THEMATIC REPORT:

PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM

Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

ERG
children's environments research group

ecpat

Thematic Report:
PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

THEMATIC REPORT:

PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM

Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

3

PREFACE

In September 2015, at the United Nations Development Summit, Heads of States and Governments adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Included in the Agenda's 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 global targets is a commitment to eliminate all forms of violence against children and a recognition of the importance of persons, including children, having a voice in decisions concerning them. Target 16.2 commits to ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. Target 16.7 commits to ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Both of these targets align with ECPAT's long-standing focus on ending the commercial sexual exploitation of children and ensuring that children, particularly victims of sexual exploitation, participate in the decision making processes that affect them.

The findings of this publication, produced as part of a continuing partnership between ECPAT International and the Children's Environments Research Group (CERG), reinforce the need to engage young people at all levels, including in the implementation of the SDGs, in line with the fundamental concept of children's rights. It has been a most satisfying mutual partnership. ECPAT believes that it has been able to critically examine how at global and national levels it can better listen and respond to children, particularly those who have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Based on the findings and recommendations of the assessment on young people's role in ECPAT's governance conducted by CERG in 2014, a new model of meaningful child and youth participation, including survivors, in organisational governance was introduced. The new model engages with children and youth at local levels and amplifies their voices at the international governance level through a re-structured ECPAT International Child and Youth Advisory Committee (EICYAC).

Meanwhile, CERG has been able to significantly improve its understanding of the theory and practice of governance with children and youth by being asked to think openly and critically about these issues with ECPAT's large international network of child-serving organisations.
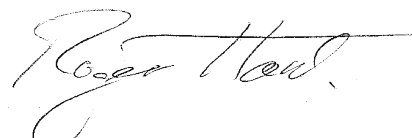
While this paper has focused on organisations working with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation, we believe that all child-serving NGOs, from local to international, need to find ways to ensure that children have a voice in governance and decision-making. We hope that this publication will be of value in furthering critical reflection and discussion on this challenging subject and in putting youth at the heart of organisations that serve them.

Dorothy Rozga

Executive Director
ECPAT International

Dr. Roger Hart

Director
Children's Environments Research Group

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSEC/ CSE	Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children
ECPAT	End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes
EICYAC	ECPAT International Child and Youth Advisory Committee
ILO	International Labour Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SAIEVAC	The South Asian Initiative for Ending Violence Against Children
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	UN International Children Emergency Fund

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

5

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this publication is to synthesise current thinking on how to best enable the voices of children who have been the subject of exploitation to have roles in the decision-making and governance of organisations that are designed to support and advocate for them.[1] It focuses in particular on the child survivors of commercial sexual exploitation, but also draws from the experiences of organisations working with other vulnerable children.

One of the most profound and transformative dimensions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is its recognition that all children should know that they are citizens, that they have rights, and that they should have opportunities to speak out about and be involved in decisions about the conditions that affect them according to the maximum of their capacities. This includes the right to have a voice in the running of programs and services that are intended for them, and the right to be heard in administrative proceedings affecting them. These goals are a challenge to any organisation working directly with children because they greatly increase the degree to which children need to be heard and taken into account beyond that which is typical for any society. But the right to be listened to, have one's opinions taken into account is particularly important for children who are having, or have had, their rights severely violated. It has strong implications not only for enabling their perspectives to be heard in order to improve conditions for children like themselves, but also for their own protection and recovery from such violations.

In practice, exercising the rights of children to have their voices heard raises questions about when and how best to account for the views of a child of CSE to ensure that the process remains authentic and does not lead to further traumatization. In addressing these questions, we take a multi-level approach that includes all organisational scales from the local to the global. This is based on an observation that we, and other scholars and practitioners have made, that while there is a great deal of high profile involvement of children in global events, it is first and foremost at the local level where we need to establish the conditions for children to be free to voice their feelings and concerns. This is important for two reasons. First, all affected children need to be able to be heard, not just a select few. Second, authentic participation in local groups is foundational to any kind of representative voices of children and youth at national, regional and international levels.

---

1   This paper draws heavily from an internal report *"The opportunities and challenges of placing children's voices at the heart of ECPAT: A review and recommendations on children's participation in organisational governance"* prepared for ECPAT Network Members related to the organisation's most recent strategic plan to ensure that victims' voices are reflected in policy, legislation, programs and practices in countries where ECPAT has a presence. In addition to a broad literature review, it involved interviewing 23 key informants, from 17 countries, at length. All informants had been associated in different ways with ECPAT, as staff members of advocacy groups or direct services organisations for survivors of CSE, representatives from national organisations, youth representatives to the ECPAT Board and staff members of the ECPAT International Secretariat.

A Clarification of Terms

In this paper, we use the term '*young people*' interchangeably with the terms '*children*' and '*youth*'. However, we use the term '*children*' to refer specifically to young people who are under 18 years of age, as it is defined in the CRC. Additionally, we use the term '*youth*' to refer to young people 15 to 24 years of age. While the term youth is used in some places to refer to people much older than 24 years of age, the more narrow range is what we find most often in the literature and our interviews with key informants.

The term '*governance*' is increasingly being used by organisations working on children's rights. It is typically used to describe the system of laws, policies, and processes that exist in a particular place to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of children. While good governance for children calls for much greater accountability and transparency across the wide range of sectors that serve children, such as education, health and child protection, it must also address the barriers that prevent young people from exercising their roles as citizens. Their voice needs to be heard in the governance of their communities and in the institutions that are meant to serve them. This has typically involved raising children's awareness of their rights, but it also needs to include a strengthening of organisational structures and processes that enable children to play meaningful roles. The Rio Declaration and Call to Action Against the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents (2008) clearly recognised this and states that policies and national action plans should:

> *Promote and fund meaningful child and youth participation at all levels in the design, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs, in campaigns and through peer-to-peer youth programs, aimed at raising awareness and preventing the sexual exploitation and trafficking of children and adolescents. (World Congress III Against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, p. 10)*

It is important to note that this description recognises young people's participation in influencing decisions regarding '*policies*' as well as '*programs*'. At an organisational level, young people's participation in governance occurs when children and youth give their input regarding an organisation's direction, policies, hiring and other major functions; when they have a real influence on those decisions; and most importantly, when they are also integrated into the everyday decision-making processes.[2] Child and youth participation in governance is particularly important in those organisations that advocate on young people's behalf, such as ECPAT, for their target group has a right to know what is being said about them and for them in public and political settings.

---

2   Murdock, S., Moncloa, F., Subramaniam, A., Olangundoye, S., Paterson, C., English, P., & Santhrum, S. (2009). Youth in Governance and Youth Adult Partnerships: An Examination of Promising Practices. 4-H Center for Youth Development, Special Report. *Davis, CA: University of California, Davis*.

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

7

The term '*participation*' is used as a general term, even when different meanings are intended; it requires modifiers to make it meaningful.[3] From here on we use the terms *'participatory'* and *'participation'* as qualifiers of specific kinds of activities, such as design, decision-making or policy formulation, in order to be clear about the nature of the involvement of children and youth in governance at all scales of an organisation. The participation of children and youth in programs where they share power in decisions and work together with adults on projects for their mutual benefit has become quite common within children's rights organisations. But young people's participation in the governance of organisations is not such a clear territory. We believe that the participation of children and youth in decision-making regarding policies and the overall running of an organisation is not qualitatively distinct from their participation in their everyday decision-making in the design of programs and projects, but is rather just a further step along the continuum of possible engagements in an organisation. Yet while having a voice regarding governance issues might seem to be a natural extension of program decision-making, there is a tendency to believe that it is only for the better educated, more literate or more powerful members of the organisation. We will argue here, that one type of participation should naturally lead to another and that we should afford opportunities for children and youth to participate at all levels within an organisation according to their evolving capacities and interests. In this paper, we critically review how the voices of children and youth are heard in the design of both programs and policies, and we pay particular attention to multiple relevant levels—local, national, regional and international.

---

3   See Milne, B. (1997) Children's participation: A global review of children's share in democratic processes. *Working Children and Adolescents International Review, 3-4*, pp. 25-38.

8

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

1

The State of Child and Youth Participation in Decision-Making in Child-Serving Organisations

Much of the attention to children's participation in decision-making by international child and youth-serving NGOs has been focused on conferences, particularly at the international level. This seems to have been based on a desire to bring the voices of children to the very top of these organisations without first thinking how they participate at more local levels. This is a deeply flawed idea that is at odds with the children's rights principle that all children have the right to have their perspectives heard. Therefore, we begin this section with examples of children's participation in local organisations because it is clear that any international network of communication between children must begin from the broadest possible base of authentic participation by children at the local level if is not to be tokenistic.[4]

1.1 Child and youth participation in the governance of local organisations

The quality of social and emotional relationships between young people and adults is what makes collaboration respectful and meaningful. This is partly dependent on the degree to which the structures and processes of an organisation foster positive and supportive relationships, such as the availability of decision-making roles for young people, and the training for all members that explicitly addresses power dynamics between children, youth and adults.[5,6]

A 'traditional' model of organisational governance includes the following components: (a) a board (that may or may not include children), (b) a child advisory board or committee, (c) an executive director, and (d) program committees.[7] Even when an organisation includes a child advisory board, it typically involves a small number of representatives who are not necessarily linked to the children that they represent through any participatory direct democratic structures and processes. This kind of structure negates the rational for such an advisory board and, over time, it undermines young people's confidence in the integrity of their participation as they begin to see the difference between genuine and tokenistic modes of participation in organisational decision-making.[8]

---

4   Hart, R. (1992) *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence, Italy: UNICEF Innocenti Research Center.
5   Murdock, *et al.* (2010). (2009). *op. cit*.
6   Subramaniam, A., & Moncloa, F. (2010). Young People's Perspectives on Creating a "Participation-Friendly" Culture. *Children Youth and Environments*, *20*(2), 25–45.
7   Breitbart, M., Iltus, S., Hart, R. (1995) *Youth Participation Pilot Survey*. New York: Children's Environments Research Group. Available at http://cergnyc.org/archives/2495
8   Ibid.

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

9

Related to this model, child and youth participation in the governance of schools has often been thought of in terms of children's councils. There are many schools with student councils throughout the world that in various degrees attempt to give a voice to children on some dimensions of the running of the school. They typically involve one or two representatives from each class in the school. The range of issues that children can address through such councils is usually quite limited, although this varies and in many "free schools" or "alternative schools" children do discuss the full range of issues, including the curriculum and disciplinary questions.

There have been too few critical evaluations of the school council models, but the available literature confirms the informal observations of many that these councils are typically weak for a number of reasons.[9] First, the representatives are often not elected by their peers. Also, even when representatives are elected the children have not been introduced to any principles of good governance and so they tend to vote for the most popular children or the ones that they think their teachers would want, rather than for someone who they think would most genuinely express the concerns of their whole class. Because of this, Priscilla Alderson found from her review of British school councils that "simply introducing a token council can increase students' scepticism".[10] From these evaluations we can conclude that while some schools find that school council can be of considerable value in improving the voices of children and having an impact on the climate of a school, there is a need for more experimentation and critical evaluation of the models.[11] Finally, there is rarely an attempt by teachers to link this representative form of governance to more direct participatory governance within the classroom. As a result, the child representatives on a school council, commonly speak from their own perspectives rather than as the voice for the children in their classroom. We need to find ways to deepen their value not only by improving the electoral process but, even more profoundly, by linking such representative groups to opportunities for all of the children to have a direct voice in the running of an organisation.

With the emergence of rights-focused children's groups in many countries over the past two decades we have begun to see an important growth of governance models that are much more participatory and inclusive for children than in the past. However, even with these rights-focused children's groups, the emphasis of children's engagement is typically on advocacy beyond their organisation rather than seeing their own organisation as a place where they can establish exemplary participatory democratic practice. Many working children's associations are an exception to this observation and are worthy of comparison.[12,13] In reviewing these organisations, we should keep in mind that while working children suffer a great deal of abuse, this is not typically of the same emotionally damaging type that happens with CSE. It is no doubt easier for working children to come to see the benefits of coming together with their peers and working collectively to change their condition.

---

9   See, for example, Allan, J., & I'Anson, J. (2004). Children's rights in school: Power, assemblies and assemblages. *The International Journal of Children S Rights, 12*(2), 123–138.
10   Alderson, P. (2000). Children and Society, 14, pp. 121-134. See also Whitty, G. and Wisby,E. (2007). *Real decision-making? School councils in action.Real decision-making? School councils in action.* Research Report of the Institute of Education, University of London.
11   The escuela nuevaescuelas nuevas, or 'new schoolsschools' of Colombia, are examples of the important attemptattempts to enrich the concept of school councils; see Hart, R. (2014) In Burke, C and Jones, K. Education, Childhood and Anarchism: Talking Colin Ward. London: Taylor and Francis.
12   Swift, A. (1997). *Children for Social Change: Education for Citizenship of Street and Working Children in Brazil*. Nottingham: Educational Heretics Press, 1997.
13   Liebel, M. (2004) A Will of their Own: Cross Cultural Perspectives on Working Children. London: Zed Books, 2004

A particularly important aspect of the building of strong participatory structures and process into children's local organisations is the potential for improving the capacities and confidence children have to protect themselves. In the best cases, their participation should be sustained over time and integrated into the existing governance structures and processes of their communities. While there has not been any systematic longitudinal analysis of interventions to improve the level of democratic functioning in children's groups, there have been some important indications of this potential. In a quantitative analysis of indicators of social capital (i.e. the level of trust and reciprocal care between citizens) in the *escuelas nuevas* or "new schools" of Colombia, researchers found that after many years of deeply democratic schooling practices the surrounding communities of the schools were safer because they had higher levels of social capital.[14] Also, a qualitative evaluation by the National Committee on Child and Youth Participation in the Philippines, through a sample of four case studies, concluded with a key finding that high levels of participation of children and youth in their own community-based associations led to changes in the children's sense of self, and the children reported that they were "more in a position now to protect themselves from potential abuse or exploitation".[15]

1.2 The absence of critical comparative accounts of alternative models of young peoples' participation in the governance of organisations

A study of over 200 organisations that serve children in the United Kingdom found that many of the organisations surveyed have high levels of support for involving young people in decision-making within the organisation.[16] This is encouraging since other studies often report tensions between youth and adults when sharing decision-making responsibilities.[17,18] The authors of the UK study, however, note that while there is support for young people's involvement in decision-making, there is little monitoring and evaluation of the quality of these processes. Also, our review indicates that there is a dearth of research that identify the organisational structures and models that promote or diminish opportunities for young people to be involved in different types of decision-making. It is for these reasons that the Children's Environments Research Group and its partners founded the *Article 15 Project* with the design of an approach and set of tools for the critical self-evaluation of how democratically any group functions. We have learned from this project that groups of children and young people are eager to learn how to better organise themselves through self-reflection and through exchanging knowledge with other groups of children and youth about their own distinct organisational practices.[19]

14   Forero-Pineda, C., & Escobar-Rodríguez, D. (2006). Escuela nueva's impact on the peaceful social interaction of children in Colombia. In *Education for all the multigrade teaching* (pp. 265–300). Springer..; Hart (2014) op.cit.
15   Ruiz, H. (2011). Case Studies on Child Participation in the Philippines. Manila: The Council for the Welfare of Children
16   Davey, C., Lea, J., Shaw, C. & Burke, T. (2010). Children's participation in decision-making: Survey of organisations. A report from Participation Works, London. Retrieved from participationworks.org.uk
17   Zeldin, S., McDaniel, A. K., Topitzes, D., & Calvert, M. (2000). *A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organisations*. Madison: University of Wisconsin.
18   Liebel, M. (2012). Children's Rights from Below: Cross-Cultural Perspectives. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
19   Children's Environments Research Group (2012) Organizing Ourselves: The Article 15 Project Summary Report; Please visit http://crc15.org for more information on this research and related resources.

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

11

1.3   Local networks of child and youth organisations

Beyond the level of individual groups there is great value in enabling children and youth to build local networks of children's organisations. In our dialogue with children's groups around the world through the *Article 15 Project*, we universally hear of the desire to be better connected with other groups like themselves who are committed to working to change conditions in relation to their rights.[20] As Anthony Swift documents with working children in Brazil, there are multiple advantages to children and youth feeling that they are part of a movement:

> *In itself, membership of a movement provides elements of protection, access to information and opportunities for personal development that are generally unavailable to unorganised child workers or, for that matter, children in conventional schools.*[21]

In other work, Swift refers to other benefits of being part of an organised collective of young people and adults, such as the support of adults to buffer against harassment from police and other local authorities.[22] Related studies with street-connected children in the Philippines report similar findings.[23]

Additional studies highlight issues that are relevant to children involved in, and at risk of, CSE. For example, a recent research on youth gangs revealed how some youth gangs put members, especially young women, at higher risk of sexual exploitation.[24] From a different perspective, Svetlana Stephenson's research with street children and youth in Moscow described how young people organise themselves into groups for protection, companionship, and economic benefits.[25] Some of the groups in this study engaged in legitimate activities, such as collaborating to sell goods in markets. Other groups operated as 'gangs' and engaged in criminal activities, such as prostitution and theft. As a result, Stephenson acknowledges the risks young people in gangs face, but also that young people seek social relationships that offer protection because these close relationships are critical for survival without more appropriate means. Other researchers report similar finding from studies with street children in Ghana, Indonesia, and other parts of the world.[26, 27, 28]

Collectively, these studies point to the importance of spaces where young people come together to form protective relationships that promote their well-being. It is within these local groups that children and youth have the most opportunity to be involved in different types of decision-making, including the design and implementation of programs, as well as the governance of an organisation. It is not surprising, then, that international agencies and child-centred community

20   Children's Environments Research Group (2012) *op. cit*.
21   Swift, A. (1998) *Working Children Get Organised*. Save the Children p3
22   Swift, A. (1997). Children for Social Change: education for citizenship of street and working children in Brazil. Educational Heretics Press Nottingham.
23   Van Beers, H. (1996). A plea for a child-centred approach in research with street children. *Childhood*, *3*(2), 195–201.
24   Beckett, H., Brodie, I., Factor, F., Melrose, M., Pearce, J. J., Pitts, J., Warrington, C. (2013). "It's wrong-but you get used to it": a qualitative study of gang-associated sexual violence towards, and exploitation of, young people in England. University of Bedfordshire. Retrieved from http://uobrep.openrepository.com/uobrep/handle/10547/305795
25   Stephenson, S. (2001). Street children in Moscow: using and creating social capital. *Sociological Review*, *49*(4), 530–547. doi:10.1111/1467-954X.ep548718
26   Mizen, P., & Ofosu-Kusi, Y. (2013). A Talent for Living: Exploring Ghana's "New" Urban Childhood. *Children & Society*, *27*(1), 13–23.
27   Beazley, H. (2003). The Construction and Protection of Individual Collective Identities by Street Children and Youth in Indonesia. *Children, Youth and Environments*, *13*(1).
28   Ennew, J. (1994). Parentless friends: A cross-cultural examination of networks among street children and street youth. *Social Networks and Social Support in Childhood and Adolescence*, 409–426.

development organisations, such as the United Nations Refugee Agency, WorldVision, Plan and Save the Children, now seek out partnerships with child and youth organisations because they have found that involving local child and youth organisations can greatly improve the implementation and efficacy of programmes, such as community-based child protection mechanisms.[29,30] Local child and youth organisations and networks are critical for including the voices of children and youth, especially survivors of CSE, at the heart of their organizations.

1.4 National-level networks of child and youth organisations

A number of national networks of children's groups have demonstrated the considerable potentials of enabling children to come together to influence policy more effectively than at the international level. They not only have the benefit of greater geographical proximity compared to an international network but very often also share a common language and culture. In addition, they offer the potential of forming coalitions with an amalgamation of different types of groups with different but complementary goals, experiences, and capacities. These coalitions offer groups more chance to learn from one another and to provide access to greater amounts of information and influence. But, more typically, national networks of child and youth groups are a collection of groups with similar purposes such as the Philippines National Association of Street and

Working Children, the Brazilian networks of street children, and the *Movimiento de Adolescentes y Niños Trabajadores Hijos de Obreros Cristianos* in Peru.[31] Similar groups sometimes even refer to themselves as unions, such as *La Unión de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes Trabajadores de Bolivia*.[32]

1.5 Regional networks

There are also a few instances of regional level participation, such as the *Mouvement Africain des Infants et Jeunes Travailleurs* in Africa.[33] While this movement has had success, the regional level is, typically, not as likely to enable young people's voices to be heard by policy makers or to influence public awareness as with national networks of young activists.

Regional networks require more coordination and effort to ensure young people are involved in decision-making than local or national ones, but our interviews with ECPAT representatives revealed that young people gain important relationships and experiences from these events. There are, however, important challenges to consider. Different languages and difficulty with travel are the two most commonly cited. There are now possibilities of establishing more

---

29   UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Child Protection Issue Brief : Community- based child protection mechanisms, September 2013, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/531ec54f4.html
30   Wessells. M. (2009) What Are We Learning About Protecting Children in the Community? *Inter-Agency Reference Group.* http://organisational.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/What_Are_We_Learning_low_res_%282%29_1.pdf
31   The Movement of Working Children and Adolescents of Christian Workers
32   The Union of Child and Adolescent Workers of Bolivia
33   The African Movement of Working Children and Youth

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

13

frequent communication than with face to face meetings through electronic communication channels, but these suffer from great variability in children's access to such media and they also tend to make the language barriers more difficult to manage.

The South Asian Initiative for Ending Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) is one example of a regionally focused organisation that continues to reflect on how best to include the views of young people in their organisational decision-making. Their governing board includes adult representatives from eight countries in the region, as well as two child board members, one girl and one boy from the region.[34] Furthermore, participants in consultations and conferences with children and youth have reflected on what is necessary to ensure ethical and meaningful participation of young people in decision-making on issues that concern them and their peers in their region. For example, SAIEVAC drafted standards and principles for children's participation in meetings and consultations organised or supported by SAIEVAC and made them available online.[35] In addition to designing their standards based on children's rights, the organisation outlines overarching principles, including guidelines that all children's participation processes be: ethical; voluntary; informed; meaningful; accessible, inclusive and non-discriminatory; respectful; child friendly; safe; consistent and accountable; and child-led.

1.6 International networks and conferences

Some organisations for children build an international system of governance with children or youth using the same conventional, traditional, representational, model described above for local organisations. Like the local use of this model, this results in a hierarchical arrangement with a very limited voice for child members in the governance of their organisations. Because of this problem international organisations for children have commonly turned to children's conferences as a way of bringing the voices of larger numbers of children to the table. To help place these kinds of events within an overall assessment of the best ways of having children's voices heard, we offer below a critical review of the state of the art of such conferences. The following conclusions regarding the potential of conferences for fulfilling the goal of incorporating the voices of children and youth into the policies and planning of international NGOs for children are based on a review of reports of such conferences and some guidelines that have been prepared built from experiences of running them.[36] The conclusions are supplemented with our personal observations and experiences in assisting in the organisation of children's participation in conferences.[37]

1.6.1 The failure to build international meetings on a strong democratic base of local organisations with children

Following the International Year of the Child in 1979 and increasingly after the launch of the CRC in 1989, it was felt necessary to involve children in conferences of the United Nations and of the

---

34   Please see http://www.saievac.org/about-saievac/who-is-who/
35   Please see http://www.saievac.org/resources/downloads/
36   A particularly relevant publication is the report of the Mekong Children's Forum on Human Trafficking: *Making History – People, Process and Participation* Bangkok, International Labour Office & Save the Children UK. Also: Cockburn, G. (2000). *A Case Study of the International Conference on War-Affected* Children. Winnipeg, Canada. Ottawa, Canada: CIDA..; Ennew, J. and Hastadewi, Y. (2004) *Seen and Heard: Participation of children and young people in Southeast, East Asia and Pacific in events and forums leading to and following up on the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children* in 2002. Bangkok: Save the Children.
37   The UN Conference on Human Settlements. Vancouver, 1976. The UNDP International Forum on Drug Abuse Prevention. Banff, Alberta, Canada in 1998.

international NGOs that serve children. For many people who designed children's participation in these conferences and meetings, it was originally thought to be sufficient that a few children's voices be heard. Who these children were and the particular contexts of their lives was not of great concern to these organisers because they felt that the category "child" is so different from the category "adult" that they will have a distinct voice and so any child can legitimately represent the category of "children". The tendency to think that "the child" is synonymous with "children" is an old problem in discussions about childhood, and this even continues to be a tension in research within the field of childhood studies.[38] But with the growth of awareness about children's rights and the emergence of the field of childhood studies over the past three decades, there has been increasing recognition that childhood is a social construction and that children live in such widely different contexts from one another that it is never adequate to speak of "the child". Greater effort is now spent by international NGOs and UN agencies in designing congresses with children, but they continue to struggle with the problem of selecting which particular children to involve in these international events. [39,40]

Ideally, the children and youth who are the particular focus of concern in a conference would select their own representatives, for this would both guarantee the choice of someone who can best represent them and better enable the delegates to play the true role of a representative: carrying with them the concerns of their peers and returning afterwards to share with them what they have learned from their participation in the conference. Unfortunately, international NGOs commonly find it too difficult to design such representative events because of the great distance between those who run international conferences and those who help facilitate the participation of children in organisations at the local level of the communities in which they live. There are however some important exceptions that are worth looking at.

One way young people contribute to decision-making of an organization at the international level is through an international advisory committee with young people or international conferences. For example, the ECPAT International Child and Youth Advisory Committee (EICYAC) is one of the primary means ECPAT involves children and young people in its governance – starting with the involvement of general child and youth advocates in different regions, and then narrowing the focus to a group of advocates made up of child survivors and children and young people believed to be at risk of sexual exploitation. For the most part EICYAC representatives have been selected from local groups rather than from national level networks that are themselves built upon local networks of organizations.

Over the years, since the start of the children's rights movement, some children's organisations have built international networks from the ground up. The organisations and networks of street working children were pioneers in this regard. The street children's conferences were built upon a system of local, highly participatory groups of children or youth who were then elected to a series of conferences at increasingly higher levels. For example, the annual national street and working children's congress in the Philippines in the 1990's was based on elections of representatives from local organisations to municipal level conferences, to island-level conferences and finally

---

38   James, A., & James, A. (2004). *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
39   ECPAT was part of an inter-agency initiative to produce Minimum Standards for Consulting with Children in conferences and events in 2005 during the process of facilitating children's participation to input into the UN Study on Violence against Children: http://plan-international.org/about-plan/resources/publications/participation/minimum-standards-for-consulting-with-children/. See also ECPAT's International Participation Project and the report Speaking up for our rights Francisco, C., Standing Up for Ourselves! A study on the concepts and practices of young people's rights to participation, ECPAT International, Manila, 1999
40   Cockburn, G. (2009). Meaningful Youth Participation in International Conferences A Case Study of the International Conference on War-Affected Children.

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

15

to a national conference.[41,42] Similarly the annual national program of working children in Ecuador elected representatives from the local groups of working children to attend municipal level meetings and then conferences in each of the three regions of the nation: the Amazon, the Andes and the Pacific coast. These programs have demonstrated how children's local efforts can have an impact on their own communities while also enabling children to make contributions to policy-making at municipal and national levels.[43] There are also international movements for street children and working children, but they have lacked continuity over time.[44] Nevertheless, in helping to prepare a General Comment for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on "Children in Street Situations" in 2014, the International Consortium for Street Children was able to call on more than thirty network members globally to promote the campaign for UN recognition of street children by inviting them to give their perspectives on what they would like to say "if the whole world was listening".[45]

The bottom-up strategy for bringing children's voices to an international level of impact has also been used with children facing the threat of trafficking. In 2004, a series of provincial and national children's fora were held in locations throughout the Mekong Delta Sub region: Cambodia, Yunnan and Guangxi Provinces (China), Laos, northern Thailand, and Vietnam. These led up to the Mekong Children's Forum on Human Trafficking held in Bangkok later in the year.[46]

These provincial and national fora were organised to allow children the opportunity to first discuss the issues with one another and then to share their knowledge, views and suggestions with ministers and senior government officials involved in the fight against trafficking at the national level. They were also able to present their perspectives and recommendations to their national press as a way of bringing their voices to the larger public. Five delegates from each of these national fora were selected by their peers to attend the sub-regional children's forum in Bangkok. Bringing children together at the provincial and national levels created an opportunity for children from a broadly distributed range of communities to share their ideas and jointly plan their own advocacy and action while simultaneously bringing their perspectives to those who influence and create policies and programs for children. Moreover, the fact that the child participants were geographically and democratically representative meant that they could authentically claim that their perspectives were relevant not just to their own lives but more broadly to the large number of children in their region who were vulnerable to trafficking.

1.6.2 The lack of a clear and meaningful focus for conferences

All too commonly, child and youth representatives travel to conferences without a clear sense of the issues being addressed or any sense of the perspectives their peers may have on specific issues or, beyond that, a vision for a larger mission. This is because their peers do not elect these child and youth delegates, and sometime when they are elected, they do not typically consult with their peers. As a result, they are able to only offer their own hurriedly prepared opinion. By contrast, in the successful examples of local to national to international level meetings, described

41   Blanc, C. (1994) Urban Children in Distress: Global Predicaments and Innovative Strategies. London: Routledge
42   Hart, R. (1992). op. cit.
43   Espinosa, M. F. (1994). The First Summit of Children and Youth of the Ecuadorian Amazon. Children's Environments, 11(3): 54-62. http://www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/.
44   http://streetchildren.org; NATs - Revista Internacional desde los Niños y Adolescentes Trabajadores, Lima (Peru); Liebel, M.(2001) Working Children's Protagonism. Social Movements and Empowerment in Latin America, Africa and India Frankfurt & London: IKO. LIEBEL, M. (2004) A Will of Their Own. Cross-cultural perspectives on working children. London & New York: Zed Books, 2004.
45   For more information, please visit http://streetchildren.org
46   Mekong Children's Forum on Human Trafficking (2004). "The Mekong Children's Recommendation on Human Trafficking." Mekong Children's Forum on Human Trafficking, October 11-17, 2004.

above, there is at each level an opportunity for the children to debate issues of concern to them and to carry them forward to the next level of discussion. Advocacy and action based on their conclusion can then happen at each level, as with the micro projects to macro projects designed by children of the national association of working children in Ecuador.[47]

1.6.3 The challenge of different languages

The difficulties of communication across different languages need to be addressed as fully as it is with adult conferences if young people are to be thought of as equal citizens in giving their voice to the issues under debate at a meeting. If simultaneous translation services are not available for all sessions, other strategies need to be carefully thought out in advance so that no individuals or groups are excluded.

In situations where simultaneous translation is not available for all sessions, one solution is to support facilitators or participants from each language group to offer translated reports from break-out groups to the larger conference. Another strategy that we have found to be effective is to bring in an artist who can create storyboards of children's accounts; the main theme can then be comprehended by all participants and each separate language group can be given detailed spoken annotations of the drawings by their own translator.

1.6.4 The lack of clear and effective roles for children

The role for young people in an event relates closely to the question of what is the purpose of the event. Again, this information is commonly not sent to children or youth in advance of the event. There should be information on its potential benefit to the children and youth, how they will be able to contribute to this goal, how their ideas will be integrated into the conclusions of the conference, who will present their conclusions and how transparency will be achieved in writing up the conclusions. Involving children and youth in the planning of the event with one another would be the best way of fulfilling many of these goals. If adults are also involved in the event, the children and youth should be considered as equal delegates, even though they might need extra preparation and support to fulfil this role. Finally, it is important to not place children or youth into different categories of roles in an event, for example performers versus speakers. If there are to be different roles, the children and youth themselves should decide upon these.

1.6.5 The absence of follow-up

When planning a conference, there can be a risk for organisers to see the conference as an end point. However, it is more useful to see it as a beginning of new relationships with others that they will want to continue in some way, a beginning of networking opportunities or a beginning of a dialogue participants hope will result in action. Selecting young people who have been attached to an organisation and will continue their work after the conference is one way to better ensure that the youth have support and follow-up after the conference.

All too often it is found that child and youth participants in international conferences are not kept informed about how their ideas were delivered to decision-makers and what happened as a result.[48] Conference organisers should be clear from the start of a conference regarding the

---

47   Hart, R. (1997) *op. cit.*
48   Cockburn, G. (2000). *A Case Study of the International Conference on War-Affected* Children. Winnipeg, Canada. Ottawa, Canada: CIDA.

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

17

type of follow-ups to the event that the children and youth can expect. After the conference they should be informed about the outcome of decisions and be provided with opportunities to react, at least at the local level. Also, at the local level the children and youth returning from the international event should be guaranteed the opportunity to present the conclusions of the conference to their peers.

Summary

In summary, there are many examples over recent decades of young people's participation in decision-making within the organisations that serve them. These experiences highlight the importance of the relationships between youth themselves and the strength of their partnerships with adults in their local organisations. Local organisations are the fundamental components for building strong networks at the national, regional, and international level, and the networks should allow for the same two-way communication of views that is sometimes achieved at the local level. When international movements and meetings begin to consider the importance of the local level groups and their linkages to higher levels networks, there will be more opportunity to involve young people in an authentic and meaningful manner at the global level.

2

Considering the Recovery Process and Special Vulnerabilities of Young People who have been Exploited or Abused

In this section we review academic literature and key findings from our own research on the question of how best to hear the voices of children and youth who are survivors of CSE during their recovery process and during their advocacy efforts. We summarize this research into a few key findings that are critical when considering how to involve children and youth affected by sexual exploitation and related trafficking into decision-making and policy-making of organisations that serve them.

2.1   Every child's recovery process is different

Every individual who has experienced CSE has different personality traits and motivations that influence how they overcome challenges faced during re-integration, including personal resilience and perseverance depending on their socio-historical context.[49,50] Some survivors may focus on future goals rather than past traumas, while others desire a longer period to focus on resolving trauma on their own before committing to any sort of training or activity.[51] While some children may find benefit in taking action to help others who have been affected by CSE, this is not true of all children; and the nature of what they are comfortable with will vary greatly.

We found resounding agreement among the individuals we interviewed who work directly with survivors of CSE that every person's recovery process is different. Interestingly, when asked about whether advocacy against CSEC may be part of the process of recovery, interviewees typically said that this is difficult to predict, but they did remember when and how this happened for specific people. One interviewee explained, "Not everyone can be part of the public process of advocacy. The children who can participate are the ones who have been hurt the least".

Although all interviewees agreed that every person's recovery process is different, one interviewee shared that there are some general stages and outlined this view in detail. In their words:

---

49   Gozdziak, E. and Bump M.N. (2008) Victims no longer: research on child survivors of trafficking for sexual and labor exploitation in the United States. US Department of Justice
50   Blower, L. and Abunimah, A. (2010) The circumstances and needs of separated children seeking asylum in Ireland. Child Care in Practice,16 (2) 129-146
51   Lisborg, A. (2009) Re-thinking reintegration: What do returning victims really want and need? Evidence from Thailand and the Philippines. SIREN Report. UNIAP III: Bangkok, Thailand

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

19

When the children arrive they are disconnected. Many do not think they have any problems and that they have complete control. This is the first stage. The next stage is when the young person acknowledges that they have experienced exploitation. This stage is difficult because they may resort to drugs or other harmful activities to deal with depression and the pain of recovery. Part of this stage is that they recognize that they were prostituted and not prostitutes. The next stage is achieving a place in society where the young person is no longer required to constantly deal with their experience as a survivor. To get to this stage typically takes a minimum of three years, and it requires that children remain dedicated to the process.

All of the interviewees who we spoke with who work directly with survivors believed that even though the recovery process is different for each person, the process typically takes years. This leads us to question whether including young survivors in organisational decision-making is even appropriate. It appears that older survivors, perhaps even in their late twenties, are more likely to be at a point in their recovery process to engage in advocacy work and participating in governance in a manner that does not risk re-traumatisation.

2.2 Supportive settings for recovery from CSEC are not universal

There seems to be little consensus over strategies that create an enabling environment for survivors of CSE. The recovery process is related to the context of CSE that a child faces and their degree of ease in removing themselves from it. There are a variety of direct services available to survivors, from simple information and advice through occasional direct support at a drop in centre to sustained support in a residential facility. The effectiveness of each setting or strategy for hearing young people's perspectives is not universal.

We also found a tension throughout the literature and our own research on whether speaking about the experience of CSE is necessary for an individual's process of recovery. The conditions that promote or diminish opportunities for these discussions to unfold is, at times, outside a survivor's control. One interviewee noted, "Fifteen and sixteen-year-olds may be ready to talk with others who have experienced [CSE], but we do not want them to return to thinking about this again." For this interviewee, discussing experiences with CSE with others may be a supportive setting only for some survivors. In fact, for other survivors, such a setting may be creating unhealthy "competition" among peers.

2.3 Peer support helps children and young people normalize their lives

Children desire normality and this means adapting to and fitting in with their peers.[52] Peer support provides "survivor role models" and lets children know they are not alone. In addition to potentially benefiting those receiving support, such models may also benefit those survivors who offer the support. Survivors typically receive training to lead activities and learn new skills and gain experience. Through "giving back" to others, such activities also help them in their own longer-term recovery.[53] And while some survivors choose to help with the recovery of their peers within their organisation, others may find success working in very different fields.

2.4 Expect both triumphs and traumas when working with young survivors

Without dismissing the severity of the trauma affecting children and young people who have suffered CSE, it is crucial for the field to address the need for positive youth development programming and authentic leadership opportunities for children and young people as they move from victim to survivor.[54] Recovery must address survivors' needs for physical and psychological protections, as well as ways that they can succeed at challenges both big and small. Opportunities should be made available, but by no means insisted upon as a necessary trajectory for all.

2.5 Compensation for work completed during recovery programs may be helpful but needs to be thought out carefully

For children and young people whose motivation was to leave home and earn money to support their families before they experienced CSEC, getting paid for their time and work in assisting in organisations can help them in their struggle with economic stress and to resist participating in CSE activities. They also come to feel that they have visible skills that are valued. In addition, a number of studies support the observation that when children have money or gifts when they return home, their families welcome them more warmly.[55,56,57] In some cases, children themselves may use their compensations towards a shared account or shared activities

---

52   Pearce, J.J, Hynes, P. and Bovarnick, S. (2009) Breaking the wall of silence: Practitioners' responses to trafficked children and young people. NSPCC; Ni Raghallaigh, M. and Gilligan, R. (2010) Active survival in the lives of unaccompanied minors: coping strategies, resilience and the relevance of religion. Child and Family Social Work 15 (2) 226- 237

53   Brown, K. (2006) Participation and young people involved in prostitution. *Child Abuse Review, 15 (5)* 294-312

54   Lloyd,R. From Victim To Survivor, From Survivor to Leader: The importance of leadership programming and opportunities for commercially sexually exploited and trafficked young women & girls. Girls Educational and Mentoring Services, GEMS.

55   Derks, A. (1998) *Reintegration of victims of trafficking in Cambodia*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: IOM and Center for Advanced Study (CAS)

56   Arensen, L., Brunn, M., and Knight, K. (2004) Caring for children from commercially sexually exploitative situations: Current practices in Cambodia and recommendations for a model of care. Hagar

57   Reimer, J.K., Langeler, E., Sophea, S. and Montha, S. (2007) The road home: Toward a model of 'reintegration' and considerations for alternative care for trafficked children for sexual exploitation in Cambodia. Hagar/World Vision Cambodia

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

21

that benefit the whole group. This may not only mitigate tensions that may arise from paying individuals, but may also foster a sense of the group and the value of their contribution as a whole. There seem to be disagreements, however, on the benefit of financial compensation for work that is part of one's recovery process. If its children's right to be heard, is it ethical and logical to pay to right holders to implement this right? We understand this concern and feel that it may even work against children being able to come to fully understand their rights and the rights of others. On the other hand, there are so many different possible contexts to consider that we feel that the decision needs to be made at the local level and with maximum transparency of the reasoning behind the decision.

2.6   Some ethical considerations

In considering the issue of children's participation in decision-making in an organisation, we need to give central consideration to the ethical practices in that organisation. In order to act truly and justly it is necessary to ask questions about what is right or wrong, good or bad, desirable or undesirable, acceptable or intolerable for individuals in that setting because there isn't one answer for all of those individuals.[58] Organisational work is not a neutral exercise and, especially in the context of CSE, has considerable potential to violate the privacy, wellbeing and security of its subjects. Even when organisational purposes are aiming to raise awareness about the risks of CSE and purports to further the interests of children, it can have precisely the opposite effect. This issue raises important questions about the ethical basis of participatory work undertaken with children and young people who experienced CSE, including their physical safety and security, being exploited by organisations for media attention on the 'so called human interest aspects', or for help with fundraising. It reveals the need for comprehensive and strict ethical codes.[59] Multiple authors point to the urgent requirement for consistent and appropriate ethical standards to be developed for use in research with vulnerable children.[60,61,62]

Summary

The recovery process from CSE can take years, if not a lifetime and, while engagement through advocacy and action programs of various kinds against CSE have been found to be valuable for some children, we cannot generalise about this for all survivors. There is value for children and youth to have opportunities to find meaningful roles for themselves during their recovery, but these need to be opportunities rather than expectations. Given the wide range of different contexts of recovery, and different conceptualisations of recovery, there is a need for a comparative review of the full range of alternative approaches to recovery found in direct service organisations and the implications of these for how best to involve young survivors in advocacy and action projects and in governance. This comparative review should include a framework for providing survivors of CSE different levels of potential involvement that are appropriate for different points in a person's recovery process.

58   Young, K. (1999). The Art of Youth Work. Russell House Publishing Ltd.
59   ECPAT has put a great deal of effort into this but the issue of how to involve survivors on an international stage raises new questions of vulnerability. Please see *ECPAT Child Protection Policies & Procedures*. Retrieved from www.ecpat.net/sites/default/files/child_protection_policies.pdf
60   Morrow, V. & Richards, M. (1996). The Ethics of Social Research with Children: an Overview. Children & Society vol. 10, pp90-105.
61   Jareg, E., Ed. Some Guidelines to Listening and Talking with Children who are Psychologically Distressed. Unpublished mimeo. Oslo: Redd Barna.
62   Richman, N., Ed. Ethical Issues in research with Children. Unpublished mimeo. London.

3

Experiences with Child Participation in Organisations Working with Children Affected by CSE

The literature in the previous section suggests that it is beneficial for a survivor's recovery for them to not only become aware of their own situation but also, sometimes, to begin to act to change conditions for others through involvement in the program decisions and governance of their organisation. We cannot generalise about this for all survivors of CSE, or easily know at what moment it is appropriate for them to become involved, so these kinds of engagements need to be thought of as opportunities rather than expectations. In this section, we discuss what we have learned from those who have worked closely with children affected by CSE and the different ways of placing the perspectives of children who have experienced CSE at the heart of their organisation. In doing so, we share insights from publications by these organisations and draw heavily from our recent assessment of how ECPAT includes children and youth in organisational decision-making in the governance of its global network of member organisations from 80 nations.

3.1 How children are being involved in efforts to eradicate CSE

3.1.1 There is a tendency to think of children's participation as unidirectional process

Placing children on boards with adult decision-makers without also thinking of how the children are in dialog with their peers reflects a unidirectional intention of an organisation. From our review of different organisations supporting children in difficult circumstances, we learned that there is a tendency to think of children's participation in the governance of an organisation as adults "listening to children's voices". We would like to argue here that opportunities for children to be listening in on the changing policies and priorities of decision-makers that relate to them are as important as their "voices" being heard. There are many reasons why this is a good idea, but the one that seems to us to be particularly important is to bring knowledge of all that is being done to end CSEC globally, as well as locally, to the children who are currently struggling to escape and recover from it. What this means practically is that if a youth survivor is elected by their peers to attend a national or international conference, it should not be assumed

that their sole purpose is to be the carrier of children's perspectives up to a board. They should first of all have local dialogs with their peers so that all children feel involved in the process. Similarly, when they return from their role as representative, they should be able to report back to their peers all that they have learned. We feel that thinking of children's involvement in organiszational decision-making in this bidirectional manner, both up and down, is central to the achievement of building a global movement and a sense of solidarity with all other victims of CSEC that stretches across the borders of neighbourhoods, cities and nations.

3.1.2   The institutional support available for involving children vary greatly

It is difficult to generalize about the process of local level participation of survivors in organisational decision-making because of variations in the context of CSE, the personality of the survivor, the diversity of models of working with survivors, and the lack of comparative analysis of these different models. While there are no doubt some significant cultural variations in how institutions are willing to listen to children, we suspect that these variations in children's participation in decision-making are also related to the availability of resources in different countries to support participatory ways of working with children.

Some direct service organisations have residential centres offering sustained support for the recovery of child victims, but many more direct service providers have outreach programs and drop-in centres located in areas with high rates of trafficking. Where children only have contact with adult supporters through programs like this, there are few opportunities for them to be involved in decision-making beyond addressing their own personal situation. In contrast, we have learned that survivors living in some residential institutions of some kind are often involved in daily decision-making tasks, and the staff of these institutions have the opportunity to be sensitively attuned to support an individual to make transitions between increasing degrees of autonomy in this decision-making.

One solution for involving the children of outreach programs and drop-in centres in a more sustained manner, has been ECPAT's experiences with 'micro projects' in the South Asia region. The most important principle behind this approach is that projects must be the initiatives of the children and youth themselves. The evaluation of the ECPAT's micro projects report concluded that an important outcome of the projects were "the valuable leadership skills and self-confidence gained by youth".[63] These modest initiatives were found to offer great potential for enabling children to build the confidence to be involved in initiating and carrying out more ambitious projects. An important means to achieve more ambitious projects would no doubt be local meetings of children and youth from different schools, shelters or other programs to come together to share accounts of their initiatives as a first step in a discussion of what they can all do together, as described in Section 2, above, with working children's associations. This would offer a valuable opportunity to find common ground in their concerns and ideas. If funds are available, these dialogs could then also be brought to national and even international level discussions of program design and policy-making.

---

63   Crispin, V. (2009). Youth Partnership Project Empowering Youth to Fight Trafficking & the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: Youth Micro Project Guideline. Comissioned by ECPAT International.

3.1.3 Each child has a unique life history and a distinct familial, social and economic context of recovery

While a small number of older youth may begin to work publicly against CSEC, for the majority of them, their economic, familial, and social responsibilities make this very difficult. Many survivors, including a survivor who we interviewed, stayed trapped in CSE years after understanding their right to leave CSE because of economic necessity and family expectations. It is not realistic for these young people to be engaged in advocacy work against CSE until much later in life. Also, given their painful experiences it can be very challenging to speak out publicly, even when a conference largely involves child survivors. Knowing whether and when to intervene with authentic opportunities for a person to play a meaningful role in an organisation is something that only the adults who support them in the everyday settings of a local organisation could know.

3.1.4 There are problems with a categorical approach to championing survivors at the centre of organisational efforts to end commercial sexual exploitation

We learned from our interviews with youth in ECPAT that the election or selection of a certain number of survivors to serve on an international or national advisory board sometimes feels uncomfortable and a little tokenistic. In listening closely to these accounts, we concluded that this is because there is tendency to give these representatives an identity as a survivor instead of as someone who can speak with direct experience and competence about CSE.

We also learned that sometimes a survivor graduates to a support role on the staff working with other survivors within their local organisation and becomes confident speaking out against CSE. From these observations, we concluded that an alternative strategy for placing the perspectives of children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation at the heart of discussion against CSE would be to identify representatives to boards or committees who have direct experience with CSE or working closely with survivors of CSE, even if they are no longer a *child* or *youth* in the strictest use of these terms. This could take the emphasis off of their identity as survivors and they could choose whether or not they wished to self identify in this way. We feel that this distinction is an important one, as it gives recognition to the fact that we need people who have experience of CSE on committees, boards and conferences and not necessarily those who are still trapped in, or recovering from, CSE.

3.1.5 The need for opportunities for children with different experiences to collaborate with one another on ending commercial sexual exploitation

Our research for ECPAT revealed that there is currently little contact between young people who are survivors and those who are working in advocacy and activism organisations against CSE. We conclude that there should be more opportunities for children in these two types of organisations to work alongside one another with meaningful roles. The role of peer educator is one such role that ECPAT has found to be an effective means for some youth to work closely with peers who are survivors of CSE. We can also imagine survivors working comfortably on advocacy projects. These kinds of collaborations would no doubt be easier in hybrid organisations where child survivors of CSE and those who are not survivors of CSE are working alongside one another

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

25

in advocacy and action against CSE. Building strong citywide networks of the different kinds of children's organisations might also offer potential for survivors of CSE and other children to work together and to have impact through collective advocacy and action.

3.1.6 The need for a more central role of direct service provider staff in understanding the perspectives of survivors

The representatives from the member organisations we spoke with that work with survivors have a depth of experience and thoughtfulness of when it is appropriate to include survivors in organisational decision-making at the local level. Their wisdom about how the recovery process might relate to young people's participation in advocacy and decision-making at national or international levels was also apparent. This is encouraging, and it seems that any network of advocacy and direct service organisations working to end CSE and support survivors of CSE would benefit from more involvement of those who regularly work closely with survivors during their recovery. If enabled to better network with each other beyond the local level they could share valuable practical experiences in how to engage children in the running of programs as well as making valuable contributions to the policy and program planning discussions at these larger organisational scales.

3.1.7 The use of video and communication technologies

It can be difficult for survivors to speak publicly even when an event largely involves survivors of CSE. Many of the children who attended the Thai Children's Forum on Human Trafficking held in Chiang Mai in 2004 had been trafficked into begging gangs, prostitution, or domestic servitude.[64] One participant, too traumatized to attend in person, spoke to the forum by telephone; an example of one kind of sharing of one's voice in a less direct manner that we discuss in a the section on using new communication technologies at conferences.

We have already spoken of the great limitations of international and regional conferences for having inclusive dialogs with children involved in international movements for children's rights, and added to this is the great financial costs of doing so. We need to consider alternative means of communication between children and between children and policy and program developers within organisations.

Video conferencing technologies are an obvious consideration because they greatly decrease the resources and time individuals and organisations need to communicate with one another. They have already become invaluable to many kinds of global collaborations, including the research interview strategy that we used for our research with ECPAT. While they cannot be expected to completely substitute for the meaningful communion that face-to-face conferences offer for building personal and collaborative relationships, there is a need to consider and experiment with digital tools to discover the opportunities and challenges that they pose.

Although using video conferencing technology to support children's participation in decision-making of international organisations seems to be unstudied, there are examples of research in educational settings with marginalised children that highlight some of these benefits and

---

64   International Labour Office & Save the Children UK (2004). Mekong Children's Forum on Human Trafficking: *Making History – People, Process and Participation.* Bangkok: International Labour Office & Save the Children UK.

challenges.[65] Organisations that work with children across geographies investigate the value of incorporating video conferencing technology into international, regional and national conferences with children and youth. From our review, we conclude that such an investigation will need to include specific consideration of the following:

- Risks associated with video conferencing, including re-traumatisation, which may be minimised through proper steps to obtain informed consent, as well as sufficient sensitivity training for people of all ages;

- Availability and reliability of high bandwidth Internet connections, which has a potential to further marginalise individuals and groups without economic or infrastructural means to easily access computer technology; and

- Meeting dynamics, including facilitation strategies that ensure inclusive and meaningful participation of all participants in a video-conference.

3.1.8 The use of creative and social mediums for dialog with between children

We were surprised to discover that not all organisations working with children affected by CSE use creative ways to enable children who have had very different life experiences, or who speak in different languages, to speak with one another through dramatic performances or skits.[66] Skits can be effective for enabling many children to express sensitive issues indirectly. After the performances there can be follow up with questions by the audience, who could be made up of other children, in order to build a conversation on the topic being expressed.

3.2 Learning from the experiences of local organisations

3.2.1 The need for critical reflection on the availability of opportunities for children to participate in local organisations

We learned that many of the organisations throughout the world that are devoted to ending CSE do not work directly with children affected by CSE; they are separate advocacy organisations. Not surprisingly, the kinds of roles that children take on in the running of these different kinds of organisations differ. While the advocacy groups speak out to the public and political about the roots of the problem of CSE and how to end it, the girls in the direct service organisations more typically find themselves supporting their peers. Often this support involves helping to collectively manage the group activities related to the recovery process that they all share, but sometimes they are also actively involved in addressing the rights of other children affected by CSE in their community or city, such as helping to prepare child friendly materials for other children who are victims of CSE or are at risk of being involved. For example, a group of girls in

---

65   For example, see Rajan, P. (2013). Use of Skype to Educate Underprivileged Blind Children in India: Motivations, Barriers and Teaching Strategies. *Disability, CBR & Inclusive Development, 24*(3), 98–111.
66   The Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) has done a great deal of work on South East Asia to train facilitators to use this approach for children to be able to communicate with one another and with the public. In the past, street and working childen's groups, trained by PETA, have been able to come together in groups and use skits to great effect for communication between one another at all levels in their system of meetings from the local level to the national (Hart, 1992, 0p.cit. and http://petatheater.com/about-peta)

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

27

the Passage House residential program in Recife, Brazil, created animated storyboards of their own life history and process of recovery and then collected them all in a book and edited it for printing and broad distribution to girls working on the streets of their city of Recife.[67] Others have conducted research with data from one another on the child friendliness of different services and places for children in their community that is "services which are easily accessible to children, give priority to their wellbeing and interests and are formed on a rights-based approach." [68]

While there are some organisations that have programs for survivors alongside programs for those at risk and for a broader population of children working on public awareness and advocacy we were not able to discover how or to what degree, the children in these parallel programs shared activities, but it appeared to be minimal. It would be valuable to find a way to systematically learn from these different kinds of organisations, how they bring children living in different circumstances together and what the benefits, risks and challenges for survivors and non-survivor activists to work more together with one another for collective change.

3.2.2 Networking among local organizations working with children in difficult circumstances

Typically, funding seems to be directed either at the support of individual organisations or large scale organisations. As a result, it is quite common within a city or nation for organizations to be working quite separately and to not have the means of easily bringing the children and staff of these organisations together for local network meetings. As a result, even staff members are more likely to meet one another at international meetings.

Opportunities for local organisations to meet periodically with coalitions of other local organisations working in various ways with the issues of CSEC could be a powerful way of enabling the children to feel that they are part of a larger movement. This has clearly been the case in the history of working children's organisations. Citywide networks offer the potential for local groups to learn from one another and to have a greater impact through collective advocacy and action. *El Programme Muchacho Trabajador* (The National Program of Working Children) in Ecuador is instructive in this regard. It was built upon an impressive process for enabling children from their small children's organisations (*espacios alternativas*) to come together in a city level conference to share their micro-projects in order to collectively determine what kind of macro initiative they could design together.[69] One such macro project, for the capital city of Bogota, involved collaborating with the city bus service and police to reduce auto pollution in the streets, where so many of the children worked. In this way, what begins as small manageable *micro projects* for children to test their skills and build confidence moves in a coherent manner towards the design of *macro programs* and even policies.

3.2.3 Allowing and creating spaces for young people to share dissatisfactions

During one of our interviews with a direct service provider, the interviewee recounted a story about the need for young people to speak with one another about the successes and

---

67   Based on a personal visit to the institution.
68   The report on the process followed for Child Participation in the SAIEVAC Technical Consultation 2011 and the preparatory National Children's Consultations
69   Hart, R. (1997). Children's Participation: the Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care. New York: UNICEF, and London: Earthscan.

challenges they face when participating in organisational decision-making. In this case, youth in the organisation are paid staff, many of them survivors, who come together regularly to discuss and plan projects. Sometimes these working sessions transform into 'moaning' sessions where the young people discuss the difficulties they face in their everyday lives and the work. The interviewee suggested that it is important to consider how meetings and responsibilities of youth staff are structured. The structure needs to support young people to reflect on the process throughout a meeting and to keep the staff accountable in addressing the issues that young people said they would like to see addressed.

3.3 Learning from the experiences of national and regional organisations

3.3.1 National level dialogs hold great potential for including children and youth in organisational decision-making and policy-making

While we learned of some nations, such as Ukraine, where there was a high degree of networking at the national level, there were many countries with no national network. Compared with international conferences, organising national events would seem to offer greater promise for children being able to influence change, such as national level policies, and to hear back about the impact of their ideas and recommendations. In most instances they also share a common language and culture, making them more effective settings for children to communicate successfully. And they are of course much less expensive than international events because of transport and living expenses and can therefore involve many more children and youth. If local networks of organisations within a nation have opportunities for young people to come together, as described in the previous section, then inviting them to elect representatives to periodic discussions at the national level to discuss issues of collective concern to them and to influence national programs and policies would be a relatively simple matter. It appears to us that from this much more solid foundation of local and national networks of children and youth working against CSE a more deeply participatory intentional movement of young people against CSE could emerge.

Online and social media would seem to have valuable potential for fostering greater linking between the different organisational levels of the movement against CSE and young people's involvement in it and with significantly less financial investment. At the very least, a website could host pages with profiles for each of the local organisations within a national network and/or international network. A more involved step would be a digital forum for members of organisations to share their experiences and questions. Whatever the solution is, it would be important to consult with the local organisations for their input in designing an online platform. This would allow groups to discuss the benefits and challenges with each forum design, which could support the creation of a regional level forum.

However, in creating an online platform for children and youth to voice their opinions as part of the movement against CSE, it is crucial to ensure their safety and protection throughout their participation. The platform should be only accessible by involved groups and not by external parties, especially potential perpetrators. Furthermore, confidentiality should be maintained

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

29

at all cost, including the removal of any identifying information of children and other relevant members, and in ensuring that all information shared within the platform remains and does not get shared with external parties.

3.3.2 The special potential of regional level conferences

For many regions it is possible for children to come together at much reduced time and cost and with greater ease at speaking across language groups and with greater cultural comfort. We also learned that meetings at this scale seem to be appropriate for enabling children affected by CSE to meet and work together with child survivors of other organisations that work with children affected by different forms of violence. Children in the SAIEVAC, have done a great deal to reflect on what is necessary to ensure ethical and meaningful participation of young people in decision-making on issues that concern them and their peers in their region. SAIEVAC's governing board includes adult representatives from eight countries in the region, as well as two child board members.[70]

3.4 Learnings from the experience of international organizations

3.4.1 Lessons from the over-reliance on conferences for promoting child and youth participation in the governance of international organisations

We have already argued that most executive boards of international child and youth-serving NGOs rely on international meetings to hear the voices of young people in their policy and program deliberations. This is a deeply flawed idea. While there are times when global conferences play a useful role for hearing young people's perspectives on matters that affect them, this should not be the first step for any program of seriously listening to youth and children. Furthermore, an overreliance on conferences for listening to children and youth is even more of a problem when the young people are survivors of CSE. We have described above how a readiness for the engagement of survivor of CSE in decision-making is challenging for most survivors. Any internationally focused discussion with survivors must, therefore, be built upon authentic opportunities to have a voice at the local level where there are staff members who can be closely attuned to the issue of readiness.

---

70   Please see http://www.saievac.org/about-saievac/who-is-who/

3.4.2 Including child and youth participation at international conferences has merit under the right conditions

While we are critical about child and youth participation in international conferences there is probably a place for such meetings within a broader spectrum of possibilities for listening to them. Anthony Swift has documented the powerful ways that working children's associations have influenced large gatherings of policy makers about the rights of working children:

> *In their first intervention in the international debate about a new ILO Convention - at the Amsterdam Conference on Child Labour in 1997- delegates from the working children's movements caused something of a stir. Some adult delegates imagined that the children would put their views across in the form of a song or a theatrical sketch but they spoke to the issues with great confidence and adroitness, holding their own with government labour ministers, trades union leaders and captains of industry. It was hard to believe that they came from remote villages and city slums. They presented a list of 10 demands worked out by their organisations and movements in 33 countries and adopted at a little-publicised First International Meeting of Working Children held in Kundapur, India, in 1996.[71]*

This example from the network of working children's associations shows just how powerful children and youth can be in achieving change when they come from organisations in different parts of the world that are well organised in a participatory manner and when they truly feel that they are representing their peers.

---

71   Swift, A. Working Children Get Organised. Save the Children Alliance: London. Retrieved from https://www.crin.org/en/library/publications/working-children-get-organised

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

31

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Recommendations for policy and practice

Children's participation is a right, not an opportunity: While participating in the governance of an organisation may be too demanding for many survivors who remain actively involved in recovery, there are some for whom it might be extremely valuable. These individuals should be supported to have their views considered if they express a desire to participate in organisational decision-making. How this is accomplished, of course, specific to the person and the context. Yet while we do not recommend any singular process, we offer below some considerations.

No need to identify as a survivor: In presenting their perspective at meetings or conferences there should be no reason for a young person or adult to feel that they need to identify their personal history, only that they have had an authentic involvement in a direct service program of some kind.

Rethink categorical approaches to championing specific young people as representatives: We suggest that organisations consider revising organisational policies that use categorical approaches to define opportunities for participation. For example, survivor status and age are less useful than the experience a person has had collaborating within an organisation.[72]

Broaden thinking on how to best understand the perspectives of survivors: Rather than relying entirely upon survivors to give their perspectives during meetings and events, sometime leading to a tokenistic involvement of children who have been affected by CSE, we should also recognise the value of listening to those who work with survivors on a daily basis, many of whom are themselves older survivors.

Recognise the key role of local direct service staff in supporting survivors of CSE to participate in organisational decision-making at all scales from the local to the international: Train staff to be sensitive to affording opportunities for survivors who demonstrate an interest and capacity to be involved in local organisational governance and subsequently in governance at higher levels.

---

72   Findings from interviews with ECPAT Network Members suggest that both survivor status and age ranges are insufficient criteria when electing members to the youth advisory committee. See Hart, R., Ataman, A., Kimiagar, B. (2014). The Opportunities and Challenges of Placing Children's Voices At The Heart of ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes): A Review and Recommendations. Unpublished report commissioned by ECPAT International Secretariat.

Think of both bottom-up and top-down approaches to including young people in organisational decision-making: The goal should not be just to carry children's perspectives up to adult decision-makers, but equally children to be informed about the changing policies and priorities of decision-makers at decision-making at all levels that are relevant.

Encourage greater participation of children in local organisations and local networks: Local organisations offer the greatest potential for children and youth to learn from one another and to have an impact through collective advocacy and action.

Avoid an over-reliance on child and youth participation in governance at the international level: In addition to great cost, there are many problems with reliance on large international events for listening to children. A major one is the need for the movement to have the means for engaging all children, not just a select few. While there can be an important role for children and youth who have directly experienced CSE at international and national conferences, it is ideal for all young people to have opportunities to become comfortably involved at the local level.[73]

Strengthen national level meetings as a fundamental component of the international movement to influence policy: Take advantage of the multiple benefits of geographical proximity and a common language and culture to promote democratically representative national-level meetings as a way of creating greater promise for children being able to influence change and hear back about the impact of their ideas and recommendations.

Recognise the special value of regional meetings in strengthening a movement: Collaborate with organisations in meetings at the regional level that include the voices of children from organisations that work with survivors from all forms of violence against children.

Experiment with digital tools for distant communication: Explore the use of video communication and, national online forums, and other social media technologies to discover the opportunities and challenges tht they pose.

4.2 Recommendations for futher research

Build the capacity for critical self-reflection by organisations: The most important kind of needed research appears to be within the organisations that directly serve the children affected by CSE. We learned that there is little attempt to systematically document how local organisations function. This greatly diminishes the possibilities for learning and the sharing of experiences. Alongside this documentation, more opportunities should be created for critical refection within each local organisation on how they currently provide opportunities for children and youth to participate in decisions.

---

73   See literature review in Section 5 on the recovery process.

THEMATIC REPORT: PLACING CHILDREN'S VOICES AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THEM
Lessons from governance with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation

33

Conduct a comparative international documentation: We propose that an international comparative participatory study be designed on how the voices of young survivors are differently involved in decision-making a nd action across the full range of types of local organisations and approaches to recovery from CSE. An important part of this study would be to improve our understanding of the potentials of collaboration between chid survivors of CSE and non-survivor activist children in advocacy work against CSE.

Create a compendium of life stories and routes to recovery from CSE: We have learned from our review that an important component of recovery for some survivors of CSE is the opportunity to have a voice in the running of the organisations that serve them and being engaged in advocacy for change. We also learned that some survivors become staff members who support the recovery of young survivors. We recognise that each child needs to find their own unique route to recovery but we suspect that there would be great practical value in learning from a life story research program what some of the more common patterns of effective routes to recovery have been. This would be useful for both the design of recovery programs and for the training of staff. Establish ethical guidelines: There is a need to establish a set of guiding principles and, ideally, standards for including the perspective of survivors at the heart of organisations that serve them. These principles should include consideration of how to make the processes of child participation in organisational meetings and consultations more ethical, meaningful, and sustainable.[74]

---

74   See, for example the following documents: SAIEVAC (2012) *Standards and Principles for Children's Participation,* http://www.saievac.org/resources/downloads/; Save the Children (2005) *Practice Standards in Children's Participation,* http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/3017.pdf; Thomas, N., & O'Kane, C. (1998). *Children and Decision-making: A Summary Report.* International Centre for Childhood Studies, University of Wales Swansea; World Vision International (2014) *Guidelines for Child Participation,* http://www.wvi.org/child-rights-and-equity/publication/guidelines-child-participation

ECPAT INTERNATIONAL