

LEVELS OF CHILD PARTICIPATION

There are many different types of participation. The levels of child participation¹ (below) become increasingly meaningful and genuine as you move from level one (Manipulation) up to eight (Child-Initiated, Shared Decisions with Adults). The first three levels cannot be considered truly participatory, but each of the subsequent five levels is appropriate for children based on the activity being engaged in and on the degree to which their participatory and decision-making skills have evolved.

8 CHILD-INITIATED, SHARED DECISIONS WITH ADULTS

- *Children initiate projects themselves, while the decision-making is shared with adults. Children have the power to make positive changes based upon their own views and ideas, while drawing upon the expertise and assistance of adults. Adults do not impose their views or try to direct the project; rather they listen, observe and act as sounding boards for the ideas and plans of young people.*

7 CHILD-INITIATED AND DIRECTED

- *Children initiate and direct the project themselves, with adults playing only a supportive role. Adults provide children with the tools, resources, and information they need to bring the views and ideas into fruition, but the decision-making happens solely among the children.*

6 ADULT-INITIATED, SHARED DECISIONS WITH CHILDREN

- *Adults initiate actions but share decision-making powers with children. While the initial idea might come from adults, children are involved with the planning, design and implementation of a particular project.*

5 CONSULTED AND INFORMED

- *Children give advice on projects that are run by adults. Children are not involved in the decision-making, but are asked to share ideas that will inform the decisions of adults. Children need to be informed about how their advice will be used and made aware of the outcomes of decisions made by adults.*

4 ASSIGNED BUT INFORMED

- *Children are assigned a specific role in a project by adults. Children understand the intentions of the project and who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why. Children are given a meaningful role, for which they volunteer only after they have a clear understanding of the objectives.*

3 TOKENISM

(INEFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION)

- *Children are asked to speak or participate in a project run by adults without fully understanding the issues, the rationale behind the project or what their contribution adds to the project. They appear to be given a voice, but in reality they have few choices for how to participate. For example, children might be asked to sit on a panel with no explanation as to how they were selected and with little time to prepare.*

2 DECORATION

(INEFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION)

- *Children are used to bolster a cause led by adults by dressing, acting or performing in a certain way. They do not contribute to the organizing or planning of the event, rather their participation is used mainly to elicit an emotional response from specific stakeholders or audiences.*

1 MANIPULATION

(INEFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION)

- *Adults use children to promote a cause and pretend that the cause is inspired or supported by children, while they have no understanding of the cause. If children have no understanding of the issues or how their actions can contribute, their participation can be viewed as manipulation.*

¹ The Levels of Child Participation were adapted from Hart, Roger A., *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*, UNICEF: Florence (1992).

