

SECURE AND DEVELOP CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

A step-by-step guide to conducting a Child Rights
Ambassador Training Programme



Sarah Nanozi, taking part in the children's rights parade through Jinja.

Foreword

This toolbox presents a training programme for Child Rights Ambassadors, developed as part of one of four projects carried out within an ICLD-funded partnership between Region Stockholm, Sweden, and Jinja City, Uganda (2022–2025). The work was implemented by staff from Astrid Lindgren Children’s Hospital and Jinja Referral Hospital/Nalufenya Children’s Hospital, in collaboration with the non-profit organisations Paediatric Health Initiative (Sweden) and Busoga Health Forum (Uganda).

The overarching aim of the partnership is to improve the quality of paediatric care, with a focus on four key areas: paediatric emergency care, neonatal care, care for children with neurological disorders, and children’s rights. This guide addresses the Children’s Rights component of the collaboration.

Although the activities described here were conducted in Uganda and within the healthcare sector, we hope the guide can inspire development efforts in other contexts, including regional and municipal partnerships.

The discourse on children’s rights has spanned decades, if not centuries. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by nearly every country in the world, was adopted in 1989 following an earlier, less binding declaration on children’s rights from 1959. Ratification obligates states to make every effort to protect and promote children’s rights. Yet in many countries, a gap remains between these commitments and their practical implementation.

Children’s rights must be safeguarded in all societal settings where children are present—including healthcare. This does not happen automatically; it is the responsibility of adults to ensure progress. In international partnerships, differences in how children are viewed may appear significant, yet the Convention provides a strong foundation for collaboration. Mapping relevant policy documents in both partner countries is a vital first step in designing and developing projects. These frameworks lend legitimacy to the work and support identified needs for change.

When project goals are relevant to development in both countries, they create a strong foundation for genuine partnership. Reciprocity of needs helps avoid the perception of a one-sided initiative where high-income countries “instruct” the Global South.

In healthcare settings, children often face unfamiliar surroundings, limited information about medical procedures, and experiences of pain or anxiety. To uphold children’s rights in such environments, staff must be equipped with both theoretical knowledge and practical tools to meet children’s needs effectively. A structured training programme for staff to become Child Rights Ambassadors can be an effective way to strengthen and secure children’s rights in practice.



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**Note:**

All photos were taken by the Swedish Child Rights Team. Consent has been obtained for all photos of children. The images may only be used in connection with this publication. Any other use is not permitted.

Table of Contents

Foreword	2
What are Children’s Rights?	4
Key Rights for Children	5
Why Take Time to Work with Children’s Rights?	6
Preparation to educate Child Rights Ambassadors	7
Value based exercises	8
Example	9
Developing a Training Programme for Child Rights Ambassadors	10
Participants	10
What is expected from a Child Rights Ambassador?	11
Training Format	12
Summary of curriculum	13
Children’s right to play- in a Child-Friendly Environment	14
Implementation process	15
Following Up on the Work of Child Rights Ambassadors	16
Decision-makers on Board	17
Organising a Children’s parliament	18
Lessons Learned – Challenges, Opportunities and Recommendations	20

What are Children’s Rights?

Children’s rights are a set of legally protected entitlements and freedoms, largely defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), that ensure a child’s survival, development, protection, and participation in society. A child is defined as every human being under the age of 18.

These rights include basic human rights like food, housing, and healthcare, as well as specific provisions for protection from abuse and neglect, the right to education, and the right to have their views considered in decisions affecting them.

Children’s rights are about making sure that every child is treated with dignity and given the chance to grow up safe, healthy, and respected. At the heart of children’s rights is the idea that children are not just “future adults” but individuals with their own needs, views, and voices here and now. This means protecting them from harm, giving them access to education and healthcare, and making sure they are heard when decisions affect their lives.

Responsibility for upholding children’s rights is shared: parents provide care and protection, the state secures laws and systems that safeguard every child, and local self-government turns these commitments into everyday services and support close to where children live.



Key Rights for Children

Article 2 *Non-discrimination*



State parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind.

Article 3 *Best Interests of the Child*



In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Article 6 *Right to Life, Survival, and Development*



Children have the right to life, to grow, and to fulfil their potential, requiring adequate housing, food, medical care, and education.

Article 12 *Right to Participation*



Children have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them, and their opinions should be given due weight according to their age and maturity.

Article 19 *Right to Protection*



Children have the right to be protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and discrimination. This includes protection from violence, harmful work, and any situation that is dangerous to their health or education.

Article 23 *Rights of Children with Disabilities*



State parties recognise that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance, and facilitates the child’s active participation in the community.

Article 24 *Right to Health and Welfare*



This includes the right to the best possible health care, access to clean water and healthy food, and the right to play and recreation.

Article 31 *Children have the right to play, rest and leisure*



This article emphasises that play, rest, and cultural participation are not luxuries but rights essential to a child’s development—physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually.

Why Take Time to Work with Children’s Rights?

This question can be answered simply by referring to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which clearly states that it is we adults who bear the responsibility for ensuring that its articles are fulfilled.

However, rather than focusing solely on obligations, it is equally important to consider the positive outcomes that a well-developed child rights approach can bring. In environments where children’s rights are respected, a more secure and respectful atmosphere is fostered.

Children whose rights are upheld tend to experience better mental and physical well-being.

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I used to think children don’t understand a lot and therefore more focus be given to the caretaker. Now I know that’s not true. I have realised that engaging children makes it easier for me to examine the child, and it takes less time than before.

Moreover, children who learn about their rights and are encouraged to express their opinions develop essential democratic skills. Investing in children’s rights is, ultimately, an investment in the future—children who grow up with respect and support are more likely to become engaged and responsible adults.

In local government services, children’s rights make a real difference in everyday life. When schools listen to pupils’ voices, the learning environment improves. When social services take children’s perspectives seriously, families get support that truly meets their needs. When city planners consider children in public spaces, safer and more welcoming environments are created for everyone. When hospital administrators and politician listen to child patients’ voices, the health care environment improves.

By working with children’s rights in these practical ways, municipalities strengthen both the quality of their services and the trust between citizens and local government.

Preparation to educate Child Rights Ambassadors

Raising awareness about a topic such as children’s rights requires a deep understanding of the perspectives and values specific to each country and local setting.

The aim is to build cultural competence on children’s rights.



A method to enhance this awareness and to develop the intended training team’s **cultural competence** is to organise study visits to different institutions such as schools, hospitals, or similar entities, to map out attitudes towards children and children’s rights. These visits may include meetings with civil society organisations operating in the relevant field, job shadowing of professionals, visits to families, and other activities that can provide a deepened contextual understanding.

The purpose of conducting activities like this, is not only to gather factual knowledge but also to gain insight into the core values that shape each country’s approach to children’s rights.

Goals for implementing the training and instating the function of Child Rights Ambassadors within an organisation or institution should be established early. The goals need to be firmly anchored within the entire project group, as each participant will play a significant role in fulfilling them.

In the initial phase of setting up the training, make sure to break down these goals and discuss most effective strategies for each project group to achieve the desired outcomes.

For Child Rights Ambassadors to fully carry out their role, it is essential that their work is **accepted and supported** by leadership. Before any training initiative begins, contact must therefore be established with the management of the institution where the Child Rights Ambassadors will operate. The curriculum of the training should be presented, along with a clear description of the responsibilities and tasks the ambassadors are expected to undertake. Input from the administration need to be considered and may lead to change in the curriculum.

To strengthen the future Child Rights Ambassadors’ ability to develop the institution’s child rights perspective, it can also be beneficial to give a brief presentation to all staff at the institution, introducing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Value based exercises

Children’s rights are not only about legal frameworks but also about the values and attitudes that shape how children are perceived and treated in society. For this reason, it is useful to combine theoretical knowledge with practical value-based exercises early on in a training. Such exercises encourage participants to reflect on their own positions and highlight how different perspectives can influence child rights work.

One effective method is the **“Four Corners” exercise**, where participants are asked to take a physical stance on a question or dilemma by moving to a corner of the room that represents their opinion.

Steps for implementation:

1. Preparation: The facilitator formulates a question or dilemma and provides three response options. A fourth “open corner” is left for in-between or alternative viewpoints.
2. Choosing a corner: Participants listen to the question and move to the corner that best matches their opinion.
3. Small group discussion: Within each corner, participants discuss why they chose that position.
4. Presentation: Each group shares their reasoning with the whole room.
5. Reflection and switching: Participants are encouraged to reconsider their stance after hearing others’ arguments and may change corners if they wish.
6. Continuation: The exercise can be repeated with new questions or followed by a full-group discussion for deeper reflection.

Example: Health and Bodily Autonomy

A 15-year-old is offered a vaccine at school. They want to take it, but their parents say no. The school nurse is unsure whether to follow the parent’s wishes or the young person’s choice.

Four Corners Statements:

1. The teenager should decide—they have the right to make choices about their own body.
2. Parents’ wishes should always come first in medical decisions.
3. The school must follow public health guidelines regardless of parent or child opinion.
4. It should be a joint decision—parents and child must reach agreement together.



Children’s Parliament

Developing a Training Programme for Child Rights Ambassadors

A training programme for Child Rights Ambassadors should combine both theoretical knowledge and practical skills. After your team has done the initial broad mapping of knowledge, attitudes and practices surrounding children’s rights in your locality, a good starting point is to analyse the specific context of the organisation or institution the Child Rights Ambassadors will operate in. Some guiding questions can be:

- What knowledge about children’s rights is essential for staff in your services?
- Which groups of children that this organisation encounters are particularly vulnerable if their rights are not respected?
- Which policies, guidelines or legal frameworks are most relevant to integrate into the training?

Based on this analysis, a curriculum can be designed that balances core principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child with local needs and priorities. The process should include discussions with staff, managers and possibly children themselves to identify the most important learning areas. The result will be a training that not only builds competence but also creates commitment—turning staff into ambassadors who actively promote children’s rights in their daily work.

Participants

Before attending a programme like this, it is strongly recommended that interested staff should get information on what later will be expected from them in their new roles as ambassadors.

The application process should be fully transparent, with clear criteria for how participants are selected. If possible, individual interviews can be conducted to clarify expectations from both parties—the training provider and the course participants.

Selecting participants for the training programme requires careful consideration to detect genuine interest in working to promote, protect and fulfil children’s rights.

Outreach efforts may initially need to be undertaken to encourage individuals who are considered future potential key contributors to apply. If such direct contacts are made, it is important that the entire project group supports the decision to avoid any conflict of interests.



Naluunkuma Amina, Naigaga Shamina, Juwa Ruth, Kisaame Zorah Ruth.

What is expected from a Child Rights Ambassador?

- In-depth knowledge of the four core articles or the CRC, 2, 3, 6 and 12.
- An overall knowledge of The Children’s amendment.
- A clear will to protect and cherish the child’s perspective and participation in matters that concern the child.
- To inspire, educate and support colleagues in children’s rights questions.
- To drive children’s rights work forward in their own workplace.
- To monitor that the rights of children are followed in accordance with the CRC.
- To supports superiors in matters relating to the rights of children.
- To have in-depth knowledge in how to collect children’s voices.
- To inspire to work in with a good child right approach.
- To inspire the use of self-assessment, according to the Checklist in Appendix 2.
- Be a part of the network of all the CRA in the region.

Training Format

The training programme is recommended to be designed to combine lectures with value-based exercises, group reflections, and assignments following each module.

The training should span over approximately six months and include:

- Four in-person meetings (two half-day and two full-day sessions)
- Three digital sessions (each one hour long)
- Practical exercises and written tasks to be completed within the regular workplace setting of participants

The agreed content of the various modules may initially be delivered by both domestic and international lecturers. However, over time, the lectures should be taken over by local human resources. In this way, the sustainability of the training is ensured beyond the duration of the project.

Five modules form the foundation of the training content. Each module covers topics considered important for increasing knowledge about child rights perspectives, with relevance to the cultural context.



Examination of Child Rights Ambassadors.

Summary of curriculum

Complete curriculum available in Appendix 1



Together for children's rights.

Module 1

Country commitment

This module presents the policy documents that form the foundation of the country's child rights work, with a primary focus on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It also addresses how traditions and customs may influence children's rights.

Module 2

5 Focus fields within child rights perspective

The goal of this module is for participants to be able to recognise and reflect on the fact that children's rights should be understood and addressed from multiple areas and perspectives.

Module 3

Children in special circumstances

All children are entitled to the same rights. This module highlights the diversity within the target group and the challenges faced by particularly vulnerable children.

Module 4

Importance of play

The module gives a comprehensive understanding of child development—both in general and in relation to play and enables the participants to make informed and appropriate selections of educational materials, tailored to the child's developmental stage and individual circumstances.

Module 5

Practicum

During the practical part, the participant is observed using the self-assessment checklist. As part of the final assignment, participants are also required to collect children's voices on a topic relevant to their own professional setting.

Children’s right to play- in a Child-Friendly Environment

Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to play, leisure, and rest. Municipal services and healthcare providers can actively support this right by integrating play and recreation into their daily routines. Play is not only a source of joy; it can also be used as a tool to reduce anxiety, build trust, and make children feel more secure in stressful environments such as hospitals, social services, or schools.

To create a truly child-friendly environment, staff can make time for play activities, provide spaces where children feel safe and relaxed, and ensure that play is respected as part of a child’s well-being. Training staff to use play in interactions— whether in medical procedures, social work, or educational settings— helps children cope better with difficult experiences and strengthens their sense of participation.

By recognising play as a right and as a practical method, organisations can reduce children’s fear, increase their cooperation, and foster more positive encounters between children and adults.

Implementing a visual change—such as a wall mural at a children’s hospital—may initially seem like an effort that is difficult to directly link to an improved child perspective. However, highly visible changes like these can serve as powerful starting points for discussion and reflection.

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After we have introduced play material and offered the children a small play area at the hospital, the children seem to have a faster physical recovery together with a better appetite and sleep.



To put Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into practice — “Children shall be given the right to express their views and that those views should be taken seriously”— a group of children were invited to share their ideas on how to improve the hospital environment. Their input formed the foundation for the design work carried out during the project.



Wall mural at Nalufenya Children’s Hospital: With relatively modest resources, the initiative enabled children to actively participate in shaping the environment they themselves spend time in. This concrete involvement not only gave children a voice but also helped staff and visitors reflect on the importance of creating spaces that are welcoming, inclusive, and respectful of children’s needs and rights.

Implementation process

To ensure that a training for Child Rights Ambassadors becomes sustainable and continues to develop beyond its formal end, a clear plan for implementation is required. If possible, it is recommended to consult with implementation specialists who can provide guidance on the different phases and their content. If such specialists or trainers are not available, there are other resources that may be helpful.

Focus on the changes the training and implementation of ambassadors aims to achieve and describe the desired behavioural changes in a way that makes the transformation visually observable. Use the provided image as a starting point and identify what the Child Rights Ambassadors team needs to implement for the change to take place.

Create a timeline, identify which target groups need to be informed and/or activated, determine which strategies should be used to move forward, and outline how communication should be structured, etc. Remember: it is behavioural change that is the ultimate goal.

Simply conducting training activities is no guarantee that change will occur. On the contrary, it may risk undermining the original objective. If many people participate in training sessions but are not influenced in their attitudes or approaches, the result of the course risk to become nothing more than a lot of decorative certificates.



I used to struggle and force children when giving injections but not anymore. I have learned to do it in a child friendly way which has made me connect more with children than their caretakers.

Following Up on the Work of Child Rights Ambassadors

When staff have completed training to become Child Rights Ambassadors, it is therefore important to follow up on how they use their new knowledge in daily practice. Understanding children’s rights in theory is not enough—the key is to ensure that these principles are consistently applied in interactions with children and in decision-making processes.

One way to support this is through a practical self-assessment checklist that helps ambassadors reflect on whether their work is truly child friendly. A checklist can cover different domains such as approach, child adapted information and participation.

The checklist can be used entirely on your own, but it works best when a colleague is present to observe. The checklist which can be found in Appendix 2 is based on a meeting with a child in a healthcare setting. It can easily be adapted to suit other environments where interactions with children and young people take place.

By using such a tool during workplace observations and in follow-up discussions, managers and colleagues can identify strengths, highlight areas for improvement, and provide guidance. This not only strengthens accountability but also helps ambassadors feel more confident and clearer about their role. Over time, systematic follow-up with a checklist can ensure that the investment in training leads to real change for children in everyday municipal services.

The role of a Child Rights Ambassador can at times feel lonely and challenging, especially when carried out in environments where children’s rights are rarely in focus. To support Child Rights Ambassadors, digital networks can be created. Through platforms like WhatsApp, contact with other ambassadors can be maintained and good practices can continue to be shared.

If possible, invite ambassadors to yearly IRL-meetings where a continuing of the work can be supported.

Decision-makers on Board

For meaningful change to occur, it is imperative that decision-makers are not only aware of the planned activities but also actively support these processes.

All regional and municipal operations are politically governed. While there may be a high degree of autonomy, the framework for the work to be carried out is set by a political agenda.



Meeting in Stockholm between regional politicians from Sweden and Uganda.

Organisational development efforts can therefore only drive change to a certain extent. For lasting change to occur, political leadership must not only approve the initiative – they must also contribute to ensuring that the development aligns with the agenda and goals pursued at the political level.

Politicians have the mandate to make decisions that affect resources, policies, and legislation—crucial for long-term impact. Political involvement also lends credibility to the process and can help gain broader societal acceptance.

Strive to establish political contact early in the ambition to instate Child Rights Ambassadors in an organisation or institution. Invite relevant politicians to attend appropriate occasions, such as the organisation of a Children’s Parliament or ceremonial events related to the project. Be mindful that political shifts may occur during a project period in connection with elections. Therefore, ensure that contact is made with both governing politicians and those from the opposition.

Organising a Children’s parliament

**“ We have heard you cry.
Today we have heard you talk.”**

One effective way for municipalities, schools, or healthcare institutions to realise article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is by establishing a Children’s Parliament—a structured forum where children can regularly meet with decision-makers.

A Children’s Parliament provides an inclusive and safe space where young people can:

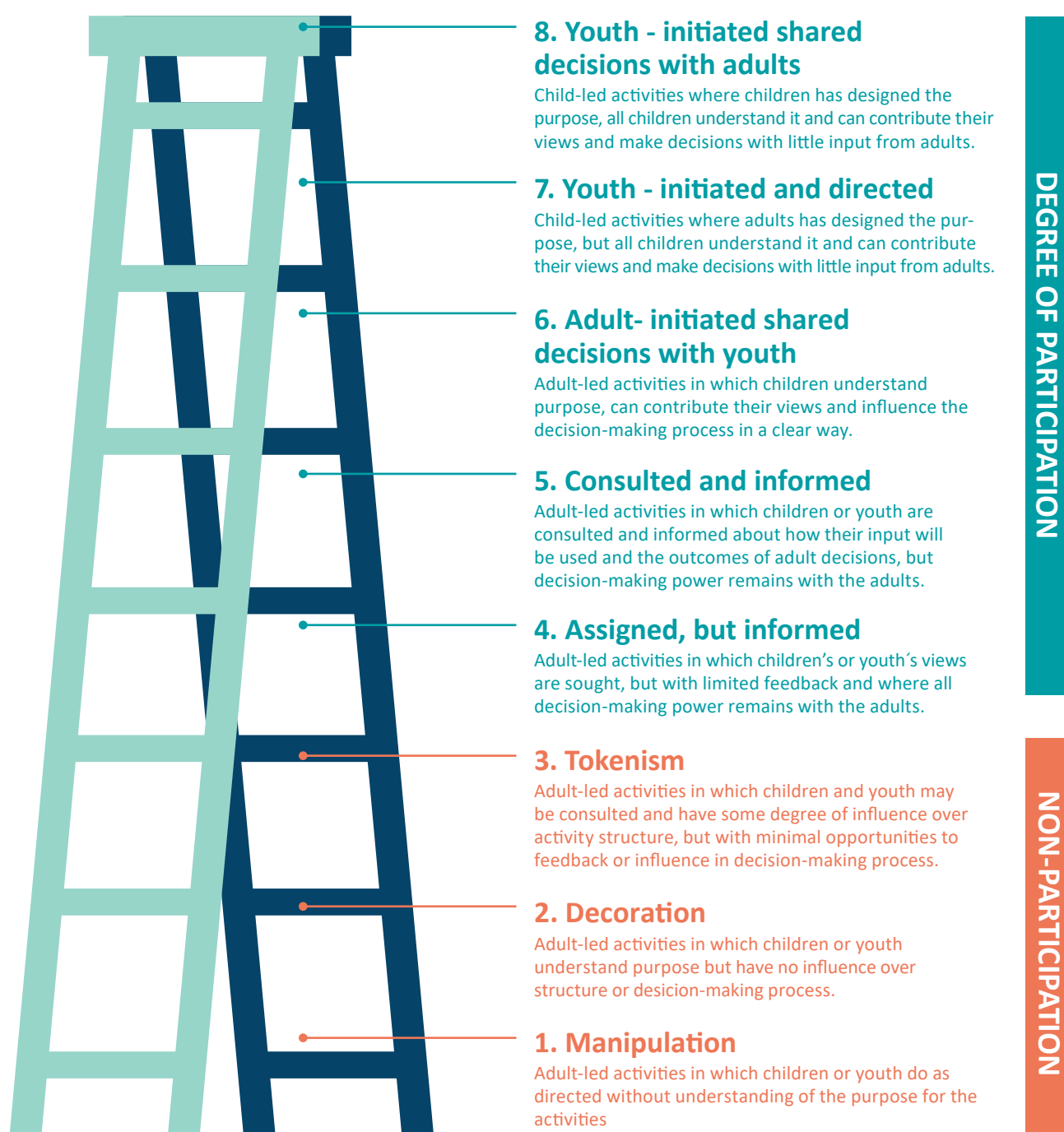
- Share their views on the quality of services such as healthcare, schools, or community safety.
- Engage directly with administrators and local leaders on issues like nutrition, early childhood development, or protection from abuse.
- Build confidence, leadership skills, and a sense of civic responsibility by seeing their opinions taken seriously.

To implement such a platform, institutions should first invite children who are directly affected by their services and ensure diversity in participation, including girls and children from marginalised groups. Sessions should be facilitated in a way that is child-friendly, using methods such as group discussions, storytelling, or creative expression.

Equally important is the commitment of adults: children’s opinions should only be sought if decision-makers are genuinely prepared to listen, reflect, and act on the views expressed. To avoid tokenism, clear follow-up must be built in so that children can see how their input has influenced decisions. Tools like Shier’s Participation Ladder can guide institutions in assessing whether participation is meaningful and at an appropriate level.

When done in this way, a Children’s Parliament can strengthen accountability, improve the quality of local services, and give children a tangible role in shaping the environments they grow up in.

Ladder of Children’s Participation



Lessons Learned – Challenges, Opportunities, and Recommendations

When planning and running an international collaboration to strengthen Children’s Rights, you can increase the chances of success by following these steps:

- **Build a common foundation:** Make sure all participants understand the project’s purpose, objectives, and their own responsibilities before the work begins.
- **Clarify expectations early:** Define roles, timelines, and deliverables at the start. Clear expectations are one of the most important success factors.
- **Recognise individual potential:** Identify each participant’s ability to contribute to change within their own organisation.
- **Create space for open dialogue:** Allocate time at the beginning to discuss perceived challenges and opportunities.
- **Set realistic, shared goals:** Base your project goals on developments that are feasible for all included parties. This strengthens equity in the collaboration and makes the process more effective.
- **Develop a joint plan:** Draft a detailed plan and follow up on it regularly.
- **Include risk management from the start:** Dedicate time to identifying risks and revisit the topic throughout the project—some risks only emerge once activities are underway.
- **Keep momentum through regular meetings:** Schedule check-ins to track progress and adjust as needed.
- **Ensure clarity in training programmes:** For participants in the Child Rights Ambassador training, emphasise that the training is voluntary and not tied to financial compensation, apart from travel costs.
- **Define the desired change together:** As a project group, agree on the change you want to achieve and how you will recognise success. Ask yourselves: What will it look like when we’ve reached our goals? *Would the change be visible enough to “film”?*

“ *Because of the training I have learned to advocate for the child, children I earlier ignored.* ”

- **Use both qualitative and quantitative evaluation:** Measuring awareness can be difficult, especially with large or short-term target groups. Combine quantitative indicators (to track measurable change) with qualitative insights (to understand attitudes, knowledge, and behaviour). Together, these provide a fuller picture of impact.

Children’s rights cannot be fulfilled through a single initiative or one-time effort. Like all rights-based work, it requires ongoing and sustained action. The world we live in today—more clearly than in a long time—shows that democratic processes can never be taken for granted. Many children grow up in countries where democratic principles are being questioned or restricted. For all these children, we must find ways to strengthen their opportunities to live in a democratic world.

With politically supported policy documents, regular training to raise awareness among adults, and platforms where children are actively invited to participate, children’s rights can be both secured and developed.



Play for everyone. Everywhere.



Nakayiza Asia, taking part in the children's rights parade through Jinja.

Notes

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