

Attachment 2.1 Child and Youth Participation Policy

Version 3.0

Introduction

There are more children and youth in the world today than at any other point in history. A majority of these children and youth live in Global South countries, and many experience deprivation, exclusion and vulnerability. ChildFund Australia, through its support for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Child and Youth Participation, is committed to ensuring children and youth are heard, can influence the changes they want in their lives, and can build and claim their rights in their own communities and societies.

Child and Youth Participation is a process where children and youth exercise agency over issues that affect them, either directly or indirectly. Participation includes children and youth expressing their views, having influence in decision-making including developing and implementing their own initiatives in a meaningful and ethical way. ChildFund prioritises children and youth in key policies and strategies. In ChildFund Australia's context, Child and Youth Participation is supported through standalone programs and projects, mainstreaming, and project areas. It is also incorporated in internal governance and decision-making processes in the ChildFund Australia Sydney Office and Country Offices. ChildFund Australia also recognises the issue of intersectionality and support youth inclusion in Gender and Disability Inclusion policies.

Key Principles

Human rights: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 12 and 13) recognises the right to participation. Article 12 states that children have the right to participate in decision-making processes that may be relevant to their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard – within the family, the school or the community.

Our organisational and programmatic approach: We understand Child and Youth Participation to be core to our vision of children reaching their full potential and having a childhood. Our mission is to promote children's rights. It is also key to our thematic focuses on voice and agency and power in responding to the exclusion and power differentials that children and youth face.

Our program approaches: We recognise the importance of child-centred approaches that allow for the participation of children and youth to be active in their own development. Child and Youth Participation further supports principles of building local capacity, supporting sustainable change, working in partnership, and adopting a rights-based and evidence-based approach.

Policy Statement

ChildFund Australia seeks to ensure that children and youth from diverse backgrounds have meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives, both directly and indirectly. We are committed to contesting power structures that exclude children and youth from shaping their own lives and futures, including those structures that exist in our own governance processes, programs and projects.

Policy Commitments

ChildFund Australia and Country Office management and technical advisors will support the participation of children and youth in five keyways:

1. Allocate resources to build capacity of staff and partners, including innovations to ensure child and youth participation in all aspects of ChildFund Australia's work.
2. Through the involvement of children and youth in mechanisms that allow their participation in governance and programming.
3. By developing programs and projects designed to increase the participation and ownership of children and youth.
4. Creating opportunities for youth-led and peer projects and capacitating young people to contribute, including youth representation in ChildFund Australia Board and/or Committee representation.
5. Identifying barriers to children's/youth's meaningful participation and responding to exclusion of children/youth due to vulnerabilities (e.g. gender, disability, indigeneity, etc).

ChildFund Australia Country Office program staff, and any staff working directly with children, will:

- Adhere to ChildFund Australia's Policies and Procedures on Safeguarding¹.
- Adhere to ChildFund Australia's *Practice Standards for the Ethical Participation of Children and Youth* (Annex 1)
- Support the participation of children and youth throughout all stages in the project cycle by:
 - Conducting and regularly updating a child and youth situational analysis to inform Country Strategy Papers, programs and projects
 - Including the participation of children and youth in the design of all child and youth participation projects
 - Undertaking project level risk assessments to ensure that ChildFund Australia projects provide an enabling and safe context for children and youth participation
 - Identifying and collaborating with youth led partners, networks and associations
 - Increasing the number of activities that are implemented in collaboration with or led by children and youth
 - Including children and youth as collaborators or leaders in monitoring and evaluation processes
 - Ensuring children are consulted on the design, implementation and monitoring of feedback and complaints mechanisms

¹ 2019, <https://www.childfund.org.au/child-safeguarding-policy/>

Annex 1: ChildFund Australia's Practice Standards for Ethical Participation

In all participation work with children and youth, it is essential to have regard to the basic requirements of meaningful and ethical participation. These requirements have been adapted from Save the Children's Practice Standards and the Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment, No.12 'the right of the child to be heard'.² While these standards specifically apply to children, ChildFund Australia adopts the same standards for participation activities with children and youth. These standards require that all participation be:

1. **Transparent and informative** – children and youth must be provided with full, accessible, and age-appropriate information (that is also sensitive to diversity) about their right to express their views freely; information should include how their views will be given due weight, how the participation will take place, and its scope, purpose and potential impact.
2. **Voluntary** – children and youth should never be coerced into expressing views against their wishes and they should be informed that they can cease their involvement at any stage.
3. **Respectful** – children and youth's views have to be treated with respect and they should be provided with opportunities to initiate ideas and activities. Adults should acknowledge, respect and build on good examples of child and youth participation. Adults also need an understanding of the socio-economic, environmental and cultural context of children and youth's lives.
4. **Relevant** – the issues on which children and youth have the right to express their views must be of real relevance to their lives and enable them to draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities. In addition, children and youth need to have opportunities to highlight and address the issues they themselves identify as relevant and important.
5. **Child and youth-friendly** – environments and working methods should be adapted to children and youths evolving capacities. Adequate time and resources should be available to ensure that children are adequately prepared and have the confidence and opportunity to contribute their views. You need to consider that children will need differing levels of support and forms of involvement according to their age and evolving capacities.
6. **Inclusive** – participation must be inclusive, avoid existing patterns of discrimination, and encourage opportunities for marginalised girls and boys and young women and men. Programs also need to ensure that they are culturally sensitive to the situation of children and youth from all communities. You need to ensure that all genders have equitable opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, programs and projects we support.
7. **Safe and sensitive to risk** – children should be safeguarded and protected from harm. In certain situations, encouraging marginalised girls, boys, young women, and men to express their views may put them at risk. Adults have a responsibility towards the children and youth they are working with and must take every precaution to minimise the risk to children and youth of violence, exploitation or any other negative consequence of their participation. Children must be aware of their right to be protected from harm and must know where to go for help if needed. Investment in working with families and communities is important in order to build understanding of the value and implications of participation, and to minimise the risks to which children may otherwise be exposed.

² *Practice Standards in Children's Participation: A User Friendly Summary*, USAID and Save the Children and Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12, The Right of the Child to be Heard, CRC/C/GC/12, July 2009.

For more information on these practice standards, see Gerison Lansdown, Every Child's Right to be Heard: A Resource on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12.
https://www.unicef.org/french/adolescence/files/Every_Childs_Right_to_be_Heard.pdf

Document Information

Document details	
Name of document	Child and Youth Participation Policy
Owner	International Program Director
Approved By	Nigel Spence, CEO
Date of Approval	27 September 2019
Date of Effect	27 September 2019
Assigned Review Period	Every three years from Date of Approval.
Date of Next Review	27 September 2022

Version control				
Version No.	Version Date	Amendment Details	Amended By	Approved By
1.0	24/11/2010			Board of Directors
2.0	06/02/2013			Board of Directors
2.1	02/01/2014			International Programs Director
3.0	27/09/2019	Incorporate PRC feedback.	Head of Programs	CEO