseminating information through games; making safety maps; conducting competitions; training one girl and one boy from each class to mobilize children; and entrusting teachers to keep records of all the issues that emerged to present at monthly meetings. The CSOs made sure that legally-mandated school management committees were set up in each village with representation from children and all other stakeholders, to ensure that adolescents were able to participate in planning.

The Director of YASHADA said that they tried to bring in adolescents' concerns through the participatory mapping process. Adolescents explained that they regularly sat in on *bal panchayat* meetings; created their own ballot papers for voting; and asserted their

The CSOs made sure that legally-mandated school management committees were set up in each village with representation from children and all other stakeholders, to ensure that adolescents were able to participate in planning.

121 Sumedh Gurjar, Director of Yashada, interview (online) with CWC, August 2021.

122 Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, et al., *Child-Friendly Panchayat Resource Kit*, 2018.

Working children did not have the time to participate. Other working children who migrated with their families lost access to midday meals and schooling. The ex-sarpanch asserted that caste hierarchies were very strong,

collective strength through public meetings. According to the *prerak*, the *prabhat pheris* (early morning marches through the village) were very effective in promoting participation and creating a child-friendly environment. The two ex-block development officers felt that information and communication technology has assisted in making governance accountable.

### **Boundaries and limits on participation**

The adolescents wanted continued input from the master trainers (engaged by UNICEF), as well as facilitators from CSOs,<sup>223</sup> to learn more about governance mechanisms; how to get more children to participate through games and theatre; and information about government and other schemes. They regretted that all training had stopped because of the pandemic, thereby weakening the participatory process.

Many of the officials interviewed supplemented the views of the children with their own observations. The *prerika* (mobilizer), for instance, felt that less attention has to be paid to paperwork and more to children's participation and empowerment through sports and cultural activities. The master trainer observed that it took about five years for *bal panchayats* to really become active and for the *gram panchayats* to understand that adolescents will eventually become aware citizens, even though the *bal panchayats* may have become formally functional in the first two years. The mobilizers (*prerikas* and *preraks*), and master trainer all insisted

that in order for these processes to be prioritized, UNICEF's technical and financial support was needed for expansion.

### **Inclusion**

*Within adolescent groups there are those individuals who are socially, culturally and economically stronger and likely to be more articulate, thereby excluding the already marginalized from participation processes: What actions were taken to promote inclusion, particularly in relation to viewing and working with the most marginalized groups as agents and partners?*

### **Exclusion of marginalized adolescents**

There were a few examples of adolescents being excluded. Adolescents spoke of a naughty child who was always given the task of cleaning the toilet. Working children did not have the time to participate. Other working children who migrated with their families lost access to midday meals and schooling. The *ex-sarpanch* asserted that caste hierarchies were very strong, and he had to struggle to challenge them. The *prerika* also mentioned discrimination against the *pardhi tola* (the settlement of the DNTs formerly classified as 'criminal').<sup>224</sup> Girls expressed their own issues around protection somewhat differently from what experts had to offer, and even from what came out of the Safe Communities Mapping.

These observations of exclusion are supported by a 2021 study,<sup>225</sup> which reported that the needs of the children

123 The adolescents interviewed by the team mentioned facilitators from organizations such as the Magic Bus Foundation and Lumpen Foundation.

124 *Pardhis* are a tribe that was notified as being a 'criminal' tribe during the colonial period and de-notified after independence, but the discrimination against them is still visible, evidenced by the fact that they have to live in a *tola* (settlement) outside the village.

125 Singh, Chandrika, and Anuradha Nair, *Child Responsive Budgeting for Maharashtra – A Way Forward*, June 2021.

from marginalized sections were not prioritized in Maharashtra when budgets were prepared. Children from marginalized groups were more likely to drop out of school early, because they and their families were excluded from welfare schemes with low budgets. The stunting levels among children from Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes were much higher than for children from other social and ethnic groups. Caste-based violence was frequently experienced by children from Schedule Castes/Schedule Tribes in schools in the form of corporal punishment, bullying and verbal abuse. In addition, the study reported that children with disabilities also faced social exclusion and were often discriminated against.

### **Actions for inclusion as agents**

Members of adolescent groups interviewed sought to include the excluded in the initiative, because they perceived that the more they enhanced their organized strength, the more they would be able to influence decision makers in formulating child-friendly policies. For instance, they offered the *gram sabha* that all children could clean the toilet by turn. When only nine members were elected to the *bal panchayat*, they formed more committees to enable those adolescents who did not get elected to take up leadership roles and have input into the *bal panchayat*. Working children were drawn into the group by explaining to their parents why they should be studying and not working.

The CSOs cited the case of how the children had persuaded their *gram panchayat* to write to another *gram panchayat* asking it to provide services to migrant children. Gender-based violence as an issue was taken up in the training courses, according to the official from the State Project Management Unit. The

official from the State Institute of Rural Development also felt that issues of social justice were implicit in the training modules, with attention to the needs of weaker sections. A remarkable action was taken by some of the boys in the village, who requested the master trainer to accommodate them in the gender training classes.

"Learnings...are being integrated into the state's revised Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy 2021 and State Policy and Action Plan for Children 2021... focused on making planning and budgeting processes at all levels child and gender responsive and improving participation... UNICEF has supported the revision and development of the policies for the state."

**Anuradha Nair,**  
Social Policy Specialist, UNICEF  
Maharashtra, interview (online) with CWC,  
September 2020

### **Resolutions**

*Organizational structures determine the nature of adolescents and young people's ability to exercise agency and influence resolutions and decisions. At the same time, those charged with promoting agency are also those who set limits and make the rules on translating the exercise of agency to enact resolutions and decisions: In such a context how are adolescents able to influence resolutions and decisions?*

### **Structures that determine the nature of agency**

Adolescents said that they have raised issues in relation to their rights, schemes, police harassment, welfare committees and observation homes, but that resolutions and decisions were

Members of adolescent groups interviewed sought to include the excluded in the initiative, because they perceived that the more they enhanced their organized strength, the more they would be able to influence decision makers in formulating child-friendly policies.



## How adolescents influence resolutions

“The children made a list of suggestions that emerged out of the competition and the safety audit regarding the roles of the police the *gram panchayat*, key political representatives, the protection officer, the women’s committee, and the facilitator. But then they had to make the budgetary provisions for each and forward them to the *gram panchayat*. It was only when they petitioned the *gram sabha* that some of their issues were included in the *gram panchayat* plan, but still there was no clarity on funding.”

CSOs, focus group discussion (online) with CWC, 13 March 2021

Manisha Kamble, a *sarpanch* (elected head of the *gram panchayat*) in one of the pilot *gram panchayats* at Bhatala (and one of our interviewees), attended a three-day training organized by UNICEF, at which she learnt about the rights of children for the first time, and that led to the formation of the first *bal panchayat*.<sup>126</sup> Other adolescents observed how officials who had initially failed to pay attention to them gradually paid more attention to children as the *bal panchayats* were instituted in every village. The first support came from the *prerikas*, who explained to the *gram panchayats* why adolescents should attend the *gram panchayat* meetings to share their ideas, feedback, and opinions. Once the adolescents began to attend, they began to freely express their views and were heard.

made by the *gram panchayats* and *sarpanch*. CSOs cited the example of a suggestion box installed to receive complaints about officials, asking which official would be entrusted with opening the box! According to both the ex-block development officers, there are vested interests who challenge lower allocation for civil works and higher spending on child protection. The master trainer, *prerika*, *up-sarpanch* and *ex-sarpanch* all mentioned that funding decisions went up the chain to the district level, sometimes to the collector and even the secretariat, and there was a long wait for children’s issues to be tackled.

126 Madhuri, N.V., Bijita Devsharma, and Ruchira Bhattacharya, *Child-Friendly Local Governance: Documenting Good Practices from India*, Child Rights Resource Unit (NIRDPR-UNICEF-CRRU), Centre for Gender Studies and Development, National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Ministry of Rural Development, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad, 2021, <[http://nirdpr.org.in/nird\\_docs/manuals/Child-Friendly-Local-Governance280621.pdf](http://nirdpr.org.in/nird_docs/manuals/Child-Friendly-Local-Governance280621.pdf)>, accessed 12 January 2022.

In relation to the state budget, adolescents said that while 10% of the budget was supposed to be reserved for women and children, there was no mechanism through which they could monitor the distribution of funds. All the other discussants agreed that financial powers had to be devolved to the *gram panchayat* level.

## Analysis

Based on the findings above, the potential areas and opportunities for the enhancement of adolescent participation in governance and challenges are highlighted in the following sub-sections.

### Existing structures and processes for adolescent participation

During its inception, the pilot programmes in selected *panchayats* focused on process, with a very strategic and successful first level of expansion to three districts. These 'micro planning pilots' were conducted by UNICEF in partnership with the government through YASHADA, as an active partner, setting up of the Centre for Community Managed Programming (CCMP) to facilitate the process.<sup>127</sup> There was active involvement by the district administration and government functionaries, with child-friendly *panchayats* leveraging "the existing government staff, government funds, volunteerism and existing legal and policy frameworks to make processes, systems and behaviour in institutions more child friendly";<sup>128</sup> along with the extensive and sustained engagement of UNICEF.

A large number of adolescents, enabled through earlier programmes like

Deepshikha and other CSO programmes that promoted adolescent participation in communities, were able to make effective use of the CFLG programme. Some Deepshikha trainees later became resource persons for the CFLG programme. In Phase 2 of Deepshikha, the Government of Maharashtra adopted the model for replication in the 125 most disadvantaged community development blocks in 25 districts to benefit more than 300,000 girls. This clearly demonstrates that when adolescents are empowered they are better able to make the use of structures such as CFLG. UNICEF Maharashtra's work between 2006 and 2015 enabled the creation of a huge reservoir of active adolescents in the state, which created an environment for adolescent participation.

### State buy-in and accountability

Maharashtra has a State Policy for Children that is in line with the UNCRC and the National Policy for Children. The new Child Policy highlights the need for investment in the capacity building of *gram panchayats* to facilitate child participation and mandates *bal panchayats*. Budgetary allocation for the health needs of children, malnutrition and child protection have low priority. This has resulted in a significant rise in the drop-out rate from secondary school. The crime rate against children has also increased. The *gram panchayats* have made admirable efforts to move from infrastructure-based development to social development in the GPDPs, but the specific mandatory investment of 25% of the budget for social development and 10% for women and child development remains unfulfilled.

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127 UNICEF, *Realizing Rights of Every Child Through Local Governments: Maharashtra*, UNICEF Maharashtra, undated.

128 Ibid.

**Institutionalizing the capacity building of elected members of the local governments and local officials in CFLG, which is being conducted by UNICEF in partnership with YASHADA, is an excellent strategic move. It has the potential to ensure the continued commitment of the state to CFLG, and the role of UNICEF in ensuring this is commendable.**

Institutionalizing the capacity building of elected members of the local governments and local officials in CFLG, which is being conducted by UNICEF in partnership with YASHADA, is an excellent strategic move. It has the potential to ensure the continued commitment of the state to CFLG, and the role of UNICEF in ensuring this is commendable. The challenge is to sustain this over five-year cycles for newly elected *panchayat* members, who will again require training in CFLG, and to devolve financial power to the *gram panchayat* level. UNICEF Maharashtra has submitted a draft induction policy for elected representatives to cover regular trainings for all, including on child rights, gender, and CFLG.

### Strategies for expansion

In the formative years of the CFLG initiative and up to the present stage, there has been a focus on devolution, but in terms of tasks and decisions, as opposed to the decentralization of power and finances. Although aligned with the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, the State of Maharashtra is yet to devolve rights and responsibilities to the *panchayats* in full measure, as has been done in some other states, such as Karnataka. The *bal sabhas* and *bal panchayats* are also not mandated by state law, as they are in Karnataka, although they are in place in several districts of Maharashtra. Another model to look at could be the Kudumbashree-led model in Kerala,<sup>129</sup> which has successfully helped to initiate *bal sabhas* in all the *gram panchayats* of Kerala.

A strategy for expansion, therefore, has to put in place structures that strengthen

participatory mechanisms and engage with dissenting opinions, especially with regard to decisions and funding priorities, so as to enhance innovative and inclusive planning. UNICEF Maharashtra has been actively involved in advocating for mandating these structures by law, and these could be strategically integrated into the provisions of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment for devolution.

Expansion, from the pilot to the state level, must be through much more facilitation of training and technical support, and continuous capacity building, which UNICEF has been instrumental in influencing in villages in Maharashtra, both directly and indirectly. The main village level facilitators (*preraks* and *prerikas*) are the real conduits for training and helping adolescents to organize themselves and influence the *gram panchayats*. A similar strategy will clearly have to be followed during any further expansion.

### Exclusion and inequity

Caste-based violence is experienced by lower caste children and children from tribal communities in schools and is reported in the literature as taking the form of corporal punishment, bullying and verbal abuse. The same is true for children with disabilities and special needs. Very few of the people we interviewed reported exclusion, but this does not mean that social barriers do not exist. The deficits in the gender budget at the state level indicate gender inequalities that are reflected in some of the interviews and documents. These include girls' concerns about their education, early marriage, dowry, domestic violence and menstrual hygiene. There were also stories about

129 Kudumbashree is the poverty eradication and women's empowerment programme implemented by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of the Government of Kerala (<[www.kudumbashree.org/pages/171](http://www.kudumbashree.org/pages/171)>).

how adolescent groups tried to address these issues, ranging from asking for cameras at bus stops and along the road, to stopping early marriages and organizing self-defence classes for girls as well as boys.

Barriers to equity are also often perceived through the lens of pre-existing prejudices. More exposure to, and understanding of, the challenges of tribal communities, including the notion that they are 'backward', gives rise to appreciation of the fact that they understand their own problems, as well as the likely solutions to these problems, better than external agents. Instructional materials that specifically include the context of discrimination due to caste, gender, tribal status and disability will better enable marginalized groups to voice their agency as a primary need. In addition, as the pandemic has illustrated, there is a great need for the state to reinvigorate training during crisis situations, which will, in turn, promote participation to address issues of exclusion.

### Role of CSOs

Before UNICEF linked directly with villages/communities, local-level work was facilitated by community-based CSOs, the Master Trainers' Alliance and those working for political decentralization. Their role has been important, both in laying the ground for CFLG and supporting children and their communities to make good use of the opportunities that emerged when CFLG was implemented. While master trainers and *preraks/prerikas* were trained on child rights, and implemented this training to the best of their capacities during CFLG,

there was a limitation imposed by the absence of support from CSOs, which have historically encouraged strong discourse and action around child rights.

For example, the Resource and Support Centre for Development, a network of over 161 core partners from regional networks, women groups, cooperatives, NGOs, community based organizations (CBOs) and people's movements, which was associated with the earlier phase of child participation, is known to have done important work on prioritizing women's governance in Panchayati Raj institutions and mobilizing people on issues of food security and violence against girls.<sup>130</sup> Their approach and skills set to facilitate children is quite unique and not all CBOs are as well versed in working with children. Where good combinations of adult and child engagement exist, the results are clearly evident and also sustained.

With the transfer of facilitating training to state institutions, the role of CSOs has apparently diminished. However, their role may be enhanced again, especially by building their capacities to engage with adolescents.

### Role of UNICEF

The provision of technical support and policy development at the state level by UNICEF has been a critical input, especially as the programme was initiated and nurtured by the Social Policy Division of UNICEF. This support has been long lasting and UNICEF has engaged with representatives of local government and administrative officials at multiple levels of government. More than two decades of such groundwork has enabled UNICEF

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130 Resource and Support Centre for Development, 'Journey', RSCD, 2016, <[www.rscdgovernance.org/index.php/journey/](http://www.rscdgovernance.org/index.php/journey/)>, 8 October 2021.

**While financial inputs from UNICEF, which were critical at the inception of the project, may not be as essential now considering the increased state buy-in, it is nevertheless important to sustain the technical support and guidance that was made available by UNICEF to ensure the quality and impact of the child participation processes within the CFLG.**

to push for democratic decentralization in rural governance to be embedded in policy.

While financial inputs from UNICEF, which were critical at the inception of the project, may not be as essential now considering the increased state buy-in, it is nevertheless important to sustain the technical support and guidance that was made available by UNICEF to ensure the quality and impact of the child participation processes within the CFLG. All stakeholders believe that this role must continue, with added emphasis on the further devolution of power – both administrative and financial – with structures for greater accountability at the local level.

### Enhancing participation

It is evident that the greater the opportunities provided to adolescents to participate, the more their capacity has developed to come together and contribute to development planning. This has also resulted in adults accepting and appreciating their contributions. Several mechanisms that have been used by

communities to strengthen adolescent participation, as well as the innovative development of textual materials to supplement and support the oral tradition of learning, have greatly enhanced the confidence of adolescents to assert their views and agency.

More micro case studies focusing in greater depth on how children have been given the space to participate and how they have not only made full use of that space, but also impacted on adults and officials to further expand that space would be useful in expanding the scope of adolescent participation throughout the state. If these case studies are disseminated as part of the oral and visual traditions prevalent in different localities then they would be even more effective, as demonstrated in the experience of CFLG so far.

### Recommendations

Based on our findings and analysis, we make the following recommendations to enhance the participation of adolescent and young people in governance.





## Adolescent groups

### **Recommendation 1. Collectivize and strengthen your engagement as adolescents:**

Collectivize and strengthen your engagement as adolescents to ensure that all young voices are heard and influence decisions together; include marginalized groups that are distanced from decision-making bodies; define your needs through mapping and priority ranking; and federate at multiple levels so that you can advocate to decision makers at higher levels.

### **Recommendation 2. Build support systems:**

Build support systems with CBOs, CSOs, media persons, other community groups, and stakeholders to strengthen your capacity for research, representation, and advocacy and to gain community support for your issues, as well as to effectively raise shared concerns that are not on the agenda of decision makers.

### **Recommendation 3. Request and obtain sustained inputs:**

Request and obtain sustained inputs about children's rights (including the right to self-determination and the agency of children) and to build a strong base with good internal systems for making decisions and collective leadership that resist the hijacking of adolescent agendas by vested interest groups.

## CSOs

### **Recommendation 1. Enable bal panchayats to learn more about CFLG:**

Enable *bal panchayats* to learn more about CFLG to facilitate their informed participation; build their capacity for democratic participation and participatory leadership; include the most vulnerable

groups and communities; empower them to fend off external interference and sustain continuity through active engagement with outgoing members; and support them with modular training, information, education and communication materials and media programmes.

### **Recommendation 2. Broaden engagement with CFLG programmes:**

Broaden engagement with CFLG programmes by strategically engaging with other CSOs working on children's rights, as well as village child protection committees and their network partners, to play a key role in building the capacities of village elected bodies and committees to facilitate the participation of adolescents and young people and to create an environment in which their participation can be nourished.

### **Recommendation 3. Engage actively with YASHADA and other institutions:**

Actively engage with YASHADA and other institutions to develop and transfer modules, strategies and resources to build the capacities of children (including the most marginalized), local governments, and CSO member organizations for the effective implementation of CFLG through the *bal panchayats* (children's councils) and *bal sabhas* (children's collectives).

### **Recommendation 4. Maintain an independent voice for democratic values:**

Play the role of an independent voice for democratic values and inspire adolescents and young people to stand by the universal principles of equality and rights for all children and to raise their voices against all manner of exclusion, marginalization and inequity through their engagement in the CFLG structure.

Institutionalize the participation of adolescents and young people in bottom-up planning and budgeting for all state legislation and policies and ensure that these policies commit financial resources for adolescent participation structures, implement participatory decisions and reach the most marginalized groups.

## State

### Central government

#### **Recommendation 1. Provide guidance to support devolution in all states:**

Provide guidance to support devolution in all states based on the model legislation in Karnataka, which devolves functions, finances and functionaries and mandates children's participation in the Panchayati Raj Act. Establish clear guidelines for roles, responsibilities and accountability at all levels of government for the 29 functions listed in the 11<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of India.

#### **Recommendation 2. Institutionalize the participation of adolescents and young people in bottom-up planning:**

Institutionalize the participation of adolescents and young people in bottom-up planning and budgeting for all state legislation and policies and ensure that these policies commit financial resources for adolescent participation structures, implement participatory decisions and reach the most marginalized groups.

## State government

#### **Recommendation 3. Establish appropriate legal mechanisms:**

Drawing on the Kerala Kudumbashree model, Nepal CFLG model, and Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act, establish appropriate legal mechanisms to devolve financial powers to the lowest tiers of governance (including *gram panchayats* and *bal panchayats*); discard unitary governance systems and uphold principles of subsidiarity and proximity; and enact rules, guidelines and circulars, with corresponding budgetary allocations, to enforce CFLG and make Maharashtra into a model system of adolescent participation in governance.

#### **Recommendation 4. Establish provisions and safeguards for the participation of adolescents and young people:**

Establish provisions and safeguards for the participation of adolescents and young people to ensure that participation determines the nature and quality of the departmental services that children require, especially for marginalized groups; provide protection from retaliation when children raise



contentious issues, especially in conflict prone areas; and pay attention to their safety and protection, especially for girls.

**Recommendation 5. Renew and reinvigorate partnerships with civil society organizations:** Renew and reinvigorate partnerships with CSOs that initiated the process of forming *bal sabhas* for CFLG implementation; study the lessons that emerged from the initial phase; and leverage these lessons to enhance CSOs' facilitation of adolescent participation and local government engagement at the local levels.

**Recommendation 6. Strengthen capacity building inputs by the State Institute of Rural Development:** Strengthen inputs by the State Institute of Rural Development to provide adequate training; update and translate the Resource Kit on child-friendly *panchayats*, developed by UNICEF Maharashtra in conjunction with the Government of Maharashtra, into local languages (other than Marathi) and circulate them to different *panchayats* across the state; develop guidelines to support mobilization, empowerment and networking by *bal panchayats*; and evolve guidelines for the government to support *prerikas* and collaborate with CSOs.

### Local government

**Recommendation 7. Sustain systems in capacity building programmes:** Sustain systems in capacity building programmes using tools such as marginality mapping, priority ranking, and frequent safety audits, and by training newly-elected *gram panchayat* members (through *prerikas*), as well as older members, to enable children to identify localities and sectors in which they experience severe vulnerabilities, so that communities may be provided with additional financial

and technical support to respond to the issues raised by children.

**Recommendation 8. Develop local guidelines for the facilitation of bal panchayats and gram panchayats:** Develop local guidelines for the facilitation of *bal panchayats* to support their mobilization, empowerment and networking at the *gram panchayat* level, as well as for *gram panchayats* to integrate bottom-up planning, include rights-based programming and participatory monitoring and evaluation; provide recognition to *prerikas*; and create special provisions for the participation of girls, children with disabilities, sexual and gender minorities, ethnic groups, children from migrant communities, and all marginalized groups so their concerns are addressed by the *gram panchayat*.

**Recommendation 9. Engage the support of civil society organizations with expertise:** Engage the support of CSOs with expertise and that possess the conceptual clarity, experience and capacities to provide technical and thematic support to local-level institutions; that can provide for peer learning among representatives of local governments for the sharing of good practices, mitigation of risks and sustaining of positive outcomes; and that can translate the updated Resource Kit on child-friendly *panchayats*, developed by UNICEF Maharashtra in conjunction with the Government of Maharashtra, into different local dialects (other than Marathi).

**Recommendation 10. Ensure the financial and operational sustainability of bal panchayats and bal sabhas:** Ensure the financial and operational sustainability of *bal panchayats* and *bal sabhas* when devolving financial power to the *gram panchayat* level and ensure that the stipulated allocation of

Renew and reinvigorate partnerships with CSOs that initiated the process of forming *bal sabhas* for CFLG implementation.

10% of the budget for women and child development takes place.

### Partner government agencies

**Recommendation 11. Enhance and ensure regular training:** Enhance and ensure regular training by studying and adopting good practices from the state's *bal sabhas* in all *gram panchayats*, Deepshikha and the In-school Life-skill Education scheme, YASHADA and Kerala's Kudumbashree, including their experience in capacity building and innovative information, education and communication models, using the lessons to train *panchayats* and adolescents in the principles of CFLG.

**Recommendation 12. Assist in updating, translating and disseminating the Resource Kit:** Assist in updating, translating and disseminating the Resource Kit on child-friendly *panchayats*, developed by UNICEF Maharashtra in conjunction with the Government of Maharashtra, into different languages and dialects (other than Marathi); help circulate them in *panchayats* across the state to enhance awareness and action on child-friendly *panchayats*; and disseminate and advocate across states, especially the YASHADA modules, which were built on the oral tradition of learning and knowledge transfers.

### UNICEF

**Recommendation 1. Mainstream adolescent participation in governance as a programme strategy in CFLG:** Mainstream adolescent participation in governance as a programme strategy in CFLG across all institutions and delivery platforms in UNICEF to strengthen cross-sectoral engagement by ensuring the realization of concepts of participation that foreground the agency of marginalized adolescent groups; by

building systematic marginality mapping mechanisms for engagement with marginalized groups on the participation of adolescents and young people; and by ensuring investment in participation strategies as a core component of all programme work.

**Recommendation 2. Develop indicators and mechanisms:** Develop indicators and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the participation of adolescents and young people to examine how to enhance participation during CFLG review; use the reviews to advocate for adequate resources to ensure adolescents and young people from the most marginalized communities can participate in local planning processes as partners; and pay specific attention to the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act in the tribal areas of Maharashtra, as it safeguards the traditions and customs of tribal communities, especially due to the alienation of land to non-tribal persons.

**Recommendation 3. Create learning exchanges:** Create learning exchanges with regional good practices such as that of the Child-Friendly Local Government process in Nepal and the Kudumbashree model in Kerala, to enhance the capabilities of the Maharashtra CFLG. Sponsor the updating and translation of the Resource Kit on child-friendly *panchayats*, developed by UNICEF Maharashtra in conjunction with the Government of Maharashtra, into several languages for other state teams to refer to while developing their own resources and circulate these kits through regional offices to enhance awareness and action on child-friendly *panchayats*.

### Conclusion

Remarkable work has been done through the CFLG programme in Maharashtra

Develop indicators and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the participation of adolescents and young people to examine how to enhance participation during CFLG review.

in promoting child participation in *gram panchayats*. Its direct linkage with the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the Constitution of India, which devolves functions, finances and functionaries to the lowest tiers of governance, has embedded the CFLG programme firmly in governance structures. The testimony of both adolescents and state officials indicates that this approach is now well accepted. The agency of children, their eagerness to bring about positive changes in their communities, and their awareness about how the local governments need to be responsive to all citizens, including children, is inspiring.

However, without further devolution of financial power, in line with the Constitution of India, and the allotment of the required budget for CFLG, the momentum of the programme may diminish over time. UNICEF Maharashtra is engaged in advocating for a legal

framework around child participation, and for the Child Policy to be revised to mandate child-friendly *panchayats*, as well as budgets for facilitating child participation. But this is dependent on strong political commitment for supporting democratic participation in governance, irrespective of the political party in power.

It has to be recognized that there is a dilemma inherent in such participation being facilitated. On one hand, stakeholders realize that it is building the base for an active and engaged citizenry in the future. On the other hand, some stakeholders fear that such a citizenry, even at the adolescent stage, can hold governments to account. With governments increasingly becoming investor-friendly and policies becoming market-led, this dilemma needs urgent resolution.



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# 4

## Child-Friendly Local Governance, Nepal

“I am so grateful to be a part of CFLG. I have learnt a lot and built on the past experiences of child clubs. In the entire country, every district should be CFLG-compliant. There should be spaces for all children to speak up without fear. Our education system must become more viable and accessible to all children. We need to have political stability and corruption free CFLG for a beautiful Nepal.”

**Rachana Bhusal**,<sup>131</sup> *President, Municipality Child Club, Nawalparasi, interview (online) with CWC, July 2021*

### Introduction

As a relatively young democracy, Nepal has been very open to progressive ideas and in its response to children’s rights related advocacy initiatives. Nepal became a member of the United Nations (UN) in 1956 and, in 1990, a year before a multi-party parliamentary system was established in Nepal,<sup>132</sup> it ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The CSOs of Nepal, the UN, and other national and international agencies have a history of almost four

decades of working for children’s rights. Since the early 1980s their efforts to establish child clubs have had the support of local administrations and recognition from national governments.

Organizations such as Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN)<sup>133</sup> have been at the forefront of children’s rights and democracy-related movements in the country. In 1992, CSOs working with children formed the Children at Risk Network. This network and other efforts by CSOs were supported financially and



131 Rachana is now 20-years-old and has been associated with child clubs for over 7 years. She was the president of the ward level child club at 16.

132 It had been established briefly in 1951, but replaced by the Panchayat system in 1960 (see <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalese\\_democracy\\_movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalese_democracy_movement)>).

133 <[www.facebook.com/cwin.org.np](http://www.facebook.com/cwin.org.np)>

CSOs, UNICEF and international agencies sustained a campaign for the recognition of children's rights in the 2015 Constitution and, consequently, the 'Rights of Children' were upheld in the Constitution, as part of fundamental rights.

technically by UNICEF and international agencies such as Save the Children and World Vision.

In the late-1990s, when the Act Relating to Children was being amended, Nepal was facing an armed conflict.<sup>134</sup> The members of the Children at Risk Network were involved in creating 'zones of peace' in collaboration with local governments to protect children and contribute to a strong pro-democracy movement. In spite of a period fraught with anxiety and polarization, with shifts in political balances, Nepal finally became a democratic republic in 2008. Children,<sup>135</sup> CSOs, UNICEF and international agencies sustained a campaign for the recognition of children's rights in the 2015 Constitution and, consequently, the 'Rights of Children' were upheld in the Constitution, as part of fundamental rights: "Part 3: 39. (3) Every child shall have the right to elementary child development and child participation."<sup>136</sup>

The new Act Relating to Children (2018)<sup>137</sup> translated the provisions of the UNCRC and the Constitution into a national legal mandate. It ensures 13 basic rights of children, sets out the responsibilities of the State to uphold these rights, refers to the institutions required by children and for children, the role of parents and the media in the realization of children's rights, and also includes the duties of

children. In addition, it mandates that the best interests of children must be the core concern. The National Child Rights Council of Nepal was set up in 2018 under this Act, as a special body, in accordance with Clause 59 (1) for the protection and promotion of the rights of children.

## Issues faced by children in Nepal

Nepal comprises 125 ethnic groups, made up of people with diverse religious beliefs who speak over 123 languages.<sup>138</sup> It has about 28.6 million inhabitants, of whom about 25% are between 10 to 19 years.<sup>139</sup> According to Section 2(A) of the Act Relating to Children (2018), the term "'Children' means persons who have not attained the age of eighteen years"<sup>140</sup> The Labour Act (1992) puts the age limit of a child at 14 years. The Nepal Citizenship Act (1963) considers persons below 16 to be minors. The Child-Friendly Local Governance Implementation Guidelines consider children as those less than 18 years,<sup>141</sup> in line with the UNCRC and the Act Relating to Children (2018).

In 2017, the number of students enrolled in primary school was 3,970,016, but this dropped to 3,730,602 in 2018 (the net enrolment rate decreased from 97.2% to 96.6%). The number of children with different types of disabilities enrolled

134 The Maoist insurgency lasted from 13 February 1996 to 21 November 2006 (see <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalese\\_Civil\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalese_Civil_War)>).

135 Government of Nepal, *Naya Sambhidan ko Nirman, Bal Adhikar ko Purna Samman*, National Campaign, Government of Nepal, 2008–2009.

136 Government of Nepal, *Constitution of Nepal 2015*, Government of Nepal, 2015.

137 Government of Nepal, *Act Relating to Children, 2075 (2018)*, Act Number 23 of the year 2075, Law Commission, 2018, <[www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Act-Relating-to-Children-2075-2018.pdf](http://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Act-Relating-to-Children-2075-2018.pdf)>, accessed 23 November 2021.

138 Castillejo, C., *Ethnic and Indigenous Groups in Nepal's Peacebuilding Processes*, Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution (NOREF), March 2017, <[www.reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2dcad865860b5424320ba4720b19442a.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2dcad865860b5424320ba4720b19442a.pdf)>, accessed 17 September 2021.

139 Statista, 'Nepal: Age Distribution from 2010 to 2020', undated, <[www.statista.com/statistics/422727/age-distribution-in-nepal](http://www.statista.com/statistics/422727/age-distribution-in-nepal)>, accessed 17 September 2021.

140 Government of Nepal, *Act Relating to Children, 2075 (2018)*.

141 Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, *Child-Friendly Local Governance Implementation Guidelines*, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, 2021.



dropped from 45,655 to 39,820 in the same period.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, the total number of students enrolled in grades 1–12 was 7,391,524 in 2017 and decreased to 7,214,525 in 2018.<sup>143</sup> The Nepal Labour Force Survey of 2017–2018 reported that some 286,000 children under the age of 17 years are involved in economic gains. The Population Monograph, 2014<sup>144</sup> and the Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019<sup>145</sup> show that 22.7% of women and men aged 20–24 years were married or in a union before the age of 18, and this percentage increases to 32.8% when looking at just women.

In the year 2017, 2,330 children (923 boys and 1,407 girls) were reported missing, increasing to 3,422 children (1,051 boys and 2,371 girls) in the following year.<sup>146</sup> The report *State of Children in Nepal, 2019* indicates a significant number of reports of violence against children.<sup>147</sup>

In the year 2017/18, a total of 995 cases of rape of girls under 18 years were registered with the police and in the next year there were 1,420 cases. According to police records, from 2017–2019, 1,230 children below the age of 10 years, 3,273 children between 11–16 years and 916 children aged 17–18 years experienced sexual violence.

The State of Children in Nepal of 2017<sup>148</sup> notes that 47,570 children living in 14 districts affected by the 2015 earthquake are considered at risk. In addition, 18,665 children were affected by armed conflict in 20 conflict affected districts. The same report refers to the deterioration of the quality of school education and children's diminished educational performance.

Now, post-COVID, "the side-effects of the pandemic across South Asia, including the lockdown and other measures, have been damaging for children in numerous ways",<sup>149</sup> explained Jean Gough, former UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia:

*But the longer-term impact of the economic crisis on children will be on a different scale entirely. Clearly there will be disruptions to all aspects of children's lives and their affect will be lasting and also irreversible in the foreseeable future. Without urgent action now, COVID-19 could destroy the hopes and futures of an entire generation.*<sup>150</sup>

According to UNICEF, when schools closed, 8.3 million children from preschool to grade 12<sup>151</sup> in Nepal had to rely on remote learning, which only partially filled the gap; many households – especially in rural areas – have no

**The State of Children in Nepal of 2017 notes that 47,570 children living in 14 districts affected by the 2015 earthquake are considered at risk. In addition, 18,665 children were affected by armed conflict in 20 conflict affected districts. The same report refers to the deterioration of the quality of school education and children's diminished educational performance.**

142 Government of Nepal, *State of Children in Nepal, 2018*, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Central Child Welfare Board, 2018.

143 Ibid.

144 Central Bureau of Statistics, *Population Monograph*, Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics, Kathmandu, 2014.

145 Central Bureau of Statistics Nepal, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2019: Survey Findings Report*, Central Bureau of Statistics, National Planning Commission Secretariat, Government of Nepal and UNICEF Nepal, Kathmandu, 2020, <[www.unicef.org/nepal/reports/multiple-indicator-cluster-survey-final-report-2019](http://www.unicef.org/nepal/reports/multiple-indicator-cluster-survey-final-report-2019)>, accessed 14 December 2021.

146 Government of Nepal, *State of Children in Nepal, 2018*.

147 Government of Nepal, *State of Children in Nepal, 2019*. Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens, National Child Rights Council, Lalitpur, 2020.

148 Government of Nepal, *State of Children in Nepal of 2017*, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Central Child Welfare Board, Lalitpur, 2017.

149 UNICEF, 'Urgent Action Needed to Safeguard Futures of 600 Million South Asian Children Threatened by COVID-19: UNICEF', Press Release, 23 June 2020, <[www.unicef.org/nepal/press-releases/urgent-action-needed-safeguard-futures-600-million-south-asian-children-threatened](http://www.unicef.org/nepal/press-releases/urgent-action-needed-safeguard-futures-600-million-south-asian-children-threatened)>, accessed 20 August 2021.

150 Ibid.

151 Nepal Education Cluster, *COVID-19 Education Cluster Contingency Plan*, Education Cluster, Kathmandu, July 2021.

electricity, let alone internet access.<sup>152</sup> Under the present circumstances, the significance of, and urgent need for, an empathetic, alert and proactive CFLG system is greatly heightened.

## About the project

### Project description

The Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) programme, introduced across the entire country in 2011, presents an excellent example of promoting and nurturing children's participation in governance on a national scale. A flagship programme of UNICEF Nepal, it has an exciting history of bringing together two core strands: children's participation and making local governments accountable to children as citizens. Children, the Consortium of Organisations Working for Child Participation, UNICEF and international agencies like Save the Children have made significant contributions in defining CFLG as a:

*[...] strategic framework that promotes child rights through practicing good governance for children at the local level. It involves planning for and with children, encouraging local governments to allocate adequate resources for children, and to create spaces and mechanisms to listen to their voices.*<sup>153</sup>

Evolving further, the most recent version of the *Child-Friendly Local Governance Implementation Guidelines, 2021*, define CFLG as:

*[...] the governance process that institutionalises issues of child rights like child protection, child safety, child development and meaningful child participation that are based on non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, overall development and the principle of meaningful child participation into local level policies, planning, structuring and working processes.*<sup>154</sup>

CFLG Nepal is further guided by principles of respect for children's participation and opinions, as well as principles of proximity, inclusion and community-based development. It focuses on involving children and communities in identifying and prioritizing problems, and children's engagement with local governments to develop plans and deploy budgets. It lays out systems for social accountability and transparency and suggests specific indicators for monitoring. The programme also has mechanisms for the convergence of different government departments and different levels of governance in a strategic manner.

The law also empowers the CFLG system to be responsive, as the Local Self Governance Act, 1999 contains provisions for local bodies to prioritize projects that directly benefit children. It says that activities related to children should be carried out in the best interest of children and their welfare (Sections 28, 96, and 189). Local bodies are assigned the responsibility to plan and implement programmes related to child and maternal health care, vaccination and nutrition, and to set up and operate a special fund for women and children.<sup>155</sup>

A flagship programme of UNICEF Nepal, it has an exciting history of bringing together two core strands: children's participation and making local governments accountable to children as citizens.

152 UNICEF, 'Urgent Action Needed to Safeguard Futures of 600 Million South Asian Children Threatened by COVID-19: UNICEF', 23 June 2020.

153 UNICEF, *Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG), Nepal 2001–2016*, UNICEF ROSA, Kathmandu, 2017.

154 Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, *Child-Friendly Local Governance Implementation Guidelines, 2021*.

155 Government of Nepal, *Local Body Financial Administration Regulation*, Rule 23 and 54, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, 2007.

According to the *State of Children in Nepal, 2019*,<sup>156</sup> three municipalities – Kanchanarup, Bhimeshwar, Devchuli and Sunwal – in different provinces were declared as having child-friendly governments. Apart from these, at least one ward in each of 35 local governments was declared child friendly. Currently, 34 district development committees, 33 municipalities and 982 village development committees (VDCs) have adopted CFLG;<sup>157</sup> of them, 1 sub-metropolitan, 1 municipality and 11 VDCs were announced to be child-friendly.<sup>158</sup>

### UNICEF's strategy

In the 1990s, UNICEF, with the support of partners such as the Norwegian Government and other agencies such as World Vision, Plan International and Save the Children, started working with women and children at the grassroots level under the principles of decentralized planning. In 2007, UNICEF facilitated the travel of a national delegation to the Philippines to gain exposure to CFLG, following which in-country discussions were initiated. UNICEF facilitated the mapping of disadvantaged groups of children within the country in collaboration with CSOs to prioritize VDCs with highly vulnerable communities. District development committees then chose 50 VDCs for the pilot, while other VDCs were free to implement CFLG with their own resources. UNICEF's strategy was to ensure the participation of child clubs and their networks to identify the needs of children and to be involved at every stage of planning and programme implementation.

The engagement of child clubs commenced when a VDC decided to adopt CFLG and sought their 'meaningful participation'. The child clubs then took decisions about the nature and scope of their participation, supported by village facilitators through the Local Government and Community Development Programme (LGCDP). UNICEF supported the capacity building of village facilitators, while the LGCDP was a multi-donor supported project. VDCs had to ensure that 15% of their budget was allocated for CFLG and fulfil the mandatory conditions prescribed. They were monitored by the central ministry.

After several iterations, the National CFLG Strategy and its Operational Guidelines were adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2011 and initiated in 34 districts and 14 municipalities by 2012. After the federal system of governance was introduced in 2015, the Operational Guidelines had to be revised to be in harmony with the federal structure. The CFLG Implementation Guidelines<sup>159</sup> remained in incubation for six years. They were finally announced in March 2021 as the core policy document for CFLG.

### Methodology

Because of COVID-19, the study team was unable to visit the programme areas. Instead, online interviews and group discussions were conducted, which imposed several limitations in terms of the availability of children and discussants, as well as limiting the rapport that could be established. It also did not allow us

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156 Government of Nepal, *State of Children in Nepal, 2019*, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Central Child Welfare Board, Lalitpur, 2020.

157 Ibid.

158 Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, *Child-Friendly Local Governance Implementation Guidelines*, 2021.

159 Ibid. As the document is in Nepali, our reflections about it are based on the unofficial translation of the document, which was translated for our reference by ADAP, UNICEF ROSA.

to observe implementation of CFLG and its impact in person. Following the scoping study, we held discussions with UNICEF representatives to learn about the overall history, present status of the programme, and identify discussants.

We had developed interactive tools for discussions with children. However, as children were unable to gather due to COVID-19 restrictions, we used FGDs, guided by the list of 'areas of enquiry'. We were ably supported with translations by Ramchandra Gaire (provided by UNICEF). Our discussions with members (and former members) of child clubs revealed their experiences as well as reflections as representatives of these clubs at the ward, municipal, district and provincial levels. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, we could not meet with as many young people (and their parents and community members) as planned. We were also unable to obtain input from children who were not part of the child clubs.

The CSOs that took part in the FGDs were also members of the National CFLG Forum. Several of them were former members of child clubs. They apprised

us of the past as well as the present situation, from their experiences as children and now as members of the National Forum. These conversations were followed by discussions with senior representatives from World Vision and CWIN Nepal. The work of UNICEF and its support for the projects were described by former CFLG focal persons. Inputs from the Deputy Mayor of Devchuli Municipality provided insights about the present situation, along with specific details of how the CFLG functioned in her VDC.

The Child-Friendly Dialogue series,<sup>160</sup> produced by the National CFLG Forum, provided enriching information and access to interviews with senior government officials whom we were not able to reach during this documentation process. The early years of CFLG are well documented in the legacy document, *Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG), Nepal 2001–2016*,<sup>161</sup> so we studied developments beyond that period. We also reviewed secondary sources related to local governance systems, with a focus on the post-2015 period, when the federal system was introduced. Throughout our interviews and secondary studies,



160 National CFLG Forum, *Child-Friendly Dialogue*, Video Series, Nepal, 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7m7aqewGCxJYnUV2oxhlfw>>, accessed April 2021 (subsequently removed); National CFLG Forum, *Child-Friendly Dialogue with Basanta Adhikari Joint Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and General Administration*, Episode 2, National CFLG Forum, Nepal, 30 November 2020, <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjtOo1mwXBA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjtOo1mwXBA)>, accessed 20 August 2021.

161 UNICEF, *Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG), Nepal 2001–2016*, UNICEF ROSA, Kathmandu, 2017.

we had periodic discussions with representatives of UNICEF Nepal and the ROSA ADAP team.

## Findings

The findings of the case study are presented according to the ASPIRE framework set out in Chapter 1.

### Agency

*Agency is defined as the evolving capacity and confidence of adolescents to engage with decision makers and structures and their autonomy in expressing opinions and taking action: Did they drive, initiate or manage projects? Did they make choices? What was the impact of other actors on their agency?*

#### **Evolving adolescent capacity to engage**

The Nepal's child rights movement commenced in the early 1980s. The 'Hatemalo children's radio show' started in 1982, with a peer exchange and learning focus, the first of its kind in South Asia. It inspired and facilitated children to come together to form clubs.

Child clubs in Nepal are often self-initiated as community-based or school-based organizations; some are interest groups, like working children or adolescent girls. By the mid-1990s, these clubs were a platform for sharing information among children regarding issues such as health and hygiene. Later they provided a platform for children to come together and learn from each other about children's rights and issues of common concern. All of the international organizations working for children's rights also incorporated the formation of child clubs into their programmes. A review of the child clubs conducted in 1999 recommended that VDCs provide affiliation to the clubs, include child club representatives in the council meetings, and provide them with financial support for long-term sustainability.<sup>164</sup>

During our discussions with child club members, their energy, confidence, communication skills and commitment to children's rights were evident. Rachana Bhusal, President Municipality Child Club Nawalparasi, has been able to mobilize children, host events, discuss with officials at the municipal level and deliver speeches before the Municipal Assembly.

**By the mid-1990s, these clubs were a platform for sharing information among children regarding issues such as health and hygiene. Later they provided a platform for children to come together and learn from each other about children's rights and issues of common concern.**

### **Box 17. Hatemalo radio programme**

"From the perspective of the historical development of child clubs in Nepal, they may be considered an extended feature of children's groups that were involved in various sports and cultural programmes including football and *deusi-bhailo*.<sup>162</sup> However, there are no written documents available regarding these. In 1982, the Hatemalo Child Radio Programme was started on Radio Nepal for children. It advocated on various issues related to children, including disability, health and child rights. Hatemalo Sanchar has reported that in 1983 Hatemalo Child Listener's Clubs were established as an extension of the Radio Programme. These listener's clubs may be considered the first child clubs in Nepal."

**Source:** (Extract) *Situation of Child Participation in Child Club, Survey conducted in Kathmandu valley, 2010*<sup>163</sup>

162 Part of the festival of Tihar, similar to carolling.

163 Thakuri, Sanjog, *Situation of Child Participation in Child Clubs*, Unpublished Survey, Hatemalo Sanchar, Lalitpur, 2010.

164 Hart, R., J. Rajbhandari, and C. Khatiwada, *The Child Clubs of Nepal: Evaluation of a Democratic Experiment*, Save the Children Alliance and the Children's Environments Research Group, Nepal, 2001.

During the same review, adults in the community not only acknowledged what children had gained as a result of their involvement in child clubs, but also how adults in the community had benefited from children's participation in terms of improved access to services and facilities, as well as how children had positively influenced adult participation.

She spoke of the need to bridge the gap between the requirements at the local level and decisions taken at the provincial level. Ashma Aryal critiqued discrimination between boys and girls: "Gender disparity is very common in villages. The liberty and freedom that boys enjoy, the girls do not. We have raised these issues and it is tough to address them."<sup>165</sup> Child marriage and child labour are other key issues she wishes to address.

#### **Adolescent autonomy to express and act**

The 2018 *Nepal Country Report*,<sup>166</sup> developed as part of the Knowledge Management Study on the programme Improving Adolescents' Lives in South Asia<sup>167</sup> and launched by ADAP section at UNICEF ROSA, reviewed three programmes: the Rupantaran training sessions for life-skills improvement, the Saathi Sanga Manka Kura (translated as 'Chatting with My Best Friend') radio programme and the partnership with religious leaders of the National Inter-Religious Network. This report presents how these programmes have increased the confidence of young people, especially adolescent girls, and enhanced their ability to reflect, engage and participate.

In the *Strategic Review of Support to Child Clubs*<sup>168</sup> carried out in 2011–2012, it was evident that participation in the clubs had given children self-confidence and access to information, as well as the knowledge and skills to claim some of their entitlements. Young people

have shared information with friends, parents and extended communities. Their awareness on topics such as sexual and reproductive health and adolescents' legal rights was enhanced and they had gained confidence to discuss such matters in their immediate circles. As explained by Parbati Tiwari, the Deputy Mayor of Devchuli, this high level of confidence did not come about overnight, but is the result of a long campaign, in which VDCs have supported children's participation over many years. CBOs, mothers' groups and political parties have all contributed to children's empowerment and participation in her municipality.

#### **Impact of other actors on agency**

During the same review, adults in the community not only acknowledged what children had gained as a result of their involvement in child clubs, but also how adults in the community had benefited from children's participation in terms of improved access to services and facilities, as well as how children had positively influenced adult participation. However, according to one of our discussants, at the national level, the National Child Club Network, which provided opportunities for children to learn from each other, is not active now and has not met for over four years now. Although able to discuss, with some degree of openness, issues such as gender and caste-based discrimination and harmful gender-based practices, the children found it difficult to challenge long-standing negative social practices.

165 Ashma Aryal, youth club member, former President of Nawalparasi Child Club, focus group discussion (online), with CWC, 16 April 2021.

166 Ernst & Young India, *Nepal Country Report: Developing Skills in Youth to Succeed in the Evolving South Asian Economy*, UNICEF ROSA, Kathmandu, 2019.

167 Ibid.

168 Ratna, K., S.K. Shrestha, and S. Maharjan, *Strategic Review of Support to Child Clubs*, UNICEF, Kathmandu, 2012.

According to Ashma Aryal,<sup>169</sup> the external environment now may be more favourable for children's participation than when she started out, but she is concerned that the new generation is not eager to be part of child clubs. Child clubs used to be the only forum for children for peer interaction, but now children can also turn to social media. This may affect the sustainability of the child clubs. She feels that the social distancing imposed by COVID-19 could also be a reason for children not attending clubs. She is very concerned about the social disconnect.

"The situation is more favourable for members of child clubs now than it was before, as people are more aware and children have more forums to speak out. While an environment favourable to children's participation has been created to some extent, we should continue to tap into the opportunities that have come our way."

President, child club,  
FGD (online) with CWC, 28 July 2021

## State

*The mandated role of the state is to integrate and sustain adolescent participation in governance and ensure subsidiarity in planning, with the devolution of decision-making power to the lowest possible tier of government: How are States able and willing to integrate adolescent participation in governance? How are current economic forces that transfer welfare functions from state to non-state actors influencing the ability and willingness of States to invest in their mandate for meaningful adolescent and community participation in governance structures?*

## Integrating adolescent participation in governance

In Nepal's 2015 Constitution, concerns about child participation have been spelt out. The federal structure provides for 'shared rule' between different levels of government. The newly established 293 urban municipalities and 460 rural municipalities are overall larger in size than earlier structures and vested with greater authority. They are further subdivided into wards, which have the responsibility to fulfil CFLG indicators, declare their wards as child-friendly, and promote CFLG at the local level.<sup>170</sup> The 2018 Act Relating to Children<sup>171</sup> states that children have the right to express their views, seek information, set up organizations and take part in assemblies.

In March 2021, the new CFLG Guidelines<sup>172</sup> for a federal structure were developed. At present, the agenda of the CFLG appears to be well known and is noticeably owned by children, members of the government and CSOs. The guidelines mention the prioritization of the needs and issues of children in both annual and periodic plans and programmes. It makes children's, including adolescents', participation mandatory in the implementation of policies, plans and laws at the local level. It also provides for the capacity building of institutions and personnel to support CFLG and collaboration between the government and CSOs working with children. The strategy and action plans suggested for CFLG implementation are listed under ten specific headings,<sup>173</sup> and action plans indicated for each. There is

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169 Ashma Aryal, youth club member, former President of Nawalparasi Child Club, focus group discussion (online), with CWC, 16 April 2021.

170 Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, *Child-Friendly Local Governance Implementation Guidelines*, 2021.

171 Government of Nepal, *Act Relating to Children, 2075 (2018)*.

172 Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, *Child-Friendly Local Governance Implementation Guidelines*, 2021.

173 The ten headings are: mainstreaming; lobbying for policy advocacy and awareness; institutional development; capacity building; promotion of collaboration and partnership; community mobilisation; social accountability and transparency; equity; behavioural transformation through information; education and communication; and monitoring and evaluation.

**Local bodies are instructed to implement CFLG in their respective areas and set aside at least 10% of their annual budget for children (15% if CFLG is declared) and develop a plan through participatory approaches.**

a directive to ensure that the action plan is contextualized and compatible with local requirements and realities.

### **Willingness to invest in meaningful participation**

Every local government has the provision of spending 50,000–60,000 Nepali rupees (approximately USD 420–500) on the implementation of CFLG. A general observation of most discussants was that this budget is quite adequate. However, the local governments need support in terms of capacity building and also guidance to develop investment plans. Local bodies are instructed to implement CFLG in their respective areas and set aside at least 10% of their annual budget for children (15% if CFLG is declared) and develop a plan through participatory approaches.

At present, the district coordinating committees, provincial governments and its agencies, and the federal government are to monitor and provide feedback to ensure that CFLG is effective, but the monitoring mechanisms are weak, despite the fact that the new guidelines attempt to specify monitoring and evaluation guidelines in relation to minimum indicators relating to CFLG, mechanisms for participatory monitoring, and the rewarding of excellence by stakeholders, including children and adolescents, in realizing CFLG.<sup>175</sup> Some wards have declared themselves as CFLG-compliant, without providing clarity on the indicators met or processes followed, especially with regards to meaningful participation.

## **Box 18. Nepal's CFLG National Strategy**

The CFLG National Strategy, 2011 is an overarching policy document. Although revised in the latest Guidelines,<sup>174</sup> this strategy indicates the state's prevailing position on CFLG from a decade ago. It contains the following minimum indicators for children's participation:

- Children aged 12–18 years participate in the decision-making processes of local bodies through the development of an institutional participation mechanism.
- The plans and programmes related to children are incorporated in the plan for the implementation of local bodies.
- An arrangement is in place for an institutional mechanism for hearing the voices of children in local school management committees.
- Child clubs are represented on the local health management committee.
- A functional child club network is formed in each VDC and a child club is formed in each ward of the municipality.
- District and municipal level child networks are formed.

174 Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, *Child-Friendly Local Governance Implementation Guidelines*, 2021.

175 (1) Inform the stakeholders regarding the minimum indicators related to child-friendly local governance, and monitor the effectiveness of the conducted programme; (2) Develop a mechanism so that the local level voluntarily takes responsibility for managing the child-friendly local governance programmes and engage in a participatory monitoring; (3) Make arrangements to include indicators related to child-friendly local governance while evaluating and monitoring the work executed by the government and non-government bodies; (4) Encourage and duly reward child groups, community bodies, ward, rural municipality or municipality, development partnership organizations and individuals displaying excellent performance while working in the field of child-friendly local governance.



Parbati Tiwari, the Deputy Mayor of Devchuli, said that prior to becoming a municipality, her VDC had already been declared CFLG and she is committed to ensuring that the entire municipality is CFLG compliant. But in her jurisdiction child marriage is increasing for a number of reasons (there is a mixed population of multiple ethnicities, it is geographically diverse, and education levels are low). This makes meaningful participation even more complex.

## Participation

*Participation is the interface between the agency of children and governance structures: What are the factors that enable meaningful engagement between adult institutions and adolescents and adolescent groups? What are the boundaries and limits imposed on adolescent participation (direct and indirect; individual and collective; local and national) by state actors, adults, and hierarchical structures? What are the opportunities for adolescents to represent themselves in order to question and change those boundaries?*

## Opportunities for adolescent participation

In the municipalities, every ward has provision for one child club per school. Nawraj Pathak, the President of the municipal-level child club network in Madhyabindhu Municipality, said that they chose three issues to highlight, of which two were prioritized by child clubs and the third is one of the CFLG indicators.<sup>176</sup> A young person we spoke to said that “Within the clubs, we mostly discuss what disturbs us – the current

issues, the indicators which need to be fulfilled and also the budgets required for them.”<sup>177</sup> The children mentioned that through their bal bhela, where children of the village gather, they can discuss issues with government officials and raise their concerns. Others are actively involved in capacity building, awareness activities and sports.

Where child clubs do not already exist, children are facilitated to form them by community focal persons or CSOs and registered at the municipal level. Asmin Kafle, president of the child club for Madhyabindhu Municipality, described how they ensured the availability of free sanitary pads in all schools by demanding them. Later, when this example was shared by children in other meetings, including at the national level, the practice was emulated by all other municipalities. Other children also spoke about child marriage and elopement and their partial success in addressing these issues.

The Deputy Mayor of Devchuli said that her government has ensured children’s representation in all committees, as prescribed by the CFLG Guidelines.<sup>178</sup> Child club members in this municipality were actively involved in school enrolment drives, visiting households to collect information about out-of-school children and preparing reports. According to the Mayor, at present there are no children out of school in her municipality, because of such action. She also said that adults have responded favourably to CFLG and the elected representatives in her municipality are comfortable with children’s involvement in planning and budgetary discussions.

The children mentioned that through their bal bhela, where children of the village gather, they can discuss issues with government officials and raise their concerns. Others are actively involved in capacity building, awareness activities and sports.

176 Nawraj Pathak, President of the Madhyabindhu Municipality Child Club, interview (online) with CWC, 2021.

177 Focus group discussion (online) with CWC, 16 April 2021.

178 Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, *Child-Friendly Local Governance Implementation Guidelines*, 2021.

## Boundaries and limits on participation

Nawraj Pathak pointed out that with the provincial structure, even though decisions can be from the local level upwards, it is difficult to work when the budget is inadequate.<sup>179</sup> Earlier, a minimum of 10% of the budget had to be allocated to issues related to or raised by children. The present guidelines do not prescribe any specified percentage of funds, stating that the “necessary budget for child-friendly local governance at the local level will be managed by the local level from its annual budget management.”<sup>180</sup> Critiquing this, Ashma, a member of the provincial children’s club, said that, due to shifting priorities, children may not have access to any budget at all if they are not able to advocate for it strongly.<sup>181</sup> According to Resham Sharma, there is resistance to listen to children and there is no budget to spend on building their capacity, as governments have used the budget for infrastructure development.<sup>182</sup>

The present guidelines do not prescribe any specified percentage of funds, stating that the “necessary budget for child-friendly local governance at the local level will be managed by the local level from its annual budget management”.

Children gave examples of negative responses from teachers when conventional teaching methods and corporal punishment were challenged. Apart from decisions being delayed by bureaucratic procedures, children also raised matters related to safety, teachers not working with lesson plans, lack of playgrounds, children unable to pursue education and the care of children who are forced to beg because of poverty. The decade-long armed conflict also posed a barrier to participation, as elected local

governments were not functioning during that time. A similar situation has prevailed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Sumnima Tuladar, General Secretary of CWIN:<sup>183</sup>

*[...]the local governments do recognize their responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of children, to fulfil the indicators associated with child rights friendly governance. Those oriented to children’s rights and who understand the importance of children’s right to participation do make the effort to create the environment and space for children to speak to them. However, a significant number of them are yet to gain a deep understanding of children’s rights and yet to view child friendly local governance in a comprehensive manner.*

## Inclusion

*Within adolescent groups there are those individuals who are socially, culturally and economically stronger and likely to be more articulate, thereby excluding the already marginalized from participation processes: What actions were taken to promote inclusion, particularly in relation to viewing and working with the most marginalized groups as agents and partners?*

## Exclusion of marginalized adolescents

Members of child clubs raised concerns about children engaged in exploitative work, but the participation of working children in the clubs was not evident among the children we spoke with. A

179 Nawraj Pathak, President of the Madhyabindhu Municipality Child Club, interview (online) with CWC, 2021.

180 Ibid.

181 Ashma Aryal, youth club member, former President of Nawalparasi Child Club, focus group discussion (online), with CWC, 16 April 2021.

182 Focus group discussion (online), with CWC, 16 April 2021.

183 Sumnima Tuladar, General Secretary, Child Workers in Nepal, interview (online) with CWC, 20 July 2021.

review<sup>184</sup> of child clubs in 2012 expressed concern at the exclusion of the most marginalized children. It is not clear if children on the street, Bhutanese refugee children in Nepal, or those in care environments are currently involved in the CFLG programme, although advocacy efforts are underway to include them.

Sanjog Thakuri, a former child club graduate, makes the following observation in his article:<sup>185</sup>

*Of the 20 child rights networks active at the present, only five networks have been led by three former child club members – all of whom are men. There has never been a Dalit or a woman former child club member who reached the leadership of these networks... It is also commented that the child clubs mostly have boys in the main leadership role, while girls are side-lined to the posts of vice-chairs or treasurers.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had an effect on inclusion. In a discussion with members of the National CFLG Forum,<sup>186</sup> Basanta Adhikari, the Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, accepted<sup>187</sup> that, post-COVID, children have not been able to attend schools and been exposed to illness and mental stress including depression and that local-level institutions (LLIs) have not been able to focus on children and their needs adequately. According to an article<sup>188</sup> on the children of in-country seasonal migrant workers in Nepal, the challenges these children face in relation

to COVID-19, include loss of income due to closure of brick kilns, disrupted access to education and development projects, immediate and long-term impacts on their families' livelihood, as well as increased vulnerability in all aspects of their young lives. While all children are severely affected, girls, children with disabilities, children in contact with street situations and those in very remote areas are even more so.

### **Actions for inclusion as agents**

The former members of the child clubs we spoke to said that all children in the local community are welcome and encouraged to be part of the clubs. If some children are not members of the club, the members visit them and request them to take part in club activities, at least briefly to gain exposure. If they face any family hurdles, the members talk to the parents and guardians and try to convince them to send their children to the clubs. The young people we spoke with were confident that most of the children in their community were members of the child clubs.

Some street-connected children have also been able to raise their issues before concerned authorities, with CSO facilitation, when the situation demanded. However, efforts to do so are ad hoc, rather than systemic. It is also heartening that girls from the Balika Peace Home, a transit centre run by CWIN, have been able to play a leading role in ward and municipal child advisory

**Some street-connected children have also been able to raise their issues before concerned authorities, with CSO facilitation, when the situation demanded. However, efforts to do so are ad hoc, rather than systemic.**

184 Ratna, et al., *Strategic Review of Support to Child Clubs*, 2012.

185 Thakuri, S., *Feminist Analysis of Nepali Child Rights Movement*, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, Kathmandu, 2021.

186 National CFLG Forum, *Child-Friendly Dialogue*, Video Series, Nepal, 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7m7aqewGCxJYnUV2oxhlfw>>, accessed 25 April 2021 (subsequently removed).

187 National CFLG Forum, *Child-Friendly Dialogue with Basanta Adhikari, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and General Administration*, Episode 2, National CFLG Forum, Kathmandu, 30 November 2020, <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjtoo1mwxba](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjtoo1mwxba)>, accessed 20 August 2021.

188 Daly, A., A. Hillis, S. Man Shrestha, and B.K. Shrestha, 'Breaking the Child Labour Cycle Through Education: Issues and Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children of In-country Seasonal Migrant Workers in the Brick Kilns of Nepal', *Children's Geographies*, 19:5, 622–628, 2021, DOI: 10.1080/14733285.2021.1891406.

committees, after initiating dialogue with the respective local governments.

## Resolutions

*Organizational structures determine the nature of adolescents and young people's ability to exercise agency and influence resolutions and decisions. At the same time, those charged with promoting agency are also those who set limits and make the rules on translating the exercise of agency to enact resolutions and decisions: In such a context how are adolescents able to influence resolutions and decisions?*

### Structures that determine the nature of agency

While reviewing the nature and scope of resolutions and decisions that have resulted from CFLG, a distinction needs to be made between those areas that were part of the CFLG pilot and those local governments that have been peripherally involved with CFLG. While the former demonstrates a high degree of sensitivity to issues raised by children and issues that have a bearing on children's well-being, the latter is less sensitive to issues raised by children. Even in the long-standing CFLG areas, when children raise issues that are acceptable to adults, they are considered more favourably. If

they raise controversial issues (such as age of consent or LGBTQI rights), they face quite a bit of resistance and even backlash.

### How adolescents influence resolutions and decisions

Child clubs have been active for three decades in Nepal and it is the activism of children that has built the CFLG structures for consultations; enabled child participation in planning; enabled representation in various governmental committees and CBOs; and built child club networks. In some areas, children are also in discussion with forest groups, mothers' groups, and CBOs. Their participation has prompted adults in the community, including religious leaders, to learn about the rights and entitlements of young people. Child protection systems have also been strengthened by bringing together multiple stakeholders working on different sectors to enable an integrated and coordinated approach to address the needs and aspirations of children. All of these things were reflected in the confidence with which the adolescents spoke with us.

At the same time, CSOs also shared several constraints and challenges they have faced in ensuring the meaningful participation of children in CFLG, despite the presence of numerous child clubs and their networks. Due to restricted funding, it has been difficult for CSOs to sustain the active engagement of children. Since federalization in 2015, clarity related to CFLG has been lacking and consultations with children have been discontinued or become tokenistic, lacking opportunities for children to think, discuss, formulate their views, express their opinions, and be heard.

Child clubs have been active for three decades in Nepal and it is the activism of children that has built the CFLG structures for consultations; enabled child participation in planning; enabled representation in various governmental committees and CBOs; and built child club networks.



## Analysis

Based on the findings above, the potential areas and opportunities for the enhancement of adolescent participation in governance and challenges are highlighted in the following sub-sections.

### Existing structures and processes for adolescent participation

The child clubs are the basic structures that provide a safe forum for children to discuss among each other and voice their concerns, thus firmly embedding children's right to participation in Nepal. The *bal bheelas* are the sites where they come together to share experiences and build networks. The discussions and decisions that emanate from these two structures then percolate into the governance structures through the municipalities, VDCs and district development committees. They provide fertile ground for adolescent participation to be nurtured and for them to engage with decision makers.

In some communities the environment is still not fully conducive to children's participation. Long-standing biases remain and children find it difficult to be heard and feel that they are not listened to, especially in relation to budgetary allocations. They face hurdles in relation to participation when they raise controversial issues and many years of effort are not prioritized by leaders. While institutional capacity building has gained attention in the latest version of the CFLG Guidelines,<sup>189</sup> it is not clear how and from where the resources and the technical support required to do so will be provided to the stakeholders concerned.

It will take sustained intervention to retain the momentum for change and to build further on the very important strides taken. Our review highlights the importance of the continued empowerment of young people and of strategies that dovetail with a range of social actors, decision makers, forums, opportunities, and resources coming together to uphold the rights of children and adolescents. For that, the agency of children and adolescents has to be fully understood in its true spirit, within the framework of their right to self-determination. But there seems to be a lack of competence among those responsible for CFLG implementation at the various levels of governance and across sectors.

### State buy-in and accountability

Even though some of the policy and programmatic links are yet to fully emerge, the extent to which the national legislation and policies of Nepal uphold children's right to participation and their engagement in governance is unprecedented in Asia. The CFLG system in Nepal has run parallel with the continually evolving nature of Nepal's democracy, federalization, and the devolution of power and funds to local government. However, after the endorsement of the Local Government Operation Act, 2017, and the subsequent changes in governance structures, the implementation of the CFLG National Strategy 2011 was uncertain, without the CFLG Guidelines<sup>190</sup> being revised until 2021.

At the national level, one of the concerns expressed by the Honourable Parbat Gurung from the Ministry of Women,

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189 Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, *Child-Friendly Local Governance Implementation Guidelines*, 2021.

190 Ibid.

**There is clearly an absence of institutional capability enhancement, capacity building and technical support at the local level. There is a need to quicken the pace of interventions and increase the level of investment in children.**

Children and Senior Citizens in the Child-Friendly Dialogue series,<sup>191</sup> is that many of the concerns raised by children involve multiple ministries, such as the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Federal Affairs, and Home Ministry, to name a few. Due to lack of coordination among the concerned ministries and unwillingness to take up certain responsibilities, there are delays and lapses. The delay in framing the guidelines indicates either a hesitation by the government or a lack of prioritization of CFLG. During this period, there has been a clear need for a proactive political response, as CFLG is in line with the Constitution of Nepal and Nepal's many international commitments.

There is clearly an absence of institutional capability enhancement, capacity building and technical support at the local level. There is a need to quicken the pace of interventions and increase the level of investment in children. All of the steps involved in the CFLG intervention require timely follow up and mid-course corrections. In its policy framework, the Government of Nepal has indeed demonstrated the political will to uphold the rights of women and children. Considering the imminent national scale-up of the CFLG, it is important to make sure that the State's recognition of child clubs is not replaced by State 'control' over them. The perception of adolescents (and youth) by the State as a demographic 'dividend', as well as future 'good' citizens, appears to be focused on an economic paradigm of productivity and not the principle of adolescent participation.

The Local Government Operation Act does not provide strong safeguards for the representation and voice of local

governments in key deliberative spaces. Local government representatives on the Intergovernmental Fiscal Council, the body that is tasked with coordinating finance management between the three spheres of government, are nominated at the recommendation of their provincial government. It has been argued that this is not in line with the principle of subsidiarity and may in fact enable provincial officials to co-opt local governments' interests. This has critical implications, also in relation to the ability of local governments to respond to children's needs and uphold their rights in the CFLG programme.

### **Adolescent representation**

During the discussions with child club network members, they explained how their choice of representative for their club was taken collectively in the club. Once representatives were selected, it was not clear what their relationship with their constituency was and if there were systems or processes in place for them to be accountable to them in any way. At present, the number of children in a club and in the local-level networks is already large enough to inculcate transparent and inclusive decision-making processes in all matters that concern them. The child club graduates we interviewed were also keenly aware of the foundations and pillars of children's rights, frequently referring to them in their reflections.

As the national coverage of CFLG in Nepal will involve thousands of children in over 700 local government areas, it will be important to enable both direct and representative participation of children and to build this into their facilitation and training in participatory democracy. Many

191 National CFLG Forum, *Child-Friendly Dialogue with Hon. Parbat Gurung, Ministry of Women and Child and Senior Citizens*, Episode 1, National CFLG Forum, Nepal, 2020.

active young people are on the verge of aging out. The means that in order to sustain their impact, ways to preserve their experiences in organizational memory will have to be included in the facilitation. It was interesting, but not surprising, to note that children have been extending their support to local governments in proactive ways. They are involved in COVID-19 related awareness creation, locating children who require care and bringing them into the local government's ambit, and providing a space for security and comfort. They have also been assisting in the enrolment of children in school, community clean up initiatives, and carrying out innovative climate safety projects.

The publication, *A Journey in Children's Participation*,<sup>192</sup> which describes different types of adult-child engagement, states that:

*[...]in situations where children have control over their own spaces and participation, they are in a position to negotiate with adults from a point of strength. They can then actively determine the roles each of them takes on in a given situation. It is this, which actually determines the level of children's participation.*

### Strategies for expansion

The participation of adolescents and young people is the strongest element that we saw evidence of, with legal and administrative sanctions, and their participation being valued by decision makers for its relevance. In our interviews with young people, we found that child club graduates played an active part at the local level and are now active campaigners for the rights of children at multiple levels. What was particularly

impressive was the enthusiasm of the girls, which bodes well for expansion. There are thousands, if not millions, of child club members and graduates in Nepal, and they can have a tremendous impact if they can come together to extend their support for expansion.

However, during the period when the locally elected officials did not have the legislation to enable them to perform their constitutionally envisaged functions, they were guided by executive orders and directives by the federal government. Even now there is an overreach by the federal government and administrative and service provision systems by way of 'governance by historical convention'. The focus of the central governance has changed from interventions in the social sector to infrastructure. This has resulted in inadequate budget allocation for children, especially since the previous modality of compulsory allocation of 10% of total budget for children (15% in case of CFLG declared Institutions) is no longer practised.

### Exclusion and inequity

Our understanding of this is obviously limited by the fact that we could not trace and meet those who may not have been included, which would have been possible if we had been able to visit the different locations and enquire more deeply. However, the adolescents and young people we interviewed did bring up the issue of discrimination based on gender and ethnicity and how they wished to contribute to a reality where these things do not exist.

The data on children in Nepal highlights the many vulnerable situations of children. The most vulnerable are supported by

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192 Reddy, Nandana, and Kavita Ratna, *A Journey in Children's Participation*, The Concerned for Working Children, Bangalore, India, 2000.

In this study, we learnt that there are currently about 20 actively working networks for children's rights in Nepal. Two of these networks have been the most deeply connected to CFLG, from the perspective of children's participation.

CSOs in several locations. However, in the CFLG process their presence is minimal, if they are present at all. Due to a lack of clarity of some of the provisions of the CFLG National Strategy, the most marginalized children, including children from migrant communities and refugee groups, children affected by disasters, and children belonging to gender and sexual minorities, are ignored. Some of the most vulnerable children are in the cities – without systemic access to local governments. While struggling for their own survival, which has been further exacerbated by COVID, it remains very challenging for them to take part in CFLG. In addition, there is no specific provision for child centric disaster risk reduction in Nepal – which needs to be addressed, as Nepal has become increasingly environmental fragile, due to climate change and the over exploitation of the environment.

### Role of CSOs

The role of CSOs in laying the foundation for children's participation in Nepal over the past four decades, and their involvement in every stage of the evolution of CFLG, is important to acknowledge. The vibrant presence of child clubs is in no small measure due to the support that children have received from CSOs to strengthen their organizations, critically reflect upon their own realities, access relevant information, and learn research and advocacy skills. CSOs have also played a key role in creating a favourable environment for children's participation at the community level and conducting advocacy among officials and elected representatives at various levels. They have been cognizant

of the most vulnerable groups of children and have developed strategies to bring them into the CFLG process.

In this study, we learnt that there are currently about 20 actively working networks for children's rights in Nepal. Two of these networks have been the most deeply connected to CFLG, from the perspective of children's participation: Consortium Nepal<sup>193</sup> and the National CFLG Forum.<sup>194</sup> Consortium Nepal works to enhance the understanding of children's participation among its own members and key stakeholders. Its members facilitate the formation of child clubs at the local level and support the formation of provincial and national level federations. The Forum was formed primarily to support the roll out of the CFLG programme across the country. Its core objective is to bridge the gap between CFLG policy and its implementation at different levels. Both are led by enthusiastic and committed child club graduates.

According to the CSOs, many local government representatives and functionaries lack conceptual clarity related to the agency of children and their citizenship. Ashok Khanal, a member of the Forum said, in a press note, that local representatives have been progressive to declare their areas as 'child friendly', however, they lack competency in CFLG and there is a huge gap in capacity building programme targeting policy makers, child club members and relevant stakeholders.<sup>195</sup> The role of CSOs is to act as a watchdog, to spot these deficiencies and the challenges of CFLG, and engage in determined advocacy and training to bring CFLG back to its original ideals.

193 <[www.consortium.org.np](http://www.consortium.org.np)>

194 <<https://ncflgforum.org/>>; <[www.facebook.com/ncflgforum](https://www.facebook.com/ncflgforum)>

195 Khanal, Ashok, Press Note, National CFLG Forum, undated.



## Role of UNICEF

In Nepal, the role of UNICEF in the conceptualization, piloting and mainstreaming of CFLG – both in policy and practice – has been outstanding. Programmatically, it had outcomes to fulfil with regard to CFLG and budgetary provisions for working with governments from the local to the national level. It also supported the grassroots work of CSOs with financial and technical assistance. It facilitated support to networks of child clubs for peer learning, collective advocacy and to build public opinion in favour of CFLG. It has also collaborated with and supported the work of Consortium Nepal and the National CFLG Forum since their inception.

Earlier, UNICEF worked intensively with the concerned ministries and senior officials from all concerned departments and kept up the advocacy at the central level. It has invested resources in the capacity building of children and adults. Its capacity building programmes have

covered a wide range of issues, from the facilitation of children and decentralized planning and budgeting, right up to national policy advocacy on all related legislation. Starting with the facilitation of the CFLG exposure visit of senior officials to the Philippines, UNICEF has been very focused and strategic in leveraging the legacy of child clubs and child rights CSOs and the Government of Nepal has been willing to pilot and mainstream CFLG across the entire country.

As a major stakeholder in the implementation of CFLG, UNICEF has garnered a high degree of multi-sectoral convergence in the programme. It has enjoyed the involvement of all the thematic sectors in UNICEF Nepal and also benefited from the guidance and support of senior management. As a UN agency, it has a bilateral relationship with the Government of Nepal, which has contributed to several policy level achievements, which have been critical to the evolution and sustenance of CFLG in Nepal.

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A few years after CFLG was mandated for implementation in the country, UNICEF's role was reduced for a period of time due to the transitional steps that were being undertaken in relation to the governance structures in Nepal. There are emerging commitments to invest in the renewed CFLG processes, which would do well to integrate robust child participation mechanisms. To better align its programme cooperation with the ongoing federalization process, UNICEF Nepal reprioritized its strategic focus on CFLG with the creation of new output in the current result structure of the Country Programme Action Plan 2018–2022.

The new output contributes to implementing child-friendly local governance priorities, as envisioned by the recently-endorsed CFLG implementation guideline 2078 (2021). It also complements the outcome and output of the ongoing provincial and local governance support programme. The focus of the new output is to support evidence generation, sectoral assessment, planning and capacity building and foster the meaningful participation of children to develop integrated and child sensitive development plans at the local level. The participation of children, adolescents and their families is critical for child-friendly development and equitable delivery of goods and services at the local level.

**Statement to CWC, Toya Nath Subedi,**  
*Planning and Monitoring Specialist, UNICEF Nepal, August 2021*

**In order to build a conducive environment for young people's participation, UNICEF proposes to support adolescents and youth to engage with governments and civil society and empower them to develop and advocate for policies that are related to their priority issues.**

Several members of UNICEF hold the view that its role was, and continues to be, critical to ensure the effective roll out of CFLG in Nepal. There is a need for technical support at the local level for children and government representatives to ensure the participation of children and to respond to children's demands and requirements. There is also a need for strategies and implementation processes at the national level to incorporate and mainstream CFLG. In addition, it is timely to identify the potential for enhanced adolescent participation in UNICEF's strategic cross-sectoral planning to support existing good practices. The CSO leaders we interviewed were also of the opinion that UNICEF had a role

to play in CFLG and that phasing out its historical engagement with CFLG has had a detrimental effect.

### **Enhancing participation**

In order to build a conducive environment for young people's participation, UNICEF<sup>196</sup> proposes to support adolescents and youth to engage with governments and civil society and empower them to develop and advocate for policies that are related to their priority issues, as well as lobby the government on the use of technology to increase their access to information and to quality public services. It also proposes to support existing adolescent



196 Beyond Group, UNICEF Nepal and UNICEF ROSA, *Empowering Adolescents and Youth in Nepal as Partners in Innovation for Development*, UNICEF Nepal, Kathmandu, 2021.

and youth councils in the provinces and districts to strengthen national policies and guidelines, to organize local advocacy groups, and to form multi-stakeholder coalitions. The CFLG process could be organically linked to this, from the local to the national level.

## Recommendations

Based on our findings and our analysis, we make the following recommendations to enhance the participation of adolescent and young people in governance.

### Adolescent groups

**Recommendation 1. Strengthen awareness about children's rights:** Strengthen awareness about children's rights by popularizing the right to agency and self-determination of children; taking part in peer learning and exposure visits; carrying out campaigns that protect children's rights; spreading the word about CFLG and its opportunities for participation and training; and reviewing CFLG indicators to understand and modify them for your own communities.

**Recommendation 2. Become financially resourceful:** Become financially resourceful by reducing dependence on CSOs; mobilizing local resources and local government support; collaborating with CSOs and other stakeholders to strengthen your cause; committing human capital resources for the participation of adolescents and young people in governance; and leveraging the mechanisms, capacities and norms required for adolescent participation in governance.

**Recommendation 3. Build a network of child clubs and organizations:** Build a network of child clubs and organizations at the ward, municipal, provincial and

national levels through CFLG; share learning and advocacy; support peers to become part of CFLG; and ensure continued engagement in different activities; collectively generate and gather relevant information to form a strong basis for arguments on behalf of children.

**Recommendation 4. Ensure inclusiveness:** Ensure inclusiveness in your clubs; identify the most marginalized and vulnerable children; provide additional support to them to express their agency; and seek the help of local governments or CSOs to do so.

### CSOs

**Recommendation 1. Be an independent voice for human rights:** Be an independent voice for human rights; inspire children and adolescents to stand by the universal principles of equality and rights; build the capacity of adolescents for democratic and informed participation; collaborate with other CSOs working in the area of democratic devolution; and develop strategies to embed rights-based programming in local government institutions and thematic ministries.

**Recommendation 2. Support child clubs:** Support child clubs to fend off political interference and co-option by the government; ensure their financial independence; sustain the continued involvement of child club graduates; facilitate their informed participation in CFLG; guide them to form networks at various levels; provide them with information and skills to meaningfully engage with governments; provide them with training modules; and promote intergenerational dialogue.

**Recommendation 3. Provide special support to the most vulnerable:** Provide

Ensure inclusiveness in your clubs; identify the most marginalized and vulnerable children; provide additional support to them to express their agency; and seek the help of local governments or CSOs to do so.

special support to the most vulnerable including by providing counselling and emotional support; creating a knowledge base about marginalized communities for critical engagement; optimizing local resources and community support for them; providing logistical and technical support to ensure their participation; assisting local-level institutions to reach them; and ensuring their participation in child clubs and CFLG.

**Recommendation 4. Strengthen collaboration between civil society organizations:** Strengthen collaboration between existing CSO networks like Consortium Nepal and the National CFLG Forum; attempt to bring in conceptual clarity about the participation of adolescents and young people; challenge sectoral concerns about the effective implementation of CFLG; contribute personnel and resources to act as an independent advocacy coalition; collectively strengthen child clubs and children’s organizations to become the main actors; and ensure that their agency is not overshadowed.

**Recommendation 5. Research, document and train:** Carry out participatory research into CFLG; identify good practices; make training modules for local leaders and institutions; develop modules to build the capacities of CSOs; and develop guidance manuals and reference materials for frontline development workers on facilitating child assemblies.

## State

### Federal government

**Recommendation 1.** Develop review and revise strategies: Develop review and revise strategies such as streamlining the agenda of CFLG in Nepal’s Ten Year Strategic Plan (2021–2030) for

children; roll out a strategy for CFLG with timelines up to 2030 to meet the mainstreaming goal for CFLG; ensure that the CFLG National Strategy is in line with the Operational Guidelines, 2021 by modifying the indicators to respond to the concerns of the most vulnerable children and children from marginalized and minority communities; and ensure functional and fiscal devolution to counter a unitary system of governance.

**Recommendation 2.** Allocate budget for social mobilization: Allocate budget for social mobilization to equip all stakeholders with the knowledge, attitudes and skills for CFLG implementation; develop guidelines and mechanisms for co-financing by various stakeholders to establish child-friendly and child responsive structures and services; apply the principles of subsidiarity and proximity to increase budget allocation for local governments; and reserve 10% of the local budget for children.

**Recommendation 3.** Set up mechanisms for monitoring: Set up mechanisms for the effective monitoring of CFLG at federal and provincial levels; compare the pre- and post-federal system of governance to identify good systems; set up a Child Rights Commission and engage the National Child Rights Council and National Planning Commission to act as independent watchdogs; and evolve mechanisms to amend directives and policies related to children when they do not uphold children’s rights and represent their best interests.

**Recommendation 4.** Provide forums for the engagement of child club graduates: Provide forums for the engagement of child club graduates for the effective implementation of CFLG and to enable child clubs; to facilitate child rights awareness at the national level

Allocate budget for social mobilization to equip all stakeholders with the knowledge, attitudes and skills for CFLG implementation.

addressing issues such as discrimination, inequity, violence and abuse of children; to enable shared learning and advocacy among members of child clubs; and to allow CSOs to deepen their role in empowering children and enabling local governments.

### **Provincial government**

**Recommendation 5. Support local governments:** Support local governments to fine-tune the CFLG indicators as relevant to their specific local context; build the capacities of village-level facilitators and CFLG focal persons; leverage the mandate and priorities of the Provincial and Local Government Support Programme (PLGSP); sharpen their understanding of the 'agency' of children; institute awards for institutions that effectively implement CFLG; facilitate exchange programmes for shared learning; and allocate resources for policies, mechanisms, capacities and norms for the participation of adolescents and young people.

**Recommendation 6. Develop guidelines for facilitation:** Develop guidelines to facilitate child clubs including mobilization, empowerment and networking at the local, ward, municipal and provincial levels; to enhance collaboration with CSOs for the empowerment of child clubs; to ensure the representation of children in all committees and forums; and to create district-level platforms for sharing ideas on adolescent participation.

### **Local government**

**Recommendation 7. Build CFLG bottom-up with child clubs as its foundation:** Build CFLG bottom-up with child clubs as its foundation to respond rapidly to issues raised by children when the provincial government has a role to play; to provide opportunities for adolescents

and young people to debate their views freely; to map localities where children experience severe vulnerability; to access additional financial and technical support; to ensure that the principle of subsidiarity is adhered to with the effective devolution of functions, functionaries and finances; and to allocate financial and human resources for establishing policies, mechanisms, capacities and norms for the participation of adolescents and young people.

**Recommendation 8. Create and lead convergence platforms:** Create and lead convergence platforms to bring together all child clubs, development partners and community-based organizations to support the implementation of CFLG; provide mechanisms for effective monitoring, evaluation, and grant making; create spaces to ensure the rapid communication of examples of children's agency; and for shared learning and appreciation of good practices.

**Recommendation 9. Support local-level institutions:** Support local-level institutions to fine-tune the CFLG indicators as relevant to the specific local context and to the issues raised by children; build the capacities of village-level facilitators and CFLG focal persons; integrate bottom-up planning for the meaningful participation of adolescents and young people; address the concerns and participation of the most marginalized; mobilize child club graduates and enlist their support for CFLG; and provide forums at the local level for members of child clubs to share learning and advocacy.

**Recommendation 10. Engage the support of appropriate civil society organizations:** Engage the support of CSOs with the conceptual clarity, experience and capacities to provide technical and thematic support to

Strengthen the facilitation of internal convergence and continuity within UNICEF to enhance technical capacities and advocacy for strong child and adolescent participation agendas in CFLG.

local-level institutions; create a local environment that welcomes CSO engagement; engage CSOs to organize campaigns for child rights awareness at the local level addressing issues of discrimination, inequity, violence and abuse of children; and support their successful pilot projects, like 'child-friendly school environment', for mainstreaming.

### UNICEF

**Recommendation 1. Strengthen the facilitation of internal convergence and continuity within UNICEF:** Strengthen the facilitation of internal convergence and continuity within UNICEF to enhance technical capacities and advocacy for strong child and adolescent participation agendas in CFLG; to develop a shared vision among all key stakeholders for CFLG; to consider the socio-economic-political context of the country, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, in order to evolve a common action plan; and to assist the Government

of Nepal to reach its goal of making all local-level institutions in Nepal CFLG compliant by 2030.

**Recommendation 2. Support national networks of civil society organizations with capacities and required resources:** Support national networks of CSOs with capacities and required resources for the effective implementation of CFLG; to implement all the recommendations listed above under 'CSOs'; to conduct national events such as the National Child Club Network meet and the National CFLG conference; and to provide spaces for shared learning and strategizing.

**Recommendation 3. Support the federal government with technical support:** Support the federal government with technical support to implement all the recommendations listed above under 'federal government' and partner with state institutions to develop modules and programmes for the capacity building of local governments in CFLG components.



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#### **Recommendation 4. Document the next phase of CFLG implementation:**

Document the next phase of CFLG implementation to be shared as a role model, not only for South Asia, but globally; develop operational guidelines for strengthening institutional capacities for enabling adolescent participation based on ADAP ROSA's regional framework; and include the Claiming Citizenship framework of agency, state, participation, inclusion and resolutions (ASPIRE) as a lens that governs the implementation of the operational guidelines.

### **Conclusion**

The Child-Friendly Local Government initiative in Nepal is an excellent example of the promotion of, and investment in, adolescent engagement and participation practices, including strengthening the capacities and mechanisms for adolescent engagement that the UNICEF interventions have catalysed based on earlier child and CSO-led engagements. CFLG has been creatively piloted in Nepal and has been effectively in existence for several years. Its achievements and challenges have had a multiplier effect across the entire country. It is time for the institutionalization of the CFLG mechanism in all of Nepal's 753 governance structures.

To ensure that CFLG attains its full potential, it needs to be further consolidated to put in place adolescent participation mechanisms in clubs, families, and communities, as well as local, provincial and national governments, through the continued engagement of UNICEF for at least another 5–10 years.

"As children, now we know what we want, and we are able to speak up. We all need to continue learning and contributing. Then Nepal will have a good future."

*Ashma Aryal,<sup>197</sup> youth club member, former President of Nawalparasi Child Club, interview (online) with CWC, 28 July 2021*

The agency and participation of children and adolescents must remain at the core of the CFLG framework, moving beyond the ritualistic participation of children. The inclusive participation of children in the CFLG framework will not be realized until inclusivity and inter-sectionality is addressed in all sectors of child development.

CSOs and agencies like UNICEF must dedicate themselves to ensure that the voices of adolescents and young people are heard on all matters that affect them, not only at the local level, but also at the federal level. The many inspiring examples practised by various local governments and municipalities must be promoted and replicated, so that CFLG becomes an organic structure that is also unilaterally respected by all political parties. This will guarantee the institutionalization of CFLG, irrespective of the political party in power.

If UNICEF does not engage with CFLG with rigour and commitment at this critical juncture, it will undoubtedly be a downward spiral for the CFLG programme in the entire country and a loss for the entire region. UNICEF, other international agencies and CSOs must support CFLG strategically and multi-sectorally and bolster it at all levels to ensure that it flourishes in the years ahead.

**The Child-Friendly Local Government initiative in Nepal is an excellent example of the promotion of, and investment in, adolescent engagement and participation practices, including strengthening the capacities and mechanisms for adolescent engagement that the UNICEF interventions have catalysed based on earlier child and CSO-led engagements.**

<sup>197</sup> Now 20-years-old, Ashma Aryal is a child club graduate and has been associated with child clubs since the age of 10.





# 5

## Adolescent and Youth Participatory Review of the National Youth Policy, Bhutan

“For us, participation means more than asking youth to take part in community services, we are trying to promote child participation in decision-making processes and local governance. Engaging young people in the National Youth Policy is an entry point to show that if we give young people a chance, good results are possible”.

**Sonam Wangchuk,**

*UNICEF Bhutan, interview (online) with CWC, November 2020*

### Introduction

The Kingdom of Bhutan spans approximately 38,140 square kilometres<sup>198</sup> with a total population of 727,145 (48% females; 52% males), of which 38% live in urban areas and 62% in rural areas.<sup>199</sup> The main ethnic groups in Bhutan are the Bhutia (Ngalops), Nepalese (Gurungs) and Sharchops. About three quarters of the population follow Buddhism;<sup>200</sup> the remainder follow

Hinduism, with a small minority following folk religions<sup>201</sup> While Bhutan’s official language is Dzongkha, there are about 20 languages spoken in the country, with the most common being Tshangla (spoken by members of the Sharchop community). Nepali is also spoken widely in Bhutan, due to the presence of the Lhotshampa (‘people of the south’) community, which is made up of different Nepali ethnic groups and constitutes over a quarter of the population.<sup>202</sup>



198 World Bank, ‘Indicators: Bhutan’, undated, <[www.data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.TOTL.K2?locations=BT](http://www.data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.TOTL.K2?locations=BT)>, 20 August 2021.

199 National Statistics Bureau, ‘Bhutan Interactive Data Portal: Population’, 2021, <[www.nsb.gov.bt/bhutan-interactive-data-portal/population](http://www.nsb.gov.bt/bhutan-interactive-data-portal/population)>, accessed 20 August 2021.

200 Norbu, Dawa, and Pradyumna P. Karan, ‘Bhutan’, Britannica, undated, <[www.britannica.com/place/Bhutan](http://www.britannica.com/place/Bhutan)>, accessed 20 August 2021.

201 National Statistics Bureau, ‘Bhutan Interactive Data Portal: Population’, 2021.

202 Minority Rights Group International, ‘World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples. Bhutan: Lhotshampas’, 2021, <[www.minorityrights.org/minorities/lhotshampas](http://www.minorityrights.org/minorities/lhotshampas)>, accessed 17 August 2021.

**Bhutan's democracy is grounded in the philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH), a unique concept that "implies that sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards notions of progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing."**

Bhutan officially transitioned to a democratic constitutional monarchy in 2008, under the leadership of His Majesty the King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who initiated and was deeply involved in the democratization process. The emergence of a new democracy marks the significance of this case study among the four selected for study. Bhutan's democracy is grounded in the philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH), a unique concept that<sup>203</sup> "implies that sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards notions of progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing."

The Gross National Happiness Index (GNHI) was created to measure and aid in increasing Gross National Happiness in policy making in Bhutan.<sup>204</sup> The 2015 GNH Report found that 43.4% of Bhutanese people are 'deeply or extensively happy'.<sup>205</sup> However:

*The GNH levels among youth are lower than other age groups, and changes are evident. For example, in 2010, nearly 80% of youth aged 15–25 thought that lying could never be justified, but this had plummeted to about 60% of youth by 2015. The youth need to be engaged and energised to value GNH and make it their own priority.*<sup>206</sup>

## Issues faced by children in Bhutan

The mandate for child rights in Bhutan arises from the Constitution of Bhutan, 2017 and the Child Care and Protection Act, 2011. Article 9(18) of the Constitution states that:

*The State shall endeavour to take appropriate measures to ensure that children are protected against all forms of discrimination and exploitation including trafficking, prostitution, abuse, violence, degrading treatment and economic exploitation.*<sup>207</sup>

The Child Care and Protection Act, 2011 and the Child Care and Protection Rules and Regulations of Bhutan, 2015 state that the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration.

Organizations such as Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women (RENEW), founded by Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck in 2004, have had a long-standing impact on child rights and protection issues. RENEW works closely with the United Nations Population Fund on issues related to the sexual and reproductive health of monks and nuns,<sup>208</sup> to address their lack of access to comprehensive education on sexual and reproductive health. RENEW<sup>209</sup> also works with the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) and the Government of Bhutan on issues

203 Oxford Policy and Human Development Initiative, 'Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index', undated, <[www.ophi.org.uk/policy/gross-national-happiness-index](http://www.ophi.org.uk/policy/gross-national-happiness-index)>, accessed 17 August 2021.

204 Ibid.

205 Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH Research, *A Compass Towards a Just and Harmonious Society: 2015 GNH Survey Report*, Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH Research, Thimphu, 2016.

206 Ibid., p. 7.

207 Government of Bhutan, *Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan 2017*, Supreme Court, Royal Court of Bhutan, 2017.

208 United Nations Population Fund, 'Nuns and Monks Break the Silence on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Bhutan', 4 November 2019, <[www.unfpa.org/news/nuns-and-monks-break-silence-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-bhutan](http://www.unfpa.org/news/nuns-and-monks-break-silence-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-bhutan)>, accessed 20 August 2021.

209 <[www.renew.org.bt/mission](http://www.renew.org.bt/mission)>

of domestic violence, sexual assault and gender-based violence through preventive and curative interventions and cross-cutting services.

The results of a 2017 NCWC study<sup>210</sup> on violence against women and girls “show that about 3 in 10 women aged 15–49 that had ever been partnered are likely to experience at least one form of a specific type of intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime.”<sup>211</sup> An earlier 2016 NCWC study<sup>212</sup> on violence against children and young people in Bhutan found that “More than 6 out of 10 children (64.1%) had experienced some form of physical violence at least once in their lifetime, often occurring for the first time before 13 years of age,”<sup>213</sup> with only a few reporting the incidents to child protection agencies. The most common forms of physical violence reported (44%) were corporal punishment by parents, caretakers and other relatives. Furthermore, the study reported that “More than 1 out of 10 children (12.8%) had experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime” and the “Prevalence among young men was highest, with nearly one in five (17.1%) having experienced sexual violence at least once.”<sup>214</sup> According to UNICEF, 6 out of 10 children have experienced some form of physical violence, and traditional practices such as corporal punishment and child marriage are common.<sup>215</sup>

A United Nations Population Fund sponsored study reported that, from 2000–2014,<sup>216</sup> 33% of mental health outpatients were adolescents and young people (aged 10–24). Drug abuse and substance addiction is a major issue in Bhutan, along with drug-related crimes, which have been increasing. Bhutan also has a high per capita consumption of alcohol. Reportedly, the National Drug Use Survey of 2017 found that about 67% of university students used their pocket money to buy drugs.<sup>217</sup>

Finally, unemployment and the lack of livelihood options seem to be a major and continuing concern for young people in Bhutan, as reported by the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD)<sup>218</sup> as well as in other studies. The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened this concern.

**According to UNICEF, 6 out of 10 children have experienced some form of physical violence, and traditional practices such as corporal punishment and child marriage are common.**

## About the project

### Project description

Bhutan’s National Youth Policy (NYP) 2011 aims to respond to the needs of young people (which includes older adolescents) in Bhutan by “providing a broad framework within which all stakeholders can contribute comprehensively and in a coordinated manner to youth development.”<sup>219</sup> It is

210 NCWC, *Study on Violence against Women in Bhutan*, National Commission for Women and Children, Royal Government of Bhutan, Thimphu, 2017.

211 Ibid.

212 NCWC and UNICEF, *National Survey on Violence against Children and Young People in Bhutan*, UNICEF, Thimphu, June 2016.

213 Ibid.

214 Ibid.

215 UNICEF, ‘Protection...for Every Child’, UNICEF Bhutan, undated, <[www.unicef.org/bhutan/protection-%E2%80%A6every-child](http://www.unicef.org/bhutan/protection-%E2%80%A6every-child)>, accessed 18 August 2021.

216 Dorji, L., S. Gyeltshen, C. Jamtsho, T. Minten, T. Dorjee, P. Namgay, and T. Wangchuk, *Crime and Mental Health Issues among the Young Bhutanese People*, National Statistics Bureau, Thimphu, 2015, p. 113.

217 Tshomo, Dechen, ‘Alcohol and Substance Abuse Rampant Among Students’, *Kuensel*, 28 July 2017, <[www.kuenselonline.com/alcohol-and-substance-abuse-rampant-among-students](http://www.kuenselonline.com/alcohol-and-substance-abuse-rampant-among-students)>, accessed 20 August 2021.

218 BCMD, *Youth Voices: Youth Matters Report*, 2020.

219 Government of Bhutan, *National Youth Policy*, Department of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Education, 2011, <[www.youthpolicy.org/national/Bhutan\\_2011\\_National\\_Youth\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Bhutan_2011_National_Youth_Policy.pdf)>, accessed 20 August 2021.

The review exercise was envisaged as a participatory process, to “transcend tokenism in youth participation” one in which youth could be substantively involved in the review, enabling them to advocate for the policy, increasing their ownership, and ensuring implementation of the policy.

strongly rooted in the philosophy of Gross National Happiness and its four pillars. While agencies working with young people implemented components of the policy’s activities, the NYP 2011 was not formerly operationalized in its fullest sense.<sup>220</sup>

The review of the NYP 2011 began in 2020, led by the policy’s custodians, the Department of Youth and Sports (DYS) of the Ministry of Education<sup>221</sup> and supported by UNICEF,<sup>222</sup> employing an inclusive<sup>223</sup> and participatory approach.<sup>224</sup> The *Youth Voices in Youth Matters*<sup>225</sup> participatory component was designed by the BCMD as a ‘collaborative research project’,<sup>226</sup> employing a mixed-methodology approach. The project was comprised of three parts:

- A 9-day residential camp was held with 24 youth, who were part of the Seventh Cohort<sup>227</sup> of the BCMD’s Youth Initiative for Debate, Deliberation and Dialogue, who reviewed the NYP 2011 and presented their findings at the end of the camp.
- From among the 24 youth, 18 were trained to be facilitators to conduct FGDs with youth groups across the country.
- In addition, an online survey was administered through Facebook.

The review exercise was envisaged as a participatory process, to “transcend tokenism in youth participation,”<sup>228</sup> one in which youth could be substantively involved in the review, enabling them to advocate for the policy, increasing their ownership, and ensuring implementation of the policy.<sup>229</sup> The Youth Initiative members were selected through registration with a motivation letter and the FGD participants were comprised of young people from 11 different youth groups (monks, nuns, those living with disabilities, in rehabilitation, in conflict with the law, creative arts, sports, students, entertainment [drayang], seeking employment, and LGBTQI young people) across six districts.<sup>230</sup> The exercise ensured that young people’s rights to express themselves freely, to be heard, and to participate in matters of concern to them were realized in all three parts of the project.

During the 9-day residential camp, the 24 pre-selected Youth Initiative<sup>231</sup> members gathered to discuss and reflect on issues affecting them, the root causes of these issues, and their vision for a better world for themselves. At the end of the camp, the young people presented<sup>232</sup> “their aspirations, challenges and gaps in the 2011 policy document, and recommended revisions to stakeholders”

220 BCMD, *Youth Voices: Youth Matters Report*, 2020, p. 9.

221 BCMD, *Youth Voices: Youth Matters Report*, 2020, p. 14.

222 UNICEF, *Youth People Lead Research to Inform the National Youth Policy in Bhutan*, Case Study Series: Experiences in Adolescent & Youth Engagement, UNICEF Bhutan, Thimphu, December 2020, <[www.unicef.org/bhutan/media/2296/file/Bhutan\\_AY-Engage\\_Case\\_Study.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/bhutan/media/2296/file/Bhutan_AY-Engage_Case_Study.pdf)>, accessed 8 October 2021.

223 BCMD, *Youth Voices: Youth Matters Report*, 2020, p. 6.

224 UNICEF, *Youth People Lead Research to Inform the National Youth Policy in Bhutan*, 2020.

225 Ibid.

226 Ibid.

227 BCMD, ‘The Youth Initiative for Debate, Deliberation & Dialogue: The Seventh Cohort’, 2020, <[www.bcmd.bt/yibhutan/cool\\_timeline/the-seventh-cohort/](http://www.bcmd.bt/yibhutan/cool_timeline/the-seventh-cohort/)>, accessed 16 August 2021.

228 BCMD, *Youth Voices: Youth Matters Report*, 2020, p. 15.

229 Ibid., p. 15

230 The six districts are Thimphu, Paro, Chukha, Punakha, Trongsa and Trashigang.

231 The Youth Initiative for Debate, Deliberation & Dialogue (or Youth Initiative) is a youth engagement process facilitated by BCMD (see [www.bcmd.bt/yibhutan/cool\\_timeline/the-seventh-cohort/](http://www.bcmd.bt/yibhutan/cool_timeline/the-seventh-cohort/)).

232 BCMD, *Youth Voices: Youth Matters Report*, 2020, p. 16.

The 18 young people who were trained as facilitators of the FGDs were organized into pairs to interview different youth groups across the country. Altogether, 114 young people participated in the FGDs.

The reach of the review process was expanded with an online survey. The BCMD had aimed to reach 2,000 respondents, however, only 1,099 youth responded, which is a response rate of 55%.<sup>233</sup> The survey included questions related to both qualitative and quantitative aspects of youth related programmes and services, even though it did not include provisions for elaboration. The online survey was to measure the level of satisfaction of young people related to different aspects under six thematic groups, while the FGDs provided qualitative feedback based on young people's experiences and observations.<sup>234</sup>

The culmination of this process was the BCMD *Youth Voices: Youth Matters Report*,<sup>235</sup> which presented the findings of the research, forming a part of the ongoing NYP review exercise. Some representatives of youth groups are presently involved in the stakeholder consultations for the Action Plan, led by the DYS, a process supported by UNICEF to engage diverse young people to review the policy and action plan, with

the youth policy expected to be finalized in December 2021.<sup>236</sup>

### UNICEF's strategy

The mission of UNICEF Bhutan's Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) programme has been to empower adolescents to actively engage and participate in civic affairs across programme areas<sup>237</sup> and national strategies. For example, UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities Initiative conducted an initial assessment of the capacity and potential for child-friendly local governance in the three pilot districts of Trongsa, Lhuentse, and Pemagatshel. It will now embark on a series of workshops in partnership with various government departments and the Youth Development Fund, a local CSO steering youth development in Bhutan, along with the teams from the three pilot districts to design and test a government-led guideline and action plan for a nationwide CFLG roll-out.<sup>238</sup> Young people's participation in the enactment of CFLG is seen as a strong component of the work. It will be steered by the ADAP programme and the Social Policy unit of UNICEF Bhutan.

CFLG is at a nascent stage in Bhutan, as is the evolving devolution of power to local government administration. While Article 88<sup>239</sup> of the Local Government Act of Bhutan 2009 provides for 'public participation' to be ensured by the local government in the formulation of the five year and annual plans, this does

**The mission of UNICEF Bhutan's Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) programme has been to empower adolescents to actively engage and participate in civic affairs across programme areas and national strategies.**

233 Ibid., p. 14

234 BCMD, *Youth Voices: Youth Matters Report*, 2020, p. 16.

235 Ibid.

236 This second phase is not a part of the present study.

137 UNICEF, *Strategy Note on Adolescent Programme 2019–2023*, UNICEF Bhutan, 15 January 2020.

238 <[www.childfriendlycities.org/bhutan](http://www.childfriendlycities.org/bhutan)>

239 Article 88 of the Local Government Act of Bhutan, 2009 reads: "A member of the Local Government shall ensure public participation from his/her constituency in the formulation of five year and annual plans"

Meanwhile, independent, volunteer-driven and CSO-led youth movements in Bhutan have been strong.

not usually include the participation of children in practice. The initiative documented in the present case study, and multiple other participation strategies for adolescent and young people, is anticipated to support the embedding of their participation in CFLG.

As a new democracy and a constitutional monarchy, Bhutan represents unique challenges in analysing the participation of adolescents and young people in governance, as reflected in the discussion. Democratization has brought about many changes for Bhutan, which have been slow and challenging, while enriching at the same time.

### Young people

According to a 2012 UNICEF study, Bhutan has a very young population.<sup>240</sup> More than half of the population are under 28 and about one-third are between 10–24 years of age.<sup>241</sup> As the National Youth Policy 2020 is a national-level policy, all of the young people of Bhutan will form a part of the constituency. The NYP of 2011 defines young people as those between 13–24 years of age, while the United Nations defines young people as between 15–24 years of age.

In 2015, the Election Commission of Bhutan set up Democracy Clubs to act as a ‘Mini-Election Commission’ to promote understanding of the Bhutanese electoral system and processes, democratic governance and institutions, and to encourage student participation in the decision-making processes of schools

and institutions.<sup>242</sup> The total number of clubs in the year 2017 was 2,015, with 7,193 registered members.<sup>243</sup> Participation in the Democracy Clubs is voluntary. Building on the Democracy Clubs, the Bhutan Children’s Parliament was established in 2015 by the Election Commission of Bhutan, with the first session taking place in 2016.<sup>244</sup> However, in 2017, there was a public debate regarding the need to continue the Children’s Parliament and its legitimacy and legality,<sup>245</sup> with some National Council members afraid of ‘politicizing’ youth. By this time, the Bhutan Children’s Parliament had completed two sessions, in 2016 and 2017, before being put on hold in 2019.

Meanwhile, independent, volunteer-driven and CSO-led youth movements in Bhutan have been strong. Groups such as Team Change and the Bhutan Scouts Association work on diverse issues including unemployment and environment. The Young Bhutan Network, an umbrella platform established by the Department of Youth and Sports (Ministry of Education) includes these and other organizations such as the Youth Advocacy Network Bhutan.<sup>246</sup> Pride Bhutan works on LGBTQI issues, and the decriminalization of gay sex in Bhutan in December 2020 has given the organization renewed meaning. The Young Volunteers in Action (Y-VIA), under the Youth Development Fund, is a network of young volunteers established in 2003 to represent the perspectives of youth in development activities, dedicated to “achieving GNH

240 <[www.unicef.org/bhutan/adolescent-development-and-participation](http://www.unicef.org/bhutan/adolescent-development-and-participation)>

241 Ibid.

242 <[www.bcp.ecb.bt/index.php/map-of-democracy-club](http://www.bcp.ecb.bt/index.php/map-of-democracy-club)>

243 Ibid.

244 Ibid.

245 Business Bhutan, ‘ECB Negates Council’s Views on Children’s Parliament’, *Business Bhutan*, 30 August 2017, <[www.businessbhutan.bt/2017/08/30/ecb-negates-councils-views-on-childrens-parliament](http://www.businessbhutan.bt/2017/08/30/ecb-negates-councils-views-on-childrens-parliament)>, accessed 17 August 2021.

246 Young Bhutan Network @BhutanYoung on Twitter <[www.twitter.com/bhutanyoung?lang=en](http://www.twitter.com/bhutanyoung?lang=en)>.

[Gross National Happiness] through volunteerism and leadership.”<sup>247</sup>

On International Youth Day on 12 August UNICEF,<sup>248</sup> the Bhutan Youth Development Fund, Department of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Education, Loden Foundation and BCMD jointly launched the Volunteer Management Information System (VMIS) to address the lack of data on young people and volunteerism in Bhutan, which was leading to a lack of efficiency in working together.<sup>249</sup> The VMIS has 3,451 registered volunteers, of which 1,948 are female. A pioneering and likely path-breaking effort, there is great potential for this

data management system to inform coordination and collaboration for young people’s participation in governance and democracy building.

## Methodology

As a result of the restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, it was not possible for the CWC team to visit the programme area. Online interviews and discussions were held instead, which imposed several limitations in terms of the availability of discussants, as well as limiting the rapport that could be established. We drew heavily on the in-depth report produced by BCMD and a

**The VMIS has 3,451 registered volunteers, of which 1,948 are female. A pioneering and likely path-breaking effort, there is great potential for this data management system to inform coordination and collaboration for young people’s participation in governance and democracy building.**



247 <[www.m.facebook.com/bettertodaybrightertomorrow](http://www.m.facebook.com/bettertodaybrightertomorrow)>

248 UNICEF, *Mapping Youth Volunteerism in Bhutan: A Database of Youth Group Led Activities, Skills and Programmes for Young People*, UNICEF Bhutan, 12 August 2021, <[www.unicef.org/bhutan/stories/mapping-youth-volunteerism-bhutan](http://www.unicef.org/bhutan/stories/mapping-youth-volunteerism-bhutan)>, accessed 20 August 2021.

249 Ibid.

few other documents for our secondary research, to gain a sound understanding of the youth consultation process and its outcomes.

The CSOs we had online discussions with included the BCMD and members of the Youth Development Fund. We also spoke with state officials from the DYS of the Ministry of Education, members of the Children Division of the NCWC, and officials of the GNH Commission. We had developed interactive tools for discussions with children. However, as COVID-19 did not allow youth to gather in one place, we felt that it would be more appropriate to hold FGDs, guided by our list of 'areas of enquiry'. We spoke to three youth who were part of the Youth Initiative cohort in the residential camp, eight youth who were not a part of the review process, but were part of other youth groups,<sup>250</sup> and two youth to discuss the BCMD report – most of whom were from urban backgrounds.

We could not meet with as many young persons as we had planned or with children from marginalized or vulnerable groups in Bhutan. We were unable to

speaking to anyone living with a disability or young people in care institutions, *drayang*s (youth in creative arts), young people in contact with the justice system including incarcerated youth, or young monks and nuns. All of the young people we did speak to were comfortable with English, so we have no insights from non-English speaking youth. We were also not able to talk to parents and community members to obtain their insights.

The research was ably supported by the teams from ADAP and the Social Policy unit at UNICEF Bhutan, and by Choeying Dolma, Intern with UNICEF Bhutan, who helped organize the meetings and recordings, along with the overall continued and timely support of Dharshini Seneviratne from UNICEF ROSA. Throughout our interviews, we continued our discussions with both representatives of UNICEF Bhutan and the ADAP team, to seek clarifications where needed. Secondary sources were reviewed, especially in relation to GNH, as well as the fledgling genesis of CFLG in Bhutan. The official version of the NYP 2020 was not available to us at the time



250 The discussants were from Team Change, Bhutan Scouts Association, and Youth Advocacy Network Bhutan.



of the study, as it was before the GNH Commission for review. A Draft Version of the National Youth Policy 2020 dated 24 September 2020 was provided to us by UNICEF Bhutan.

## Findings

The findings of the case study are presented according to the ASPIRE framework set out in Chapter 1.

### Agency

*Agency is defined as the evolving capacity and confidence of adolescents to engage with decision makers and structures and their autonomy in expressing opinions and taking action: Did they drive, initiate or manage projects? Did they make choices? What was the impact of other actors on their agency?*

#### **Evolving adolescent capacity to engage**

It was observed through interactions with the young people we interviewed that while their agency was evolving, their capacity and willingness to engage with decision makers and state representatives, as well as their perceptions of themselves as right-holders with entitlements, including the right to seek and access information and the right to participate in policy-processes and governance, are at a nascent stage. This was apparent in the gratitude that many of the respondents felt for decision makers and others in positions of power for the 'opportunity' they had been provided to take part in the review process.

Agency was expressed in various ways. A member of Team Change spoke of how they address the sexual assault of young people and children, which is seen as a significant problem, by going to schools to create awareness about sexual harassment. Another discussant from a religious group stated that they worked on engaging youth in religious activities to instil discipline, for instance, by building a statue of the god of medicine in various schools. The Youth Development Fund also conducted the South Asia region-wide adolescent-led appreciative enquiry process – SParking Wellbeing – initiated by ADAP ROSA, which enabled enquiry and action into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people,<sup>251</sup> enhancing young people's agency and action by helping them to overcome apathy and stress.<sup>252</sup>

Young people talked to us about the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and working online through Facebook and other media channels to maintain engagement on issues. Some of them were already using technology extensively prior to the pandemic, such as Team Change with their group chat option on Facebook, to address problems such as youth unemployment, sexual assault and issues within families.

#### **Adolescent autonomy to express and act**

Young people's agency in articulating traditionally unseen aspects of policies and planning was clear during the youth policy process. According to Ngawang Rigsar, Programme Officer for BCMD, the process enabled youth perspectives and the experiences of young people

Young people's agency in articulating traditionally unseen aspects of policies and planning was clear during the youth policy process.

251 UNICEF, *SParking Wellbeing: Selected Learnings from an Adolescent-Led Engagement and Enquiry during COVID-19 – Bhutan Country Report*, UNICEF Bhutan, July 2021, <[www.unicef.org/rosa/media/16001/file/SParking%20Wellbeing%20Appreciative%20Enquiry%20Selected%20Learnings.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/16001/file/SParking%20Wellbeing%20Appreciative%20Enquiry%20Selected%20Learnings.pdf)>, accessed 24 November 2021.

252 Ibid.

**Critical adolescent and youth services, such as counselling, were also felt to constrain empathetic and youth agency-driven responses to young people's mental stress issues. The findings of the BCMD report show that youth shared doubts about the ethics of counsellors, as they felt that confidentiality is not respected or protected.**

as service users to be heard and considered, including establishing the relevant opening hours for youth centres, and highlighting the mismatch between skills and education and existing livelihoods opportunities.<sup>253</sup> Chencho Lhamu, Executive Director of BCMD, also reported how the process and young people's voices had led to mental health being placed more strongly on the youth policy agenda.<sup>254</sup> In addition, young people made specific links between mental health issues and the overuse of technology. The agency of LGBTQI youth was also enabled, with their voices critically informing youth policy priorities, and LGBTQI youth finding satisfaction in this involvement, as highlighted by the representative of NCWC.

Roma Pradhan, Senior Programme Coordinator, Youth Development Fund,<sup>255</sup> observed that there is a trend of young people acting as 'agents of change' at the community level and they are interested in contributing to local government.<sup>256</sup> Members of the Bhutan Scouts Association gave examples of how they exercised their agency on issues such as preservation of the environment, something that they, as young people, had actively chosen to advocate for by creating awareness in schools against the use of plastic. They also highlighted youth-led promotion and advocacy for sexual education and generating awareness among young people about sexual assault.<sup>257</sup>

## Impact of other actors on agency

Young people often felt that their agency was constrained by cultural factors. The draft NYP 2020 emphasizes that there is a clear need to internalize core Bhutanese values,<sup>258</sup> such as *Tha Damtshig* (the sacred commitment to others in society)<sup>259</sup> and *Ley Jumdrey* (good begets good).<sup>260</sup> The preservation of culture and tradition is an integral part of Bhutan's national ethos. Many young people highlighted the nature of the promotion of culture. One respondent felt that it was a "...must (to) follow our culture", while another said that "culture and traditions must also evolve with time".<sup>261</sup> Members of the LGBTQI community felt that they were constrained in some, although not all, cultural and policy contexts. The third pillar of GNH being 'cultural preservation', the struggle between the preservation of culture and cultural heritage, and self-expression and 'modernization', which may not involve cultural traditions, can create tension among young people and affect their agency. Traditional concepts are also sometimes in conflict with modern attitudes of agency propagated by the global media.

Critical adolescent and youth services, such as counselling, were also felt to constrain empathetic and youth agency-driven responses to young people's mental stress issues. The findings of the BCMD report show that youth shared

253 Ngawang Rigzar, BCMD, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

254 Chencho Lhamu, Executive Director, BCMD, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

255 Roma Pradhan, Youth Development Fund, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

256 Innovate Bhutan – Centre for Social and Business Innovation "aims to wed social and business innovation and forge empowered leaders to create socially and environmentally innovative ventures in Bhutan" (see <[www.bhutanyouth.org/lab](http://www.bhutanyouth.org/lab)>).

257 Members of the Bhutan Scouts Association, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

258 Tashi Choden, National Consultant, 'Draft National Youth Policy 2020', Revised on 24 September 2020, Submitted to DYS, Ministry of Education and UNICEF Bhutan.

259 Wangyal, T., 'Ensuring Social Sustainability: Can Bhutan's Education System Ensure Intergenerational Transmission Of Values?', *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Volume 3, No.1, Summer 2001.

260 Ibid.

261 Young people, interviews (online) with CWC, June 2021.

doubts about the ethics of counsellors, as they felt that confidentiality is not respected or protected.<sup>262</sup> Lack of confidence that incidences of abuse or corporal punishment shared by youth would not be revealed due to hierarchies of adult-youth relations were also highlighted by Chencho Lhamu of BCMD. She also identified top-down parenting, which is common in Bhutan and is reinforced by the education system, as part of the reason why youth were experiencing mental health issues.<sup>263</sup>

## State

*The mandated role of the state is to integrate and sustain adolescent participation in governance and ensure subsidiarity in planning, with the devolution of decision-making power to the lowest possible tier of government: How are States able and willing to integrate adolescent participation in governance? How are current economic forces that transfer welfare functions from state to non-state actors influencing the ability and willingness of States to invest in their mandate for meaningful adolescent and community participation in governance structures?*

### **Integrating adolescent participation in governance**

Bhutan ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 1 August 1990, but is not a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights or the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights (ICESR). The norm of 'Gross National Happiness' forms the basis of all policy making, including the NYP 2020 and the Child Policy. The legal

mandate for children's participation in decisions that affect them is found in guidelines rooted in the Child Care and Protection Act of Bhutan 2011, whereby a child placed in an 'appropriate' home<sup>264</sup> shall be "consulted about and allowed to participate in making decisions affecting the life of a child".<sup>265</sup> Similar provisions exist in the Guidelines for Accreditation of Service Provider, 2017, by the NCWC. The extension of this right to participate in governance is embedded in the stakeholder discussions for the Action Plan for the National Youth Policy 2020 and very minimally in the new Child Policy.

The Monarchy and the GNH Commission have an important role to play in enhancing the participation of young people in governance. Karma Tshering Samdrup (Research and Evaluation Division) and Lekema Dorji (Children Division of GNH Commission) elaborated on this when they informed us that the 2020 NYP had been submitted to the GNH Commission, where it is being screened through the lens of 9 domains and 22 variables to ensure that "it is in line with GNH", after which it will be presented to the Cabinet. According to Lekema Dorji, they "wish to take a systems approach (to issues like unemployment), but research and data are limited at the moment".<sup>266</sup>

### **Willingness to invest in meaningful participation**

Varying perspectives and experiences exist on the meaningful facilitation of participation. On the one hand, there are instances, such as recounted by Chencho Lhamu of BCMD, of adult discomfort in providing permission when a group

**The Monarchy and the GNH Commission have an important role to play in enhancing the participation of young people in governance.**

262 BCMD, *Youth Voices: Youth Matters Report*, 2020, p. 34.

263 Chencho Lhamu, Executive Director, BCMD, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

264 Section 12, The Child Care and Protection Act of Bhutan 2011.

265 Section 12 (c), The Child Care and Protection Act of Bhutan 2011.

266 Lekema Dorji, Gross National Happiness Commission, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021

of youth in a rural community took the initiative to attend a village level meeting. On the other hand, Roma Pradhan of the Youth Development Fund states that:

*When young people got an opportunity to take part in the village meeting, they were able to understand how to plan for development and brought up new issues, such as rural-urban youth migration and of young people abusing drugs and alcohol [...]. The local leaders were taken by surprise by the seriousness of these issues.*<sup>267</sup>

**Rinzin Wangmo, DYS, stressed that coordination and collaboration between government agencies is what they wish to focus on. She said “right now, we are all working in silos, so things tend to fall through the cracks. If we all do not all come together, no single agency can address all the concerns of young people.”**

Rinzin Wangmo, DYS, stressed that coordination and collaboration between government agencies is what they wish to focus on. She said “right now, we are all working in silos, so things tend to fall through the cracks. If we all do not all come together, no single agency can address all the concerns of young people.”<sup>268</sup> Wangmo reiterated the need to:

*[...] have a system in place where all the agencies that are developing policies should collaborate and involve young people. At present such a system is not there. In the new revised policy, we want to have a system in place where young people can be involved in all the development of policies related to them.*<sup>269</sup>

Roma Pradhan emphasized that UNICEF plays a very important role in avoiding the duplication of efforts and helps to

showcase the work of local CSOs at the international level.<sup>270</sup> Chenchu Lhamu spoke positively about the pivotal role of UNICEF in bringing together the DYS and BCMD in 2020 for the NYP review process, which would have been difficult for CSOs to achieve alone.<sup>271</sup>

“With regard to the implementation of the NYP – youth can evaluate how the policy is progressing. In such a system of M&E [monitoring and evaluation], they will have opportunities to demand their right to livelihood etc. So, when M&E for the youth policy was being developed, as I believe young people should be involved, I specifically asked for its inclusion.”

**Karma Tshering Samdru**, *Research and Evaluation Division, GNH Commission, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021*

## Participation

*Participation is the interface between the agency of children and governance structures: What are the factors that enable meaningful engagement between adult institutions and adolescents and adolescent groups? What are the boundaries and limits imposed on adolescent participation (direct and indirect; individual and collective; local and national) by state actors, adults, and hierarchical structures? What are the opportunities for adolescents to represent themselves in order to question and change those boundaries?*

267 Roma Pradhan, Youth Development Fund, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

268 Rinzin Wangmo, Chief Program Officer, DYS, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

269 Ibid.

270 Roma Pradhan, Youth Development Fund, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021

271 Chenchu Lhamu, Executive Director, BCMD, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

## Opportunities for adolescent participation

The number of young people who participated in the first stage of reviewing the 2011 NYP was small, with only 24 Youth Initiative members at the workshop, 114 youth in FGDs, and 1,024 participants in the online survey on Facebook. Many youth networks like Team Change and Young Bhutan Network were not included and claim they were not aware of the review process. This limited reach was acknowledged in the BCMD report, with the COVID-19 pandemic cited as one of the main reasons for this. Going forward, substantial resources are needed to ensure wide-ranging and representative in-person consultative processes. State officials said they were ensuring that many of the groups that had been left out could take part in the development of the Action Plans for the implementation of the 2020 NYP.

Kinzang from Team Change stated that if they were a part of it, they would have raised issues of livelihood and job creation, as well as about the sexual assault of young people and children.<sup>272</sup> Mental health and depression were issues of major concern, which were also highlighted in the BCMD report *Youth Voices: Youth Matters*.<sup>273</sup> Tenzin from Pride Bhutan said, “Mental health is not considered a priority, there is stigma related to it because culturally we have been brought up like that”.<sup>274</sup> Young people also critiqued the State services set up to address this:

“Counsellors promise that they will maintain confidentiality, but then the next day, rumours are everywhere. This scares students and they do not find it useful!”<sup>275</sup>

## Boundaries and limits on participation

In the course of our discussions, young people referred to the strong culture of obedience in the country, where it is the norm for adults to speak on behalf of children. Ngawang Rigzar from BCMD identified the intergenerational gap as affecting mental health.<sup>276</sup> Rinzin Wangmo of DYS pointed out that “It is difficult to bring young people on board for policy-making processes, because they feel it is tokenism”.<sup>277</sup> The NCWC members took note of these serious concerns, but said they laid most of their emphasis on the ‘protection’ aspect of child rights, because the right to participation is yet to be embedded in the work of state authorities involved in children’s issues.<sup>278</sup>

Youth also raised the issue of unemployment and the need for job creation. Team Change, for instance, said that they were working on ‘creating jobs ourselves’. Wangchuk Zangmo, NCWC, admitted that studies conducted point to a huge gap in the number of skilled workers needed in the country. But she stated that youth are not interested in the jobs that are available, such as in the construction sector, part of the ‘Build Bhutan’ project.<sup>279</sup>

Going forward, substantial resources are needed to ensure wide-ranging and representative in-person consultative processes.

272 Kinzang, Team Change, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

273 BCMD, *Youth Voices: Youth Matters Report*, 2020.

274 Tenzin, Pride Nepal, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

275 Young people, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

276 Ngawang Rigzar, BCMD, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

277 Rinzin Wangmo, Chief Program Officer, DYS, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

278 NCWC members, focus group discussion (online) with CWC, June 2021.

279 Wangchuk Zangmo, NCWC, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

The BCMD study also found that incarcerated youth and those in rehabilitation, as well as those from the LGBTQI community, faced discrimination and stigmatization, and that they wished for a social environment more accepting of them.

## Inclusion

*Within adolescent groups there are those individuals who are socially, culturally and economically stronger and likely to be more articulate, thereby excluding the already marginalized from participation processes: What actions were taken to promote inclusion, particularly in relation to viewing and working with the most marginalized groups as agents and partners?*

### Exclusion of marginalized adolescents

The BCMD shared that due to the COVID-19 pandemic and scope of the programme design, youth participation was not as representative as had been earlier envisaged.<sup>280</sup> Tenzin from Pride Bhutan and Rinzin Wangmo of DYS said that the process should have included more people with disabilities.<sup>281</sup> Rinzin also felt that the needs of young monks and nuns were not adequately considered in the 2011 NYP, especially issues related to their health, education and psychosocial well-being. She also pointed out that issues of young LGBTQI people are new in Bhutan and so they need to find a place in the proposed 2020 NYP.

### Actions for inclusion as agents

The BCMD reports<sup>282</sup> that a total of 1,193 young people participated in the research; the youngest being 13 and the oldest 29. In the FGDs, the 114 youth who

participated included monks, nuns, youth with disabilities, youth in rehabilitation, youth in conflict with the law, youth in creative arts (*drayang*s), youth in sports and students,<sup>283</sup> youth in entertainment centres, youth seeking employment and LGBTQI youth.<sup>284</sup> There was a clear intention to involve marginalized groups and those from vulnerable backgrounds. While it is not clear why the Young Bhutan Network, established under the aegis of the DYS, was not a part of the initial NYP process, they have nevertheless been part of the subsequent youth policy action planning consultations led by the DYS and supported by UNICEF.

The BCMD study also found that incarcerated youth and those in rehabilitation, as well as those from the LGBTQI community, faced discrimination and stigmatization, and that they wished for a social environment more accepting of them.<sup>285</sup> The DYS has asked the Young Bhutan Network to invite young people to participate in the consultations for the Action Plan for the NYP 2020 to ensure that groups excluded in the review process may be facilitated to give their input.

## Resolutions

*Organizational structures determine the nature of adolescents and young people's ability to exercise agency and influence resolutions and decisions. At the same time, those charged with promoting agency are also those who set limits and make the rules on translating the*

280 BCMD, interview (online) with CWC, 2021.

281 Tenzin, Pride Nepal, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021; Rinzin Wangmo, Chief Program Officer, DYS, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.

282 BCMD, *Youth Voices: Youth Matters Report*, 2020, p. 18.

283 Students include those in schools, colleges and technical training Institutes (TTIs) (Ibid., p. 15).

284 Ibid.

285 BCMD, *Youth Voices: Youth Matters Report*, 2020, p. 26.

*exercise of agency to enact resolutions and decisions: In such a context how are adolescents able to influence resolutions and decisions?*

### **Structures that determine the nature of agency**

The now-defunct Bhutan Children's Parliament had adopted resolutions at their two sessions to facilitate adolescent participation, in particular urban-rural student interactive programmes.<sup>286</sup> It is not clear from our discussions, or

from the secondary research, whether or not participation by youth has led to any decisions in Bhutan, at the local or national levels. As mentioned by the representatives of the government, it is likely that the lack of coordination and collaboration between agencies is fracturing efforts, making youth participation largely a consultative, ad-hoc exercise. One of the intentions of the NYP is to create structures and processes through which youth can impact on decisions that affect their lives.

**It is reassuring that the proposed NYP and Action Plan have been partly shaped by advocacy by youth groups, opening the space once again for recommendations by youth to influence decisions that affect their lives.**



286 Resolutions adopted by the Second Session of the First Bhutan Children's Parliament (see <[www.bcp.ecb.bt/index.php/bcp-resolutions-2](http://www.bcp.ecb.bt/index.php/bcp-resolutions-2)>).

## How adolescents influence resolutions and decisions

It is reassuring that the proposed NYP and Action Plan have been partly shaped by advocacy by youth groups, opening the space once again for recommendations by youth to influence decisions that affect their lives. This highlights awareness of the need for local, periodic, and sustained participation by young people in decision-making processes, as well as in monitoring plans. Decision-making mechanisms are often influenced by how context specific they are and also how they are able to transform dynamically in harmony with the agency of adolescents and young people.

### Analysis

Based on the findings above, the potential areas and opportunities for the enhancement of adolescent participation in governance and challenges are highlighted in the following sub-sections.

#### Existing structures for adolescent participation

The Democracy Clubs and the Bhutan Children's Parliament are good examples of how youth in Bhutan have been involved in democracy building, along with the role of young people, as clearly envisaged in the NYP 2011. However, their impact on adolescent and youth participation in governance is not clear. Most discussants were unaware of their exact role and a few referred to the Democracy Clubs as school clubs. They were not able to articulate whether or not they had a positive impact on participative democracy. Yet, in terms

of design, it is clear that the existing Democracy Clubs and the revival of the Bhutan Children's Parliament have great potential to enhance young people's participation.

The Young Bhutan Network, with 15 youth groups and more than 20,000 volunteers, under the aegis of the DYS, is active in facilitating collaboration and networking. The different youth groups in the Network work on issues such as unemployment, the environment, peer pressure, and drug abuse. With volunteers driving these efforts, the reach of these groups is wide and there is scope for significant bargaining power with the State. However, some of the young people in our discussions were either reluctant to reach out directly to the government or did not see it as an option, choosing instead to focus on campaigning and advocacy, especially through social media and online channels.

The potential of the recently-launched VMIS, which has around 3,500 volunteers registered so far, as well as ongoing online and offline advocacy, is also apparent. So is the opportunity for virtual participation through social media, which is already being admirably used by the youth who were not a part of the NYP review process. As Ngawang Rigsar of the BCMD pointed out, there may be a problem with respect to those who cannot access the technology.<sup>287</sup> Yet youth and adolescents have been creating their own structures (like Gay Pride and Team Change) to campaign on specific issues such as LGBTQI rights and unemployment.

Through these structures, and with a nationally active CFLG, children and young people in Bhutan can be drawn into the participatory governance framework, as the mandate exists in the Local Government Act 2019 to ensure 'public participation'.

287 Ngawang Rigsar, BCMD, interview (online) with CWC, June 2021.



Through these structures, and with a nationally active CFLG, children and young people in Bhutan can be drawn into the participatory governance framework, as the mandate exists in the Local Government Act 2019 to ensure 'public participation'. The third pillar of GNH, 'cultural preservation', can both aid and impede participation and independent self-expression by children and young people, specifically when such expression or participation is seen as being at odds with cultural preservation. Conversely, it also has the potential to aid participation if participation is seen as crucial and essential for increasing GNH and for nation-building, especially given the first pillar of GNH which is 'good governance'.

### State buy-in and accountability

Child protection is the focal point of child-rights related work in Bhutan. A discussant from NCWC spoke about how children's right to participation is important and the NCWC and Ministry of Education must ensure that all the agencies embrace children's participation as essential in decision making. The DYS representative also explained that adults making a policy for youth would not be able to produce a fully comprehensive policy embracing all of the issues facing youth without youth participation. Hence, it is crucial to involve youth in youth policies. However, this understanding appears to be on paper only, with insufficient clarity on how it translates into action, including how exactly the NCWC might ensure, or has already ensured, participation by children and the monitoring of such participation.

While protection and the provision of services are crucial, children's rights

cannot be completely realized through these aspects if participation is not part of programming.<sup>288</sup> Child protection and provisioning divorced from child participation cannot have a lasting impact on child rights, as rights are not something that can be 'given' and children's right to determine the quality and nature of the provision and protection must be respected.<sup>289</sup> If agencies are working in silos and are not aware of how to involve young people in policy making that affects them, that too reflects on the State's lack of buy-in and accountability.

### Adolescent representation

The steady move from an absolute monarchy to a democratic constitutional monarchy in Bhutan has impacted on youth and adolescent participation in governance, especially on how adolescents and young people view themselves vis-a-vis the State and their rights and entitlements. Adolescent and youth representation is still seen as a kind of benevolence, rather than a right. This view has partly shifted due to the review process for the 2011 NYP. The DYS is engaging with young people to refine the policy and provide inputs into the action plan, and it was reported by UNICEF that the DYS is visiting schools and colleges to sensitize and gather feedback from students.

The BCMD is organizing online advocacy to highlight the key issues of young people and garner support from different stakeholders. UNICEF Bhutan has begun engaging with Scout volunteers across 20 districts to sensitize them to the NYP – this process was, however, hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, but UNICEF hopes to continue these efforts in 2022. These activities indicate a willingness

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288 Reddy, Nandana, and Kavita Ratna, *Introduction to Child Rights Programming*, 2019.

289 Ibid.

to enhance adolescent representation and to carry out mid-course corrections when required.

### Strategies for expansion

According to the 2021 UNICEF assessment of CFLG in Bhutan:

*There are mixed feelings about children's participation in decisions that are generally considered as adult matters, but most of those interviewed are open to the idea. Where it suits them, communities are already using the voices of children. In Drakten Gewog, communities are strengthening their case against closing their school and relocating their children to another gewog [group of villages] by arguing that their children are against the idea.<sup>290</sup>*

The CFLG assessment shows there is potential to include children's participation in governance in Bhutan at the local government level. However, the lack of a legislative or policy mandate to ensure that it is followed is likely to result in over-reliance on the agenda of individual local government functionaries, who are already limited by the scope of their power and duties.

National processes such as the NYP review, in which a policy is reviewed with individual youth members, are at risk of being merely an 'event-based' programme, in the absence of a base or an association (like a youth organization or a youth group) to ensure the continuity of engagement. For strategic expansion, it will be crucial to sustain and incentivize the continued engagement of youth, even in the programme design.

The Young Bhutan Network, under the aegis of the DYS, is a concerted effort

by the Ministry of Education, supported by UNICEF Bhutan, to ensure that youth groups have access to funds and other technical support, so that they can raise issues within their communities, which are then brought to the attention of the DYS. Whether the Young Bhutan Network has been successful in ensuring a more representative form of participation, including the seeking out of, and providing space for, voices and issues from vulnerable and marginalized communities, remains to be seen.

The mainstreaming of young people's participation as a right across all relevant policy frameworks would be a timely intervention through existing structures like the Democracy Clubs. This would improve the participation of adolescents and young people in governance and democracy building, beyond the current narrow focus on elections and towards a broader understanding of participation in practice. But it would require the Democracy Clubs to expand into communities and be linked strategically with CFLG and initiatives for child-friendly cities, as well as a legal mandate to embed adolescent participation in governance structures.

### Exclusion and inequity

The NCWC study<sup>291</sup> on violence against children detailed serious findings related to physical, emotional, and sexual violence against children in Bhutan, especially corporal punishment in school and at home. However, in our discussions with youth, this was not expressed spontaneously as a serious issue, perhaps because of the sensitivity of the issue and the stigma associated with speaking openly about it. However, other issues such as those

**The CFLG assessment shows there is potential to include children's participation in governance in Bhutan at the local government level. However, the lack of a legislative or policy mandate to ensure that it is followed is likely to result in over-reliance on the agenda of individual local government functionaries, who are already limited by the scope of their power and duties.**

290 UNICEF, 'Child Friendly Local Governance Assessment Bhutan', Bhutan, 28 January 2021, p. 26.

291 NCWC and UNICEF, *National Survey on Violence against Children and Young People in Bhutan*, June 2016.

faced by young people with disabilities, those from rural areas, and those who identify as LGBTQI were expressed as significant, with mental health as a cross-cutting issue. Unemployment and livelihoods were also major concerns, which were linked to mental health concerns, due to the inadequacy of the education system and the poor mismatch between what is taught in schools and colleges and what is required in the job market, leading to dissatisfaction and feelings of despair among youth. This was exacerbated by the poor access to mental health support and the inability to speak to adults, including parents and teachers, about mental health issues.

Marginalization and vulnerability due to identification with certain communities or gender identities was a big barrier to social equity, including the inability to express themselves in terms of clothing or other forms of self-expression, due to cultural impositions, including dress norms (as expressed by a member of the LGBTQI community). The LGBTQI groups routinely challenged the status quo and expressed themselves more freely. Other issues of less visible marginalized groups may also need to be brought out more explicitly through inclusive discussions and deliberations across diverse communities living in Bhutan.

According to the CFLG Assessment report by UNICEF Bhutan:

*Besides many CSOs have their youth wings. This includes Tarayana Clubs (5000 members), RENEW's Druk Adolescent's Initiative on Sexual Awareness Network (700 members), BYDF's [Bhutan Youth Development Fund's] Young Volunteers*

*in Action (7000 members). There are also several other youth volunteer groups not associated to any CSO and dedicated to community and social works. Some of them have been brought under the umbrella of Young Bhutan Network by the MoE [Ministry of Education]. Most of the clubs and groups are focused on youth problems such as drug and alcohol addiction and social work, and less on addressing policy and service-related issues within their communities. In fact, many LG members are not aware of such group.*<sup>292</sup>

### Role of CSOs

The BCMD played a major role in the National Youth Policy review process. Their engagement was also linked to their extensive work with the Youth Initiative. Other CSOs working with child and youth networks, such as RENEW and Young Bhutan Network, are exclusively engaged in consultations related to the review of the NYP. While some youth groups did find a place in the stakeholder consultation for the action plan, the review process itself had a very small sample of Youth Initiative members (also members of Young Bhutan Network), who were trained to conduct FGDs with other groups (see 'Findings' section above).

The work of CSOs active in the child-rights space focuses mainly on child protection and violence against children, such as with RENEW and the Youth Development Fund. Participation does not appear to be a core component of this work at present, even though they have had some involvement in the initiation of CFLG. UNICEF Bhutan may consider deepened its engagement with CSOs to provide technical support to them to

**The work of CSOs active in the child-rights space focuses mainly on child protection and violence against children, such as with RENEW and the Youth Development Fund. Participation does not appear to be a core component of this work at present, even though they have had some involvement in the initiation of CFLG.**

292 UNICEF, 'Child Friendly Local Governance Assessment Bhutan', 2021.

ensure children's right to participation as a core principle.

### Role of UNICEF

The NYP review process, led by the BCMD, was a UNICEF supported project; thus, UNICEF's role was significant. However, UNICEF could have facilitated the involvement of a wider array of youth organizations and youth groups working on a wide range of issues, in different parts of the country to elicit a more comprehensive response to the NYP.

Young people who were part of the review process are happy that they were able to provide their input into a policy of national importance. However, they must see it as sustained involvement, continuing beyond the first consultation. Young people could be supported by UNICEF, for example, to review the extent to which their input was incorporated in the policy; how they may contribute to the Action Plans; and how they can be involved in monitoring the policy's implementation, among other things.

These limitations on design should be addressed now by UNICEF to ensure that the consultation will not become a once-off exercise and can instead provide a spring-board for continued engagement. This is important, especially as there are no base groups of adolescents and youth in Bhutan that are able to engage with national processes on their own. It would also be timely for young people to be informed and facilitated to sustain their involvement and to demonstrate how their genuine efforts can contribute to the development of their nation.

The initiation of CFLG in Bhutan is anchored by the Social Policy Unit of UNICEF. This unit could work closely with other sections of UNICEF and with local governments to strategize and build

capacities for the sustained participation of young people in CFLG.

### Enhancing participation

At the time of discussion, the Youth Initiative group members informed us that were not aware how many of their recommendations had made it into the final draft of the NYP 2020. A participatory monitoring and evaluation component was not envisaged or included as part of the policy review process. There is a need to ensure participatory monitoring and evaluation in the NYP review process and in the development of the subsequent Action Plans. Consultative processes are only the beginning. Mechanisms and structures to monitor the implementation of decisions taken are important to build in all processes of adolescent and youth participation in governance, be it CFLG or Democracy Clubs, to ensure that the state is accountable to young people and to enhance their participation on a national scale.

### Recommendations

Based on our findings and analysis, we make the following recommendations to enhance the participation of adolescent and young people in governance.

#### Adolescent and youth groups

**Recommendation 1. Seek information on, and engagement with, national policies:** Seek information on and engagement with national policies such as the National Youth Policy, the Child Policy, the National Youth Action Plan, and the Child-Friendly Local Governance initiative (which are currently all at different stages of the policy-making process); become aware of the opportunities they can provide for the participation of young people at the local level; and use this to engage with policy-making processes.

These limitations on design should be addressed now by UNICEF to ensure that the consultation will not become a once-off exercise and can instead provide a spring-board for continued engagement.

**Recommendation 2. Organize yourselves as children, adolescent, and youth groups:** Organize yourselves as children, adolescent, and youth groups, either geographically or thematically, whichever is most appropriate; participate in Democracy Clubs; access the information required to make informed choices; and collectively ask elected representatives and local government officials for entitlements and services.

**Recommendation 3. Initiate and engage in learning:** Initiate and engage in learning through sharing and association with local CSOs, as well as youth groups in other parts of the world; use the VMIS platform to contact other youth organizations; gain information management and advocacy skills from participatory research; expand your understanding of issues such as gender and sexuality through regional networks; and advocate for the VMIS platform to be used by youth groups to connect with each other, as well as with government agencies when required.

**Recommendation 4. Engage directly with government agencies:** Engage directly with government agencies on advocacy programmes and campaigns; hold them accountable through these direct interactions; build awareness campaigns for people to also engage with them; and advocate for a direct feedback loop mechanism from government agencies and representatives through a public grievance redressal system.

### CSOs

**Recommendation 1. Map out existing adolescent and youth groups:** Use the recently launched VMIS platform to map out existing adolescent and youth groups across CSOs, governments and the private sector; include specific interest groups and members of marginalized

communities; ensure the continued bottom-up engagement of young people in policy making and governance space, especially the ongoing National Youth Policy and Child Policy; and examine other ways in which the different youth groups can be brought together.

**Recommendation 2. Support inclusive processes:** The collective bargaining processes of youth groups are at a nascent stage, so ensure that any policy involving children, adolescents and youth is presented to different marginalized groups, such as monks, the LGBTQI community, disabled youth, refugee groups and others, even though their numbers may be small.

### State

#### Central government

**Recommendation 1. Ensure the participation of young people that is inclusive:** Mandate the incorporation and integration of young people's participation across all processes; broaden the base of youth groups providing input into the National Youth Policy and its Action Plan; expand the Young Bhutan Network umbrella through the VMIS and other platforms; and include interactive structures on the VMIS platform for young people to directly connect with government agencies.

**Recommendation 2. Establish CFLG as a nationwide programme:** Establish CFLG as a nationwide programme rooted in the notion of 'child-friendly cities', in line with the mandates of the Local Government Act 2009; establish the meaningful participation of adolescents and young people as the core of CFLG; conduct a CFLG pilot in one *gewog* (group of villages), in partnership with UNICEF; and include the lens of children's rights and youth rights, as defined in the

Use the VMIS platform to contact other youth organizations; gain information management and advocacy skills from participatory research; expand your understanding of issues such as gender and sexuality through regional networks.

CFLG Guidelines on participation, in the review of policies on the GNH indicator framework.

**Recommendation 3. Allocate financial and other resources:** Allocate financial and other resources to strengthen participation mechanisms; ensure local implementation structures for the National Youth Policy; involve local government institutions in the process; establish capacity building programmes on the participation of adolescents and young people for public functionaries; establish and implement a mandate for seeking the input of young people in all matters concerning them; and evolve laws to embed young people's participation in governance mechanisms.

#### Local government

**Recommendation 4. Integrate young people's participation:** Integrate young people's participation at all levels of policy, planning, implementation, and review; provide avenues at the local level for young people to participate in decisions and issues that concern them; and establish structures to provide more space for young people to be able to present and debate their views frankly and freely.

**Recommendation 5. Partner with government agencies:** Partner with government agencies to seek input on policy from diverse youth groups under the Young Bhutan Network umbrella platform; establish and implement a mandate to ensure the participation of young people in all policies affecting them; and design a platform (on VMIS) for young people to demand accountability from governance structures.

**Recommendation 6. Allocate financial and other resources:** Allocate financial

and other resources for documenting youth groups in the country and the various issues that they work on and advocate for; for disseminating this information along with the work of youth groups registered on the VMIS; and for training and capacity building to strengthen youth participation mechanisms.

#### UNICEF

**Recommendation 1. Ensure the credibility of review processes:** Ensure that multiple youth groups from diverse and marginalized backgrounds participate in the National Youth Policy and Action Plan formulation and review processes; review which inputs and recommendations are incorporated; and extend this to the design and implementation of future review processes facilitated or funded by UNICEF in Bhutan.

**Recommendation 2. Conclude the process of piloting and implementing CFLG:** Enable the prompt implementation and presentation of the findings of the pilot CFLG to the central and local governments; scrutinize the scope of CFLG as a nationwide programme; and continue to work on building child-friendly cities in Bhutan with a focus on CFLG.

**Recommendation 3. Advocate for forums for taking up sensitive issues:** Advocate for safe spaces for young people to discuss issues like mental health, violence against children, unemployment, education, drug addiction and traditional culture; recommend the revival of the Bhutan Children's Parliament as a venue for taking up such issues; liaise with government agencies to ensure that the recommendations of young people are considered seriously; and encourage schools, clubs and CSOs to invite children and young people to engage on sensitive issues.

Integrate young people's participation at all levels of policy, planning, implementation, and review; provide avenues at the local level for young people to participate in decisions and issues that concern them; and establish structures to provide more space for young people to be able to present and debate their views frankly and freely.



**Recommendation 4. Continue with the pioneering efforts for the VMIS:**

Enable the VMIS platform to help youth groups in Bhutan to engage with youth groups in other parts of the world; expand the scope of the VMIS platform to contribute to embedding young people’s participation in governance; and establish a mechanism on the platform through which young people and youth groups can directly liaise and connect with the government and its agencies and hold them accountable through monitoring.

**Recommendation 5. Allocate substantial financial and other resources:**

Allocate substantial financial and other resources for advocacy, training, and capacity building and to support the piloting of initiatives that have been suggested in these recommendations.

## Conclusion

The collaborative research project and review of the National Youth Policy of Bhutan by the BCMD and DYS, in partnership with UNICEF, is a good example of a successful partnership to open up consultative spaces for adolescents and youth to be heard by the State. It has also built the capacities of the youth who took part in the process to engage with the State and with policy matters to advocate for their issues of concern. However, in order to ensure the widespread and representative participation of youth in the review of policies affecting them, these good practices need to be scaled up to enable broader and more inclusive participation. This will ensure that good practices are not a once-off process, but are aligned with continued representative and inclusive youth engagement across all policy processes of relevance to young people.

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# 6

## Overall Conclusions

Adolescent participation in governance upholds children's right to participation, which is critical for building egalitarian societies. The participation of children is a democratic right and an end in itself. In the case studies presented in this report, adolescents and young people have consistently demonstrated how, when given the opportunity to participate, they express their agency, gain self-confidence, learn critical thinking and analysis, build connections, develop empathy, uphold social justice, and challenge regressive social practices. Their participation enhances their understanding of citizenship and enables them to claim their entitlements. They articulate their concerns and aspirations and demand accountability from state and other service providers. They also enable other sections of society to appreciate and adopt participatory practices.

Child rights programming by governments and CSOs that has adolescent participation at its core invests in young citizens, who become aware, informed, and experienced in, and committed to, democratic processes. This challenges normative assumptions about infrastructure development,

replacing it with social development. This prepares adolescents for consultative and democratic decision making and advocacy. It prioritizes the people of a nation, especially when they are young, and ensures long-term social benefits. Hence, the participation of children, including adolescents, should be a cardinal principle of all just and peaceful societies, because it ensures public participation at an early age to debate and put in place sound policies, as well as to demand public accountability from all agencies responsible for implementing those policies.

UNICEF's commitment to support initiatives that enable and strengthen adolescent development and participation in local and national governance practices in the South Asia region is, therefore, of critical importance and in accordance with a range of international conventions and declarations, based on the historic United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. ADAP ROSA rightly emphasizes the need for "developing capacities for autonomy and expression" of adolescents and for "strategies [to] be designed, and opportunities to be



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Wherever opportunities have been offered to adolescents to participate in the processes of governance, the expression of their agency and protagonism has been remarkable, their engagement with governance invigorating, and, in some cases, the development outcomes transformative.

provided for their full engagement in their communities and nations, including in decisions at all levels and in all spheres that affect their lives.”<sup>293</sup>

This context provides the backdrop against which the four case studies in this report document UNICEF’s important technical and advocacy support to initiatives in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra (in India), Nepal, and Bhutan. The Safe City Initiative in Bhopal city Madhya Pradesh is an example of participation in governance by children from the most vulnerable communities in an urban setting; the Child-Friendly Local Governance initiative in rural Maharashtra has a specific focus on child participation policies and structures at multiple levels of governance; Child-Friendly Local Governance in Nepal is now present on a national scale; and the participatory review of the National Youth Policy 2021 in Bhutan has enabled young people to vocalize multiple issues of concern to them in relation to the National Youth Policy. Hence, all four cases are illustrations of UNICEF’s innovative guidance and support of local, provincial, and national efforts and stakeholder collaborations aimed at drawing adolescents into the structures and processes of governance.

The four key lessons that have emerged from this documentation and analysis of the four case studies are:

**Lesson 1.** Wherever opportunities have been offered to adolescents to participate in the processes of governance, the expression of their agency and protagonism has been remarkable, their engagement with governance invigorating, and, in some cases, the development outcomes transformative.

**Lesson 2.** This adolescent energy has been greatly facilitated by efforts to inform, train, build capacity, and organize by CSOs, trainers, frontline workers and local governments, supported by UNICEF.

**Lesson 3.** Advocacy, policy guidance and capacity building by UNICEF at all levels of government has paved the way for adolescents to collectively present their views and ask for accountability.

**Lesson 4.** The enthusiastic participation by adolescents has also had positive impacts on their families, elders, communities, CSO workers, government functionaries and elected representatives, at personal and inter-personal levels.



<sup>293</sup> UNICEF ROSA, *South Asia Approach Paper for Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) Section*, 2020.

Good practices for structures and processes that may be emulated for scaling-up are:

**Practice 1.** The integration of adolescent participation into child protection, social protection and governance efforts through mapping, research, campaigns, and policy reviews, as well as by building community awareness and alliances in all available spaces by adolescents organized at multiple levels of governance, strengthens their empowerment.

**Practice 2.** Accessible and simple modules for sharing information, principles, and good practices, when they are widely disseminated through training of trainers and peer learning, serve to build capacities, organize groups, and provide pathways for participation and engagement by adolescent groups.

**Practice 3.** A holistic approach that connects children’s well-being and development to the concerns of their families and communities about issues

of livelihood, shelter, citizenship, safety, welfare, education, health, transport, and all other social and civic services empowers all sections of society.

**Practice 4.** Engaging with all levels of government to persuade officials, functionaries and agencies of the importance of adolescent participation and to build their capacities to uphold children’s rights provides opportunities for decision makers to engage with children and to be accountable to them.

**Practice 5.** As highlighted in the ADAP ROSA model for participatory institutions, building the capacities of institutions in the processes and elements specified equips them and makes them conducive to community and adolescent-engaged planning and provision.

**Practice 6.** It is important to capitalize, strengthen and leverage the role of local governance structures (rural and urban) in promoting and advancing adolescent participation, through training, exposure visits and model building.

**Engaging with all levels of government to persuade officials, functionaries and agencies of the importance of adolescent participation and to build their capacities to uphold children’s rights provides opportunities for decision makers to engage with children and to be accountable to them.**

**Figure 4. ADAP ROSA institutional dimensions of participation**

Are adolescents and young people’s participation and priorities considered in ...?





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Against this larger backdrop, for rigorous and meaningful expansion of each initiative documented here and for creating similar initiatives in other countries in the region, these challenges need to be addressed:

**Challenge 1.** The lessons about adolescent participation that have already emerged from the cases, especially adolescents' informed mobilization into collectives, need to be integrated as holistically as possible into governance structures and processes across sectors at UNICEF before expansion strategies are put into place.

**Challenge 2.** Without involving the most demonstrably effective agents for encouraging adolescent participation, such as existing children's groups, CBOs, CSOs, frontline workers and training institutions, expansion will only be ritualistic.

**Challenge 3.** All the initiatives could enhance their reach to include those most vulnerable and excluded groups who are presently outside their scope, who are discriminated against, marginalized and have no access to either information or organization to be able to demonstrate their own protagonism.

**Challenge 4.** Even when adolescents are enabled to collectively present their views and demands and obtain assurances, without the devolution of decision-making power and finances to the lowest tiers of governance, their participation will be frustrated by lack of tangible responses and action.

**Challenge 5.** There is a political dilemma facing all democratic governments in South Asia: to promote a child-friendly citizenry, which requires public sector accountability, or to meet the demands of an investor-friendly market economy that

privileges private sector priorities. This dilemma has wide ranging implications, which will need to be addressed locally as well as by the highest levels of decision making by all key stakeholders.

**Challenge 6.** Disasters, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, induce deep distress and dislocation in society and the economy, which de-prioritize the opportunities available for adolescent participation in governance decisions that can make (or unmake) their futures. This has to be cautiously pre-empted and responded to.

**Challenge 7.** Without internal integration across sectors like education, health, protection, sanitation, employability, skills and climate change, UNICEF will not be able to evolve a long-term strategy at this historic juncture when technical support is greatly needed to nurture and further adolescent participation in governance in different nations with different political approaches to the dilemmas facing them.

Taking the strengths and challenges into consideration, detailed recommendations have been offered for each case study in the preceding chapters. These recommendations are summarized into the following broad themes:

**Recommendation 1. Adolescent groups** must inform themselves; organize democratically within; build linkages; include members of vulnerable and marginalized communities as agents and partners; carve out structures for debate and advocacy; and learn to use disasters as an opportunity to influence policy and governance.

**Recommendation 2. Civil society organizations** should support adolescent groups to construct processes for greater participation; help them to build capacities and alliances; and share and

nurture collective learning, visioning and action. They also need to democratize digital technology for participation, as this is creating another inequity in relation to participation and voice in governance.

**Recommendation 3. Central/federal governments** must uphold international and national commitments to adolescent participation; ensure policy commitments to realizing participation rights; provide public institutions with support for wider inclusion and monitoring; implement legal instruments for the devolution of governance to local levels and uphold the principle of subsidiarity; and ensure that disaster mitigation measures are securely in place at the national level. In addition, adequate resources must be allocated at the appropriate levels to realize these agendas.

**Recommendation 4. Provincial governments** and their partner institutions have to strengthen the understanding, empathy and capacity of their functionaries to assist child-friendly participation processes and structures; suitably recognize and reward their frontline workers; evolve laws, guidelines and safeguards for promoting adolescent participation in governance; provide for devolution to the lowest tiers of governance; and sustain a continuous process of evaluation and review.

**Recommendation 5. Local governments** need to demand the devolution of power and finances; build more structures in which adolescents can participate; and build convergence in their procedures and policies so that the participatory expression of the needs of adolescents and their communities can be met in the shortest time possible. In addition, local governments should develop indicators and processes for social/children's monitoring and the continued participation of adolescents and young

**Adolescent groups must inform themselves; organize democratically within; build linkages; include members of vulnerable and marginalized communities as agents and partners; carve out structures for debate and advocacy; and learn to use disasters as an opportunity to influence policy and governance.**



people in creating communities that are inclusive.

**Recommendation 6. UNICEF** should celebrate what has been achieved and continue to strengthen the ability of its thematic sectors to embed informed adolescent participation in policies, programming, technical assistance and policy advocacy by strengthening the capacities of governments and stakeholders, including communities, for enhancing adolescent participation in decision making.

**Recommendation 7. UNICEF** must embed adolescent participation as a critical strategy across all programme sectors, and plan systematic staff capacity building regimes for integrating adolescent participation across sectors.

**Recommendation 8. UNICEF** must also develop operational guidelines, and support their implementation, for strengthening institutional capacities,

with specific guidance on adolescent participation in policy processes, planning, implementation, information provision, budgeting, review and evaluation, institutional governance, and capacity building regimes based on ADAP ROSA's regional framework for institutional strengthening for participation. The 'Claiming Citizenship' ASPIRE framework (agency, state, participation, inclusion and resolutions) may be included as the lens that governs the implementation of the operational guidelines.

**Recommendation 9. UNICEF** must invest in strengthening local governance, both urban and rural, and through these structures develop models for adolescent and youth participation.

**Recommendation 10. UNICEF** must create platforms for adolescent and youth participation, including policy making and monitoring, and invest in developing resources for building the capacities of adolescent and youth groups.

**Recommendation 11.** UNICEF should strengthen the capacities of social workers, health workers, community workers, frontline workers, and decision makers in health, education, child protection, water and sanitation, climate change and social protection to enable adolescent participation. Investing in enhancing the potential of youth service officers, youth workers (a professional category involved in youth empowerment), and ministries holding portfolios and liaising for youth, children and women's issues will ensure valuable and long-term impact.

**Recommendation 12.** UNICEF must continue to invest in systematic and intentional initiatives to build the agency of adolescents to be informed and capacitated participants in governance processes. The four UNICEF supported

initiatives here, which need to be sustained, also provide examples of policies and practices to be adopted after suitable modification.

This is a historic moment for UNICEF to strengthen the participation pillar across sectoral areas. UNICEF must construct a long-term strategy to financially and technically support initiatives by adolescent groups to learn, mobilize, include, ally, and become active agents for change. We hope that the findings of this study and the recommendations emerging from this report will help other countries and initiatives in ROSA's jurisdiction to further rationalize investment in participatory structures for adolescents, including attendant capacity building, systems strengthening, and policy formulation.

**This is a historic moment for UNICEF to strengthen the participation pillar across sectoral areas. UNICEF must construct a long-term strategy to financially and technically support initiatives by adolescent groups to learn, mobilize, include, ally, and become active agents for change.**







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# Annexures

## Annexure A. List of areas of enquiry

After preliminary discussions with UNICEF an exhaustive list of areas of enquiry developed for assessing existing policies and mechanisms of participation, as relevant to each case study:

- Adolescent participation as a democratic right and a strategic priority for achieving SDG targets more effectively
- Differentiating adolescent participation from generic youth participation to avoid being subsumed by the more formal youth participation structures, which can often marginalize adolescents
- Freedom of association of adolescent groups and capacities for collectivizing, organizing and voice of adolescent groups
- Democratic representation through adolescent entities with a focus on informal adolescent groups and their potential as well as existing practices
- Subsidiarity in planning and adolescent participation from the most local governance structures and upward
- Political, socio-economic and cultural contexts at the national and local levels
- Equity as a cornerstone of designing, implementing, and measuring outcomes of development programmes for adolescents
- Inclusion of the most marginalized in programme and policy influencing, with systematic processes for mapping and working with the most marginalized
- Safeguarding and confidentiality mechanisms
- Existing accountability structures and provisions for the participation of adolescents and young people, as well as accountability to them
- Informed participation and access to information, including adolescent capabilities of creating their own information and knowledge
- Informed participation in adolescent budgeting and monitoring and evaluation of programmes for adolescents
- The link between adolescent participation in governance and actual decisions on resource allocations and programme implementation
- The impact of child work and child labour on participation
- Limitations of previous programmes in terms of adolescent participation; gaps in UNICEF goals
- Capacities of local governments and how they affect adolescent engagement and responsive action on the ground
- Extent to which existing laws, government orders, notifications etc. impact on the presence and sustainability of adolescents' participation in governance
- Sustainability of programmes at the state and community levels and vis-à-vis UNICEF's engagement

## Annexure B. List of discussants

### UNICEF ROSA – ADAP

- Dharshini Seneviratne, UNICEF Regional Adviser, ADAP ROSA
- Aruna Pant, Partnership Specialist, ADAP ROSA
- Abdul Alim, Social Policy Adviser, UNICEF

### Madhya Pradesh

#### Adolescents (Muskaan)

- Divya, 19 years, Gautam Nagar
- Manisha, 20 years, Babu Nagar
- Rani, 16 years, Sargam
- Manjana, 16 years, Rajiv Nagar, Pardhi Mohall
- Sanjana, 16 years, Rajiv Nagar, Pardhi Mohall
- Muskaan, 20 years, Rajiv Nagar, Kathputli
- Anisha, Sevaniya Gond
- Poona, 17 years, Suraj Nagar, Banjara
- Neelam, 15 years, Barkhedi, Agariya
- Deepak, Navagraha

#### Adolescents (Uday Society)

- Lalit Bighane
- Soniya Prajapati
- Rishi Salve
- Mayur Gajbhiye
- Kiran
- Vijay Ahirwar
- Anita Gosai
- Ranjan Vishwakarma
- Diksha
- Bharti Gupta

### CSOs

- Archana Sahay, Director, Aarambh
- Seema Deshmukh, Muskaan
- Shivani Taneja, Muskaan
- Saba, Muskaan
- Rakhi Raghuvanshi, Uday Society
- Karuna Gawai, Uday Society

### State officials

- Anuradha Shankar, Additional Director General of Police
- Ashish Maurya, Ward Officer, Ward 48, Bhopal Municipal Corporation
- Shailesh Chouhan, Zonal Officer, Zone 5, Bhopal Municipal Corporation
- Abhishek Kumar, Accountant, Zone Office, Bhopal Municipal Corporation
- Suresh Tomar, Joint Director (IEC Bureau), DWCD
- Ram Gopal Yadav, Assistant Director, DWCD, Focal Point for SCI
- Mayank Dixit, Labour Inspector, Labour Department, Coordinating Person of the Labour Department for SCI
- Nitin Saxena, District Education Officer, Bhopal Education Department
- Akhilesh Chaturvedi, Child Development Project Officer (CDPO), Govindpura, DWCD
- Shiva Khare, Child Development Project Officer (CDPO), Chandbad, DWCD
- Poonam Soni, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Supervisor, Banganga Project, DWCD
- KVS Choudhary, Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Bhopal Municipal Corporation Commissioner

- Monu Saxena, ex-Corporator, Ward 27, Bhopal Municipal Corporation
- Santosh Kasana, ex-Corporator, Ward 29, Bhopal Municipal Corporation
- Rupa Malviya, *anganwadi* worker
- Maya Sen, *anganwadi* worker
- Anita Ingle, *anganwadi* worker
- Sarita Sikarwar, *anganwadi* worker
- Sunita Singh, *anganwadi* worker
- Afshaa Akhter Khan, *anganwadi* worker

### UNICEF Madhya Pradesh

- Lolichen Pullempavil, Child Protection Specialist, Madhya Pradesh, UNICEF
- Advaita Marathe, Senior State Consultant, Madhya Pradesh, UNICEF

### Maharashtra

#### Adolescents

- Sanket Gaurkar
- Ashwini G
- Vynkatesh Ralegavkar
- Kajal Ralegavkar
- Asmita Wakudkar
- Bhavyashree

#### CSOs

- Datta Gurav, Resource and Support Centre for Development, Navi Mumbai (Resource and Support Centre for Development)
- Malti Sagne, State Convenor, Resource and Support Centre for Development
- Anant More, Director, Sparsh (Deepshika partner organization)
- Dilip Deotale, Sparsh
- Nita Magar, Sparsh
- Shital Bodhe, child-friendly panchayat, trainer and district coordinator (UNICEF's In School Life Skill education)

- Ziya Bano Syed, from Latur

#### State officials

- Sharad Magar, Block Development Officer, Nandurbar (for child-friendly *panchayats*)
- Om Prakash Yadav, Block Development Officer and then, Deputy CEO, Chandrapur
- Rajesh Rathod, Deputy CEO, Chandrapur (2014) and presently Deputy CEO, Water & Sanitation, Gondhia
- Jagdevi Sugave, Trainer in Latur (associated with village planning/Deepshikha/child-friendly panchayat programmes)

#### Government agency in partnership – YASHADA

- Sumedh Gurjar, Director, Research and Documentation Cell, YASHADA
- Pradnya Dasarwar, Coordinator, Project Monitoring Unit, Research and Documentation Cell, YASHADA
- Pramod Kalekar, UNICEF consultant, YASHADA

#### UNICEF Maharashtra

- Anuradha Nair, Social Policy Specialist, UNICEF
- Rejani Pavithran, State Consultant for Child-Friendly Local Governance and Decentralized Planning at UNICEF Mumbai

### Nepal

#### Adolescents

- Ashma Aryal, 20 years, Nawalprasi
- Rachana Bhusal, 20 years, Nawalprasi
- Nawraj, 19 years, Madhyabindhu
- Ashmin, 16 years, Madhyabindhu
- Punam Kumar, 18 years, Sunwal

## CSOs

- Resham Sharma, CFLG Focal Person
- Bipana Sharma, Executive Board Member, National CFLG Forum
- Sumikshya K, CFLG Officer, National CFLG Forum
- Nirijana Bhatta, Executive Board Member, Yuwalay; Project Coordinator, CWIN Nepal
- Sumnima Tuladar, CWIN Nepal
- Shyam Adhikari, World Vision Nepal

## UNICEF Nepal

- Ashok Jha, Programme Officer, UNICEF, Nepal working in Planning and DRR
- Madhab Baral, Child Protection Officer, UNICEF Nepal working in Terai (Bihariganj)
- Barsha Pradhan, Planning and Monitoring Officer, UNICEF Nepal
- Pragya Shah Karki, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Nepal

## Bhutan

### Adolescents and youth

- Tenzin, Pride Bhutan
- Sonam Tshomo, college student
- Sawan Nepal, Engineer
- Kinzang, Team Change
- Rigsel Yangtso, Bhutan Scouts Association
- Dechen Namgay, Bhutan Scouts Association
- Sonam Tenzin, Bhutan Scouts Association

- Karma Yangden, Bhutan Scouts Association
- Neelam Ghalley, Youth Advocacy Network Bhutan
- Sangay Loday, Youth Advocacy Network Bhutan
- Kimley Pemo, Youth Advocacy Network Bhutan
- Tseten Zangmo, Youth Advocacy Network Bhutan

## CSOs

- Chenchu Lhamu, Executive Director, Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy

## State officials

- Yeshey Lham, Children Division, National Commission for Women and Children
- Wangchuk Zangmo, Children Division, National Commission for Women and Children
- Rinzin Wangmo, Chief Program Officer, Department of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Education
- Lekema Dorji, Planning Officer, Gross National Happiness Commission
- Karma Tshering Samdrup, Research and Evaluation Division, Gross National Happiness Commission

## UNICEF Bhutan

- Sonam Wangchuk, Programme Officer, UNICEF Bhutan
- Choeying Dolma, Intern, UNICEF Bhutan

## Annexure C. Foundational sources for principles of participation

### Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the seminal document enshrining the rights and freedoms of all human beings, universalizing the principles of human rights. Article 18 details the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; Article 19 the right to freedom of opinion and expression; and Article 20 speaks of right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Article 26 states that everyone has the right to education and Article 29 states that “Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible”

### UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

The UNCRC is rooted in the principles espoused by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenants on Human Rights. Specifically, the UNCRC’s Articles 12–17 enshrine the rights of all children, including adolescents, to participate in decisions that affect their lives, have access to relevant information and possess a right to conscience and religion. Article 15 recognizes the rights of the child to freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly. Article 3 mandates that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration and Article 6 speaks of the child’s inherent right to life.

### General Comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

The General Comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child have helped interpret and articulate the provisions of the UNCRC, directing action on ground in terms of legal obligations, especially under Article 12 of the UNCRC:

- General Comment 12 on Article 12 of the UNCRC: emphasizes the right of the child to be heard. The right to express views freely in matters affecting them is a right to be assured by the State and the importance of meaningful participation is underscored.
- General Comment 5 (2003): provides for measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and states the importance of governments developing direct relationships with children, rather than relationships mediated through NGOs or human rights institutions.
- General comment 20 (2016): calls on State parties to ensure that adolescents are involved in the development, implementation and monitoring of all relevant legislation, policies, services and programmes affecting their lives, including at the local level. It is unique in the scope it provides for adolescent participation, addressing their evolving capacities and emphasizing the importance of participation as a means of political and civic engagement.

### **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006**

Adolescent participation in governance is deeply impacted by the specific vulnerabilities of children, one of which can be disability and special needs. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes that the full participation of persons with disabilities will result in “their enhanced sense of belonging and in significant advances in the human, social and economic development of society and the eradication of poverty...,” as well as the importance of the autonomy and freedom of persons with disabilities to make their own choices. Clause (r) of the Preamble is especially relevant as it states that: “Recognizing that children with disabilities should have full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children and recalling obligations to that end undertaken by States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

Further, Article 3(6) states, as a principle, full and effective participation and inclusion in society. Article 4(3) imposes upon State parties a general obligation to closely consult with and actively involve persons and children with disabilities in processes concerning issues related to them. Article 7 details measures to be taken with respect to children with disabilities and, in particular, clause 3 states that children with disabilities have a right to express their views on matters affecting them, on par with other children, and that the appropriate assistance must be provided in order to realize this right.

### **UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979**

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women reaffirms the “equal rights of men and women,” an important and fundamental human right, as well as the obligation of State parties to condemn and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. The Convention also has a very important provision with respect to child marriage, an issue that plagues most countries in South Asia and is an issue in India and Nepal, where three of our case studies are located. Article 16(2) states that “The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.”

### **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966**

Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that all peoples have the right to self-determination; Article 3 provides for the equal rights of men and women; and Article 24 states that every child without discrimination is entitled to measures of protection as required by their status as a minor.

### **International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights, 1966**

Article 1 of the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights also states that all peoples have the right to self-determination. Article 10 states that children and young persons must be protected from economic exploitation, and employment in work that is harmful

to their “morals or health or dangerous to life or likely to hamper their normal development should be punishable by law”. It also imposes upon States the duty to set age limits below which “the paid employment of child labour should be prohibited and punishable by law”. These are important provisions as many of the adolescents participating in governance are child workers and are part of child worker unions, especially in India.

### **UN Sustainable Development Goals 2015**

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out a plan for the world to ensure peace and prosperity, reduce inequality, tackle climate change and enable sustainable development for all. All the goals have relevance and bearing on child and adolescent rights. For instance, SDG 1 aims to end poverty in all its forms; SDG 2 aims to end hunger and improve nutrition.

### **UNICEF Programme Guidance for the Second Decade: Programming With and for Adolescents**

A key programming principle in this document is “support meaningful and systemic participation”, and “For participation to be meaningful,

adolescents require access to safe spaces, the ability to voice their views, opportunities to exert their influence and a receptive audience”.

### **UNICEF Strategy Plan 2018–2021**

With humanitarian action and gender equality being the two cross-cutting priorities of the UNICEF Strategic Plan for 2018–2021, the Strategic Plan aims to focus on community engagement and accountability for affected parties, including “through communication for development and platforms for adolescent participation”.

### **UNICEF Guidance document, *Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement, 2020***

Published in July 2020, this document explains in detail a theory of change and principles for adolescent participation in governance, including modes of adolescent participation. While the guidance document has scope for enhancing methods and principles of adolescent participation in governance, it is a holistic document that lays down the principles and methods, including strategies, interventions and tools, for adolescent participation and governance.

## Annexure D. Literature reviewed related to the four case studies

### India

- The Constitution of India
- The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act
- The 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act

### Madhya Pradesh

A Safe City for Children in Bhopal: Infographic 2018

A Safe City for Children in Bhopal: Mapping with Children 2017

- A Safe City for Children in Bhopal: Review Report 2018
- UNICEF Meeting Notes Aug 2020
- Strategic Action Plan for Adolescent Emp. w/focus on Ending Child Marriage & Violence against Children (Madhya Pradesh WCD)
- Info Pack in Hindi
- Training manuals
- Structure of state and local governance

### Maharashtra

- UNICEF August 2020 Meeting Notes
- Maharashtra Village Panchayat Act
- Maharashtra Stories
- Maharashtra GPDP SIGMA Foundation Study: Key Findings & Recommendations
- Maharashtra Case Study: On Evolution of GPDP & Child-Friendly Panchayats
- Improving Accountability of Local Government: A PPT by Anuradha Nair
- Training manuals
- Structure of state and local governance

### Nepal

- Children's club
- Constituent Assembly and Parliament – Child rights Sep–Oct 2014
- Performance report on above Apr–Jul 2014
- Final CFLG document 2001–2016
- CFLG Bal Bhela draft version 1 Jun 2016
- CFLG Nepal Assessment Report
- The Constitution of Nepal 2015
- The Local Self Governance Act, 1999
- National Strategy on Child-Friendly Local Governance
- Structure of state and local governance
- 'Progress Report 2018–2020', National Action and Co-ordinating Group(NACG-Nepal), December 2020

### Bhutan

- State Response 3–5 Periodic Report
- 12th Five Year Plan 2018–23
- Performance Agreement between PM and Director NCWC 2018–19
- Bhutan Youth Policy Methodology – BCMD approach
- Youth Voice Matters – BCMD report June 2020
- Youth Policy process video
- Briefing Note on Integrated Youth Friendly Centres, Gelephu
- Youth Friendly Integrated Services PPT
- SOP on Vase Management for Women & Children in Difficult Circumstances



- Child Care & Protection Act 2011
- Child Care & Protection Rules and Regulations 2015
- Bhutan Adolescent Participation Mapping Form
- The Constitution of Bhutan
- The Gross National Happiness Index
- The National Youth Policy 2011
- Structure of state and local governance

Apart from these documents, the Draft Approach paper (current draft from November, 2020) by the ADAP section titled: 'South Asia Approach Paper for Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) Section', as well as the Internal Guidance Document for UNICEF country offices from South Asia, from the Social Policy Section 'Placing the Children at the Heart of Local Development, A UNICEF Regional Strategy: Building a Cost-Effective Framework for Child-Friendly Local Development in South Asia', June 2020 were explored in detail as part of the literature review.

## Annexure E. Definitions

In order to reduce ambiguity about terminology, here are the definitions we will adhere to:

**Accountability:** A system whereby effective measures are in place so that governments or other duty-bearers are answerable for the protection of adolescents' rights and can be held accountable if these rights are not met.<sup>294</sup>

**Adolescence:** In terms of age, early adolescence is 10–14 years, late adolescence is 15–19 years and young adults are in the age group, 20–24.

**Adolescents:** As per the World Health Organization, adolescents are persons aged from 10 to 19 years of age.

**Adolescent empowerment:** Ensuring adolescents have the capacities to develop self-esteem, self-awareness and be protagonists in their own lives.<sup>295</sup>

**Adolescent engagement:** Where adolescents develop sustained connections in their lives. This can occur within themselves, in the immediate world around them, in society and the wider world. These sustained connections may be emotional, psychological or cognitive, and can be personal or social. It can involve enhancing self-awareness, and enhancing social, political and economic awareness of the world around them.

Youth engagement is often referred to as young people's involvement in social action (U Report/civic action/service, youth-led research etc.). These are important, but are not the only forms of youth engagement.<sup>296</sup>

**Adolescent development/training:** For the purpose of UNICEF programming, this would include the holistic and convergent social, political and economic development of adolescents through programming in health, education, child protection, social policy and other sectors and training related to sector-specific or convergent initiatives. This may or may not include explicit adolescent empowerment and participation components.<sup>297</sup>

**Adolescent empowerment training:** This would entail youth work training that enhances the capacity of adults and peer youth groups in understanding and engaging with young people as equal partners for personal growth, and social, political and economic learning and empowerment across and beyond sectoral initiatives.<sup>298</sup>

**Adolescent and youth participation:** Young people's active involvement in a range of participatory work including community volunteering, innovation, influencing policy and practice and other forms of active action. Training

294 UNICEF, *Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement*, 2020.

295 The Concerned for Working Children, *Glossary of Terms*, 2019.

296 Revised and adapted by ADAP UNICEF ROSA from Commonwealth Secretariat, *Youth Work in the Commonwealth: A Growth Profession*, London, 2017, pp. xxviii–xxix, <[https://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/events/documents/YouthWorkintheCW\\_9781849291736.pdf](https://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/events/documents/YouthWorkintheCW_9781849291736.pdf)>, accessed 14 December 2021; and Fletcher, Adam, 'What is Youth Engagement', Blog, 10 April 2013, <<https://adamfletcher.net/2013/10/04/what-is-youth-engagement/>>, accessed 10 August 2021.

297 The Concerned for Working Children, *Glossary of Terms*, 2019.

298 Ibid.

in youth participation would include explicit inclusion of modules on modes of participation and policy around participation mechanisms.<sup>299</sup>

**Adolescent and youth participation in public governance:** A specific form of participation consisting of young people's active involvement and influencing of public policies, programmes and evaluation of decisions that affect them, their communities and the world. This involves influencing national and sub-national policies, institutional decision making across a range of government institutions at local government, and national and sub-national level. This involves attention to voice, influencing, representation and impact.<sup>300</sup>

**Adolescent/youth-led organizations:** Organized adolescent groups with a collective consciousness, working together to achieve the rights of themselves and their communities as collectives, with an organizational structure and clear representative structures for informing State policy and practice.<sup>301</sup>

**Agency:** The capacity of an actor to engage with the social structure exercising autonomy in expressing opinions and taking action for change.<sup>302</sup>

**Assent:** Willingness to participate in research, evaluations or data collection by persons who are by legal definition too young to give informed consent according to prevailing local law, but who are old enough to understand the proposed research in general, its

expected risks and possible benefits, and the activities expected of them as subjects. In most countries, if assent is given, informed consent must still be obtained from the subject's parent or guardian or a responsible adult.<sup>303</sup>

**Autonomy:** The freedom or the right of adolescents to make their own decisions about what to do, rather than being influenced by someone else, told<sup>304</sup> what to do or have decisions made on their behalf by others.<sup>305</sup>

**Civic engagement:** Individual and collective action in which people participate to improve the well-being of communities or society in general.

**Early adolescence:** Persons in the age group of 10 to 14 years.

**Equality:** The state of being equal, especially in status, rights, or opportunities. The central idea of equality is that all the individuals receive equal treatment in the society and are not discriminated against on the basis of race, sex, caste, creed, nationality, disability, age, religion and so forth. This requires the presence of equal opportunities and state obligations and the absence of discrimination – legal or socially enforced. Equality is the foundation of a democratic society that aims to prevent discrimination and provide an equal opportunity to all. However, equal opportunities do not necessarily ensure equality. When situations and circumstances are unequal, opportunities need to be weighted in favour of the less privileged.<sup>306</sup>

299 Ibid.

300 Ibid.

301 Ibid.

302 Ibid.

303 UNICEF, *Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement*, 2020.

304 Ibid.

305 Ibid.

306 The Concerned for Working Children, *Glossary of Terms*, 2019.

**Equity:** Equity derives from a concept of social justice. It is the virtue of being just, even-handed and impartial. It recognizes differences and attempts to counteract unequal individual opportunities. Equity demands fairness in every situation, whether it is the distribution of benefits or burdens. Therefore, people are treated fairly, but differently, as their circumstances are given weight. Hence, an individual's needs and requirements are taken into account and treated accordingly. It ensures that all the individuals are provided with the resources they need to have access to the same opportunities, as the general population.<sup>307</sup>

**Governance:** The action or manner of governing a state, organization, etc.<sup>308</sup>

**Gram panchayat or panchayat:** The *gram panchayat* is the lowest level of administration in the system of local government in India. The term *panchayat* refers to both the geographical and administrative units, as well as the elected body, which acts as the local council. A *panchayat* is composed of a cluster of villages and several *panchayats* constitute a *taluk*.<sup>309</sup>

**Late adolescence:** Persons in the age group of 15 to 19 years.

**Marginalization:** Marginalization is the process of making a group or class of people less important or relegated to a secondary position. It is a form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities, as a result of which individuals or entire communities of people are systematically blocked

from (or denied full access to) various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a different group, and which are fundamental to social integration within that particular group (e.g., education, housing, employment, healthcare, civic engagement, legal recourse, political participation).<sup>310</sup>

**Participation:** In a rights frame, participation is defined as the proactive engagement of individuals, communities or groups in all matters affecting them, in an informed manner. This includes influencing attitudes, policies and practices that affect their lives and society. This necessitates that the participants are closely involved in the economic, social and cultural and political processes that affect their lives. Participation is an essential element of human development and is an overall development strategy focusing on the centrality of people's roles in all spheres of life. Human development involves the widening of choices and greater participation enables people to access a broader range of opportunities. Participation can be either direct or indirect through representation. It can be as an individual or as a collective/group or union, which brings together individuals with common concerns, agenda, interests and aspirations. As participation requires increased influence and control of individuals as well as communities, it is enhanced by increased empowerment in economic, social and political terms. All these forms of participation are intimately linked and reinforce one another.<sup>311</sup>

307 Ibid.

308 Ibid.

309 Ibid.

310 Ibid.

311 Ibid.

**Protagonism:** Advocating for ones' own cause.

**Social norms:** Patterns of behaviour in a particular group, community or culture, recognized as appropriate and acceptable, to which an adolescent is expected to conform and breach of which has social consequences. The strength of these norms can vary from loose expectations to unwritten rules.<sup>312</sup>

**Social exclusion:** Social exclusion is a form of discrimination. It occurs when people are wholly or partially excluded from participating in the economic, social and political life of their community, based on their belonging to a certain social class, category or group. Social exclusion occurs on the basis of identities including race, ethnicity, religion, gender identities, economic status and disability. It is often embedded in social relations and affects people's rights and entitlements. It may occur in degrees, ranging from total to selective; temporary to permanent; deliberate and explicit to implicit and unintentional.<sup>313</sup>

**State:** A government or politically organized society having a particular character.<sup>314</sup>

**Subsidiarity:** Subsidiarity is the principle that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed at a more local level.<sup>315</sup>

**Sustainability:** Capable of being sustained.<sup>316</sup>

**Systems strengthening for adolescent-centric work:** Building adolescent-friendly systems that embed adolescent aspirations and participation across the project cycle, in order to build adolescent-centric programming (adolescent engagement and participation, adolescent budgeting, youth safeguarding, adolescent focused research).

**Union:** When seven or more people come together to form an association with a common interest and purpose.<sup>317</sup>

**Vulnerability:** The quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, economically, socially, culturally, physically or emotionally.

**Young adults:** Young people in the age group of 20 to 24 years.

**Youth:** Young people in the age group of 15 to 30 years.

**Youth work:** A specific professional category that enhances youth engagement skills. It includes skills for building capacities in young people for reflection, learning, empowerment and fun within enabling non-formal environments. Transferable skills are included in this scope which includes citizenship, agency, employability and personal empowerment. (Note: Youth work does not refer to young workers/ young professionals.)

312 UNICEF, *Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement*, 2020.

313 Concerned for Working Children, *Glossary of Terms*, 2019.

314 Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 'State', undated, <[www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/state](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/state)>, 3 December 2021.

315 Concerned for Working Children, *Glossary of Terms*, 2019.

316 Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <[www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/state](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/state)>.

317 Concerned for Working Children, *Glossary of Terms*, 2019.

## Annexure F. Tools of engagement

The exercises with adolescents in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh were conducted using the following tool:

### **Tool for exercises with adolescents in Bhopal**

**Exercise 1:** Request all the participants to stand in a straight queue.

There will be 10–15 questions that are to be asked. For each question, there are three possible answers:

- (1) Yes
- (2) Don't know/perhaps
- (3) No
  - a. If the answer is 'yes' then the participant takes one step to the left
  - b. If the answer is 'maybe/don't know' then the participant stays in the same position
  - c. If the answer is 'no' then the participant takes one step to the right.

The questions are:

1. Are you satisfied with the information about the project (NYP/Safe City/ GPDP/CFLG)?
2. Do you know what adolescent participation means in the project?
3. Is there an adolescents' group in the project of which you are a member?
4. Do you feel you are an important member of any/the adolescents' group?
5. When there is a discussion about the project are you invited to share your views?
6. When you (whether invited or of your own accord) share your views does someone record or take note or pay attention to them?
7. Do you find that all the other adolescents present agree with or give importance to your views?
8. Do you find that any adults who are present also agree with or give importance to your views?
9. When a final decision is taken do you feel your views have been heard?
10. Is the decision implemented after it has been taken?
11. Do you participate in checking whether the decision has been implemented?
12. Do you feel anything you have participated in gave positive results?
13. If there was a negative result, was it discussed?

14. Have you had a positive experience with the Municipal members/leaders?
15. Have you had a positive experience with the police?

At the end of Exercise 1, there will be some children on the left; some in the middle; and some on the right. These will constitute three groups – even if there is only one participant in a group.

**Exercise 2:** Each group will now sit separately and focus on the following issues, discussing these issues among themselves. These issues will be thematically divided.

The adolescents have to keep notes and document the process of discussion in their groups and present the findings at the end of the exercise.

Facilitators should also document the discussion process for the groups (a separate format for this will be provided to the facilitators)

### **I. Type of adolescent participation**

- 1) Do you feel all types of adolescents can take part equally in decision making and implementation? If Yes, why? If no, why and who are the people who are more suited?
- 2) Do you feel adolescents with disabilities can take part in these processes?
- 3) Are there ways that more adolescents can take part in making the decisions?
- 4) Can you suggest how more and more adolescents from all backgrounds and groups can also be drawn in?

### **II. Content of participation**

- 1) According to your group and its position at the end of Exercise 1, what were the positive and/or negative aspects of the activity that made you feel how much your participation was valued or not valued?
- 2) Did the project activities following the decisions impact only adolescents or also adults, other castes, communities, all genders, and different backgrounds?
- 3) What were the main problems in your Basti? 1) sanitation, 2) water, 3) police violence, 4) bars and drugs, 5) lighting, 6) playgrounds, 7) social exclusion, 8) street and sexual harassment, 9) education, 10) health, 11) job opportunities, 12) working conditions
- 4) Can you rate these problems from 1 (most troubling) to 12 (least troubling)?

### **III. Power structures and hierarchies**

- 1) In your group were there any experiences of disagreement during the activity and how did you come to a consensus?
- 2) What do you feel are ways to deal with disagreement and have a process of agreement on an issue?
- 3) Do your experiences show that there were some individuals who took the lead or initiative and made major decisions?

- 4) Why do you think they are able to and taking the lead? Who are they and what kind of people are they in terms of characteristics, personalities etc.?

During these two exercises, the facilitator's role will be to just present the exercises and let the participants go through them in any way they like, and record which adolescent/group did what.

If the participants have any queries, it would be better for the facilitator to only repeat the question in such a manner that the participant understands it, or to ask the participant/group to decide for themselves. Facilitators must not lead the participants to any one type or nature of discussion or focus their attention on any particular question or theme.

**Exercise 3:** Once Exercise 2 is over, the three groups may be brought together so that they can present their findings to the larger group and reflect on their discussions.

They will then make recommendations about how participation can be improved so that all the adolescents have a chance to present and argue their views so that it becomes part of how decisions are taken. These recommendations should be presented on paper.

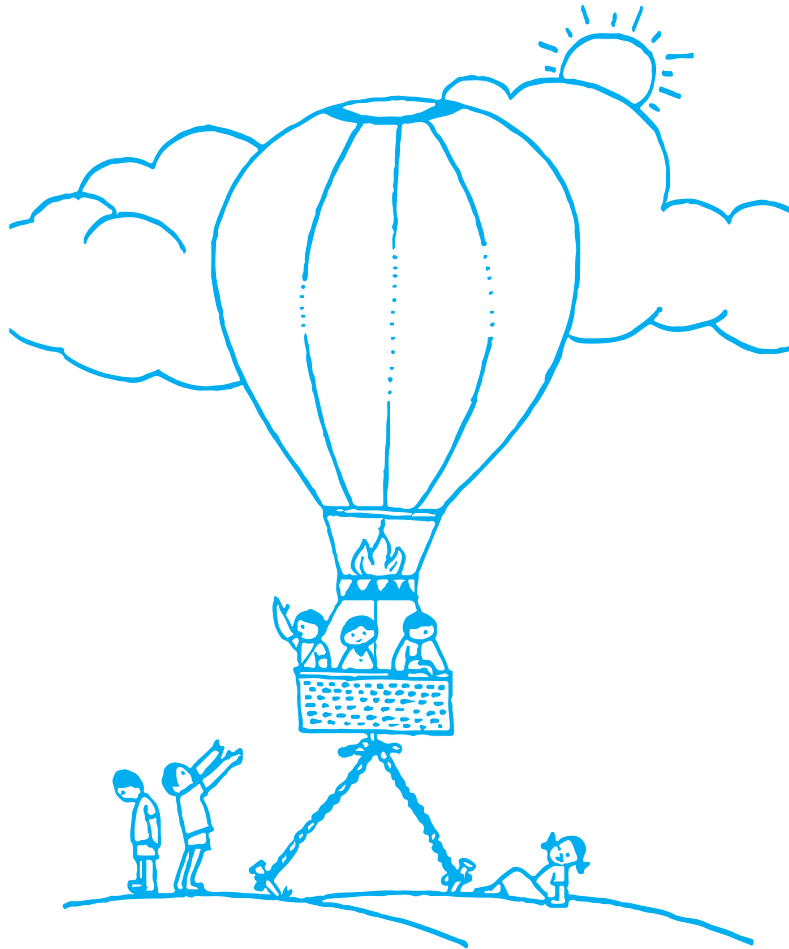
At the end of all the Exercises, we expect a report from the facilitator on why three groups did (or did not) form at the end of Exercise 1; a documentation on the FGDs in Exercise 2; and the recommendations that come out of Exercise 3.

### **Balloon tool (modified from the *ARC Resource Pack 2009*)**

At the end of Exercise 3, the facilitators can introduce the simple Balloon tool (shown below) to the adolescents for a discussion. If they wish, they can work together on the exercise at that time or they can take it back to their communities and the facilitators or CSO representatives can carry out the exercise with the tool at a later stage.

- Introduce the balloon to the adolescents, explaining that the **balloon** represents adolescent participation, the **pegs** below represent barriers to participation – and if these are removed, then adolescents can have their understanding and vision of participation.
- **Fire** is the lifting element that lifts or improves participation and the segments of the balloon represent components of adolescent participation.
- The **clouds** are the risks faced by adolescents when participating.
- The **basket** represents the children who are included.
- The **sun** is the purpose, the reason for why adolescents should participate.





## Facilitator form

### Exercise 1

Please write a brief 1–2 paras on why groups formed or didn't form in Exercise 1. Do you feel that the exercise could have been done in a different way?

### Exercise 2

Please document the nature of group discussion in Exercise 2 thinking of the following:

- Was the process of discussion collaborative and participative?
- Were the adolescents respectful of each other?
- What were the main findings of the group across:
  - Theme 1
  - Theme 2
  - Theme 3

### Exercise 3

Please write down the recommendations of the adolescents?

**Any overall feedback on the process?**

## Annexure G. Broad list of questions to guide the tools of engagement

### Bhopal

1. How were the adolescents' identified/selected/mobilized?
2. How similar or different is this process from Mumbai and Kolkata?
3. Why and how were the initial four wards selected?
4. How is sustainability defined in relation to this programme?
5. What conversations have taken place and what challenges are expected?
6. Any 'perceptible change' in adolescents post the Safe City Initiative?
7. What 'dents' have children been able to make in governance?
8. Is there any institutional format for this kind of sustainability?
9. Is there any documentation of adults seeking children's inputs on issues such as right to information (RTI)?
10. Can you give more information on the success stories and all the dynamics involved?
11. How have changes in district level leadership impacted on the programme?
12. Are there any examples of initiation of adolescent participation affecting other aspects?
13. Is there any plan with respect to change in functioning of district level authorities?
14. What was the impact on children/protection/communities/decentralized governance?
15. Are there any struggles with respect to expansion – financial or programmatic?
16. Are there any struggles with protectionism – and how were these overcome?
17. Did UNICEF discuss backlash against adolescents with the adolescents?
18. What has been the partners' perception/role in creating a local mandate?
19. Do any of the partners see a possibility of adolescents driving ADAP?
20. How were the adolescents 'collectivized'?
20. Were the results of the mapping shared with other adolescents?
21. What were the issues that were focused on? What about livelihoods?
22. How do plans with adolescent inputs compare to plans without?
23. What was the paralegals' age, backgrounds, selection and training?
24. Did adolescents participate in coordination meetings with the police?
25. Is there any documentation of the work with the police at district level?
26. Did UNICEF work with protection authorities anticipating threats?
27. What was the composition, role, issues covered of/by the CRTs?
28. Was there any back-end facilitation to them?

29. Any documentation of how CRTs were part of discussion in the bastis?
30. What is the present status of the CRTs?
31. What was the involvement of elected officials/administrators?
32. How does devolution of power in Bhopal compare with Mumbai and Kolkata?
33. What was the impact on the process as a result of the Patta Land Act?
34. Which issues did the local administration support?
35. Did the adolescents have any role in debating with any 'insensitive' officer?
36. How important were the mohalla samitis (neighbourhood committees) for this project?
37. Compare the first 6 pilot wards, with the expanded 15 and the final 70?
38. What was the involvement of adolescents in the design and/or roll out of expansion?
39. Can and has this model of expansion been applied elsewhere?
40. How and through whom were the 15 expansion wards chosen?
41. What is the convergence between government departments during expansion?
42. What institutional changes took place in urban governance for ADAP?
43. What were the changes within UNICEF to make ADAP central to the Safe City Initiative?
44. Did adolescents give any feedback on tools and design?
45. Please give examples of adolescent participation in the master plans.

## Maharashtra

1. Why does 'livelihood' not figure in the format for promoting child participation?
2. What norms were suggested by the children for preventing violence in the home?
3. How will building the capacity of gram panchayats overcome the limitations of PlanPlus and ActionSoft?
4. How were the 2 girls and 2 boys selected in each village?
5. What could be specific guidelines for assessing adolescent participation in the gram panchayat planning?
6. Why were all the selected settlements located on the hazard prone land?
7. Why are there differences between DNA risk and threats and risks from mapping?
8. How were the issues for discussion by children selected and by whom?
9. Why is there an inference that there is a gap between police and community?
10. Why has the District Child Protection Committee been given the authority to review and decide on the Plan?
11. Why is there no convergence between perspectives of experts, adolescents, and communities?

12. Where demand for solutions exists, how has the supply been addressed in the gram panchayat?
13. How will engaging with JJA and the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) find solutions to child protection issues?
14. Is there any study that documents the impact on policy and stakeholders?
15. What training has been provided by the prerikas to the group members for adolescent participation?
16. Why are there differences between issues of the groups, experts and safe communities mapping?
17. How is this difference being addressed by the gender resource centre?
18. What was the role of the CP Unit?
19. What was the role of the National Team of ADAP and convergence between all of the above?

## Nepal

1. Why did UNICEF Nepal drop out of ADAP and CLFG?
2. Why is children's participation missing from planning and budgeting?
3. Why were child clubs set up through LGCDP not involved in this process?
4. On what normative basis do the VDC and community members decide how to allocate the budget?
5. If the main issue is poverty then how does livelihood training meet the need and allow schooling?
6. If the CFLG became disorganized at the ground level, what measures were taken to restructure it?
7. Why did the INGO child clubs not seek support from the government?
8. If the rules were clear under the unitary system. how are the revised guidelines addressing that?
9. How is the 80% fulfilment measured and monitored to determine if there is CFLG compliance?
10. How did mainstreaming of CFLG process link to everything else happening in Nepal?
11. How do you define 'participation' by children? Has this changed over time?
12. What percentage of children's demands were approved by VDC in the unitary period or federal period?
13. Can we get quantitative figures of plans and budgets after children's voice is empowered?
14. With the new Constitution, how have the structures changed?
15. What does it mean to say children's participation is a fundamental right?
16. What roles do gender, class and caste play in children's participation in local governance?
17. What has been the role of child clubs in the CFLG continuum?
18. What are the implications of compulsory registration of child clubs for engaging with CFLG?

19. What is the role of CSOs presently supporting CFLG in village or district levels?
20. What is the link between the children clubs and the National Children's Council?
21. How effective are Bal Bheelas – and what is their role in CFLG? Are vulnerable children involved?
22. What have been the implications of inclusion of children's rights as a fundamental right in policy?
23. What are the implications of LGCDP on CFLG?
24. Who are the different stakeholders and how are their capacities built?
25. What is the situation of graduates of child clubs? Are they part of any local youth processes?
26. In places where the CFLG process is going on effectively, what are the key elements of the process?
27. What are the challenges to the CFLG process at the village level, provincial level and federal levels?
28. How autonomous is the government in terms of child policy from the UN and other donor agencies?
29. How is convergence between different ministries built into the government?
30. How is convergence achieved between different sectors in UNICEF?
31. How different is it now compared to when CFLG and ADAP were separate sectors?
32. Why were the facilitators and women and child officers dropped under federalization?
33. Where individual officials were convinced how did they reform the new structure?
34. Was the priority of local governments influenced by pressure of SDGs and market interventions?
35. Have the existing child clubs and autonomous agencies reorganized themselves?
36. When the Provincial and Local Government Support Programme (PLGSP) began, and now while it is being implemented, why is UNICEF not part of it?

## Bhutan

1. What is the role of UNICEF in country in addition to role of youth groups?
2. What were the recommendations from the youth and their critique of existing youth participation?
3. How is the constitutional reference to 'citizen's participation' linked to youth?
4. What was the engagement of young people in the 'entertainment' sector and their participation in the consultation?
5. How does the Young Bhutan Association function?
6. Why does the demography show violence on such a large scale?

7. What does participation in terms of good leaders for the future mean when youth are saying they are not involved in decisions?
8. In case the recommendations do not match with other policies already laid down what will UNICEF/DYS do?
9. Is the earmarked budget adequate for NCWC to carry out the recommendations?
10. Has the toll free help-line for children been established?
11. Why could the DWCC not be formed for all Dzongkhags?
12. Please give examples of Youth Initiative members selected through registration with motivation letter.
13. Is there a commitment from the government to accept the recommendations and for putting in investment?
14. How the culture of obedience is limiting child participation and what is planned to address it?
15. What will be the role of ADAP?



## ***Claiming Citizenship: Case Studies of Adolescents Participating in Governance in South Asia***

documents UNICEF's leadership in South Asia in support of adolescent agency and public sector commitment to working with and for them. It also highlights UNICEF's decades of collaboration with rights-based civil society organizations to realize children's right to participation.

The study brings together selected relatively evolved practices of UNICEF in South Asia through case studies from India, Nepal and Bhutan on interventions that have strengthened policies, mechanisms, capacities and relationships to facilitate adolescent agency and their participation in decision-making. These initiatives have furthered the realization of adolescents' right to participation and enhanced the delivery of responsive and relevant services. As the writers observe: "Wherever opportunities have been offered to adolescents to participate in the processes of governance, the expression of their agency and protagonism has been remarkable, their engagement with governance invigorating, and, in some cases, the development outcomes transformative"

The study also provides recommendations for scaling up embedded, holistic, and cross-sectoral good practices, with a full appreciation of the economic, social, cultural and administrative challenges, as well as the vast potential of mainstreaming the participation of adolescents in governance.

# CLAIMING CITIZENSHIP

Case Studies of Adolescents Participating in  
Governance in South Asia



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